

LEARNING MADE EASY



4th Edition

Body Language

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Learn to spot signs
and signals

Infer meaning from
what you see

Pick up on unspoken
cues

BOOKS & MAGAZINES
IN ENGLISH



Elizabeth Kuhnke

The Body Watcher

BOOKS & MAGAZINES IN ENGLISH





Body Language

4th Edition

by Elizabeth Kuhnke

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Body Language For Dummies®, 4th Edition

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Introduction

You don't have to be a professional performer for your body to communicate your emotions, thoughts, and intentions. Nor do you have to be a mind-reader to fathom the people you interact with. What you need is an awareness of nonverbal behavior – including voice and body language – and how it impacts communication. Some movements and expressions are subtle; some are obvious. Some are designed to reveal; others seek to hide. All body movements and facial expressions tell a story. You just need to know what to look for to understand the tale.

Body language speaks the truth. While the spoken word conveys facts, data, and sometimes fake news – your body's movements, gestures, and facial expressions never lie. No matter what words come out of your mouth – “I love you,” “I'm disappointed,” “I'm fine” – if your body isn't reflecting what you're saying, your listeners become confused and believe what they see and sense rather than the words you say.

Your body relays messages about your attitude, intentions, and general state of being. Although there are times when you can't control your body's movements or just haven't a clue what your hands, feet, lips, and eyes are doing, all is not lost. With awareness and practice, you can determine which messages you relay through your gestures, postures, and expressions.

Although body language served as the means of communication long before today's spoken word, only in the last 150 years or so has nonverbal behavior – including vocal sounds as well as physical gestures, movements, and expressions – been seriously studied. During that time, people have come to appreciate the value of body language as a tool for understanding and enhancing interpersonal communication. Politicians, actors, celebrities, and other high-profile individuals recognize the vital part that their bodies play in conveying their messages.

Each chapter of this book addresses a specific aspect of body language. In addition to focusing on individual body parts and their role in communicating your thoughts, feelings, and intentions, you discover how to interpret other people's physical movements, including their gestures and facial expressions, giving you an insight into their mental state before they may be aware of it themselves. You see how performing specific actions and gestures creates the corresponding mental states within yourself and others. You find out how others perceive you and how you perceive them based on nonverbal behaviors. Approach body language respectfully and

responsibly, and base your judgments on the clusters of movements you observe and the context in which you see them. Just as one word can't tell an entire story, nor can one gesture. By aligning your movements with your words, you experience the powerful impact of body language and the clear messages you can convey.

About This Book

For a subject that's relatively new to the study of evolution and social behavior, you can find a sizeable amount of research on body language. As businesses go global, international travel is more accessible, and meetings are regularly held online, people are acknowledging the impact of technology, culture, gender, and religious customs on body language as a way of communicating. While I've written the fourth edition of *Body Language For Dummies* from a mostly English-speaking Western perspective, Chapter 15 has been expanded to include body language in different cultures – what's acceptable and what could cause offense. Because of the vastness of the subject, I've been selective about what I've included and focused on using body language to enhance your relationships.

In this book, I explain how to distinguish and identify specific gestures, actions, and expressions that both confirm and negate the spoken message. By improving your reading of body language, understanding how body movements convey meaning, and recognizing how gestures and expressions reflect thoughts and emotions, you have the upper hand in your interpersonal communications. Through physical signals, you can direct the flow of conversation and facilitate meetings, discussions, and everyday conversations easily and effectively. I will also show you how thoughts and feelings influence gestures and expressions – yours *and* others.

The point of this book is for you to become conscious of the power of body language. To this end, I provide you with the means of identifying and interpreting nonverbal behavior and offer tips for sending signs and signals to enable clear and congruent communication.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, I use the following conventions:

- » *Italic* is used to emphasize and highlight new words or defined terms.
- » **Boldfaced** text indicates keywords in bulleted lists or the action part of numbered steps.

- » Monofont is used for web addresses.
- » Sidebars, which look like text enclosed in a shaded gray box, consist of information that's interesting to know but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the chapter or section topic.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume, perhaps wrongly, that you

- » Are interested in body language and know a little bit about the subject
- » Want to improve your interpersonal communication
- » Are willing to reflect and respond
- » Expect the best of yourself and others

How This Book Is Organized

Throughout this book, you explore and interpret facial expressions, gestures, breathing patterns, and postures, gaining insights into the meanings behind your body language and that of others. You pick up tips for developing and enhancing your relationships with different types of individuals through your nonverbal behavior. In addition, you discover signs that reveal what you might prefer to conceal, as well as signals that expose what you're happy to share. Finally, with exercises to practice and artwork to illustrate the diverse assortment of body language examples, your arsenal is stocked, and you're set to go!

Part 1: Getting Started with Body Language

Bodies always communicate. They always have. They always will. Consciously or not, people project their moods and attitudes through their posture, breathing patterns, facial expressions, and gestures. Body language creates powerful and lasting impressions.

This book's journey into the land of body language begins in Part 1 with historical and scientific data that supports anecdotal evidence. It offers the fundamental components of nonverbal behavior, gives examples of the impressions that specific expressions and movements project, and provides you with a firm foundation for coming to grips with body language.

Part 2: Starting at the Top

If you want to discover how tilting heads, raised eyebrows, scrunched cheeks, and puckered lips convey unspoken messages, this is the place for you. Here, you look at the many meanings divulged by head positions, lips, and eyes, such as lust and love; desire and despair; anger, arrogance, and assertiveness; pride and contempt; power and authority; and submission and superiority. You come to appreciate that as long as your facial muscles are in good working order, there's not a lot of emotion that you can't express.

Part 3: Letting the Limbs Do the Talking

Your posture (sitting, standing, or lying down), arm positions (open or closed), hands (clenched, fiddling, or folded in your lap), and legs and feet (held closely together or wide apart) all reveal and influence your attitude as well as the attitudes other individuals form about you. This part shows you how to welcome some people into your space and shut others out. As a bonus, you pick up tips for using accessories to increase your appeal and reveal the inner workings of your mind.

Part 4: Putting the Body into Social and Business Context

Whether you relish or abhor the company of friends, family, clients, colleagues, or strangers, engaging with people from similar and different socioeconomic backgrounds is a part of modern life. Interacting with individuals other than those with whom you relate and feel comfortable is nonnegotiable when living in a world where teamwork and good social karma are the gateways to success. This part considers the impact that space and seating arrangements have on relationships and perceived status. For those of you looking for tips on how to score at a

soiree, interview for your dream job, influence someone whose worldview is different from yours, and communicate clearly in virtual settings, you can find them here.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

If your idea of a good read is to flip through easily accessible information, come on down! Demonstrating confidence, reading nonverbal messages, and building on your existing strengths – yes, you do have some – are here. If you want a quick tutorial on how to decipher gestures and facial expressions, turn to Chapter 17. If demonstrating confidence is more up your alley, look at Chapter 18. If you think developing your self-awareness and improving your interpersonal communication could be interesting, Chapter 19 is the one for you.

Icons Used in This Book

For sharpening your thinking and focusing your attention, let these icons be your guide:



ANECDOTE

This icon highlights stories to entertain and inform you about people I know or people I've observed and the signals they've sent through their body language.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Here's a chance for you to stand back and observe without being seen. By distancing yourself and taking a bird's-eye view, you can see how others behave and then reflect on the outcome.



REMEMBER

This icon underscores a valuable point to keep in mind.



TIP

These are practical and immediate remedies for becoming a skilled and confident body language practitioner.



TRY THIS

Here, you can have a go at putting theory into practice. Some practical exercises are designed to enhance your nonverbal communication, while others aim to help you understand the meaning behind what others are saying.



WARNING

This icon highlights potentially awkward situations to avoid.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This is information that you may find interesting.

Beyond the Book

Find out more about body language by checking out the bonus content at www.dummies.com.

You can locate the book's Cheat Sheet at <https://www.dummies.com/article/body-mind-spirit/emotional-health-psychology/psychology/social/body-language-for-dummies-cheat-sheet-207509/>, where you'll find handy hints and tips.

Where to Go from Here

Although all the material in this book is designed to support you in being yourself at your best, not all the information may be pertinent to your specific needs or interests. Read what you want, when you want. You don't have to read the book in any specific order, nor is there a sell-by date for covering the material.

If you're interested in how body language conveys messages, begin with Part 1. If you're seeking to improve your body language for a job interview or for playing politics in the professional world, have a look at Chapter 14. If you're curious about facial expressions, turn to Chapter 4. And if you want to know how to behave appropriately in cultures and countries different from your own, go to Chapter 15.

Now turn to a page, chapter, or section that interests you and begin reading. I hope you take away something useful and have fun in the process.

1

Getting Started with Body Language

IN THIS PART . . .

Get the skinny on body language.

Learn how your body outs your feelings.

BOOKS & MAGAZINES IN ENGLISH



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- » 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



ANECDOTE

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

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.

- » Exploring the origins of body language
- » Conveying information through body language
- » Grasping the power of nonverbal behavior

Chapter 2

Looking Closer at Nonverbal Behavior

Like it or not, you're an animal. And like all animals, your gestures, movements, and body position reveal your mental state.

Throughout the animal kingdom, body language is a reliable form of communication. Animals of all sorts, including people, are constantly sizing one another up as they prepare for an encounter.

In this chapter, I revisit our ancient ancestors to explore the beginnings and evolution of body language. You discover how your body conveys what you're feeling, thinking, and general state of being. You find out how body language reveals the emotions and attitudes that you may prefer to leave unexpressed and how your movements support your words.

Observing the History of Body Language

For over 100 years, psychologists, anthropologists, and even zoologists have studied nonverbal behavior to grasp its impact on human communication. These experts recognize that familiarity with nonverbal behavior enhances your ability to connect more successfully than relying solely on the spoken word.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Research into primate activities shows that gestures and facial expressions are reliable means for conveying simple and complex messages.

Aping our ancestors

Charles Darwin concluded that humans' ability to express thoughts, feelings, and intentions through posture and gesture stems from prehistoric apes that most resemble today's chimpanzees. Like humans, chimpanzees are social animals that live in groups. As with humans, chimpanzees' needs are based on successful communication and cooperation to survive. As chimpanzees have yet to develop the ability to speak in a language homo sapiens can understand, they primarily rely on nonvocal means such as stance, facial expressions, and touching gestures to show who's in charge, demonstrate affection, and alert others to danger.

Darwin published his findings in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872. This academic study is regarded as the most influential pre-20th-century work about body language and continues to serve as the foundation for modern investigations into facial expressions and nonverbal behavior. Over 150 years after its original publication, Darwin's findings about posture, gesture, and expression are consistently validated by experts in the field.

Gesturing led to speech

Extensive research into the foundations of communication suggests that spoken language evolved from gestures. In developmental terms, speech is a relatively new means of engagement, having only been a part of the human communication process for somewhere between 500,000 and 2 million years.

According to Frans de Waal of the Yerkes National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia, gestures appeared first in human development, followed by speech. An example of this progress can be seen in the behavior of infants. Babies quickly discover which gestures to use and how to use them to get what they want. Shaking heads, kicking heels, and hands pushing outward signal an unhappy camper.

Studying the behavior patterns of apes and monkeys, de Waal concludes that gestures used as specific signals are a more recent addition to the communication chain, coming after vocalizations and facial expressions. Apes – genetically close to humans – use specific gestures for sending precise messages, while monkeys – further removed from humans – don't.



REMEMBER

Although humans' ability to communicate effectively has evolved with the development of speech, body language remains the most reliable source for conveying thoughts, feelings, and intentions.

Understanding the Nuts and Bolts of Body Language

The primary purpose of the spoken word is to convey information – facts and data – whereas body language relays unspoken thoughts, emotions, and intentions. You may argue that words also relay thoughts, emotions, and intentions, and you’d be right. Sometimes. Think back to those occasions when you said words like, “I’m fine; there’s no problem,” “I think you’re great,” or “I couldn’t be happier,” when you really meant, “I’m annoyed, there’s a huge problem,” “I think you’re hideous,” or “I couldn’t be more miserable.” If the person you were speaking to were a careful observer, they would have noticed that while your words were sending out one message, the way you delivered them sent out a conflicting one. The result? Confusing communication.



TIP

When observing body language, always consider the context in which the gesture is being performed. In addition, consider other movements and facial expressions that the individual makes before drawing a conclusion.

Kinesics: The categories of gesture

American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell was a pioneer in the study of nonverbal behavior. He labeled this form of communication “kinesics” because it relates to the movement of individual body parts and the body as a whole. Building on Birdwhistell’s work, Professor Paul Ekman and his colleague Wallace V. Friesen classified kinesics into five categories: emblems, illustrators, affective displays, regulators, and adaptors.



WARNING

Kinesics conveys specific meanings that are open to cultural interpretation. The movements can be misinterpreted when communicating across cultures, as most of them are carried out with little, if any, consciousness. In today’s global environment, awareness of the meanings of different kinesic movements is vital to avoid sending the wrong message. (To find out more about kinesics across different cultures, see Chapter 15.)

Emblems

Emblems are nonverbal signals with a verbal equivalent and are easily identified because they’re frequently used in specific contexts. Because emblems are quick to use and unambiguous in their meaning, the person receiving the gesture immediately understands the message – as long as they come from the same culture as you. Keep in mind that easily understood emblems in one culture may be puzzling in another.

CONTEXT CLUES: STUDYING GESTURES IN CHIMPS AND BONOBOS

Studying humans' closest primate relatives – chimpanzees and the black-faced bonobo – research conducted by Amy Pollick and Frans de Waal concluded that the meaning of a gesture depends on the context in which the gesture is made, as well as on other gestures that are occurring at the same time. Observing a captive test group of chimps and bonobos, the researchers identified 31 gestures – defined as any movement of the forearm, hand, wrist, or fingers used solely for communication. In addition, they identified 18 facial or vocal signals and recorded them in the context in which they were made. The facial and vocal signals had practically the same meaning in the two species. The gestures had different meanings.

The common signal for fear in chimps is a “bared-tooth scream.” The “up and out” gesture of reaching with the palm facing upward has different meanings. Depending on the context, it can be interpreted as begging for food or money, as street beggars do, or begging for a friend's support. The open-handed gesture is frequently seen after a fight where reconciliation is sought. This versatility demonstrates the necessity for context to be considered before interpreting a gesture's meaning.

Examples of emblems include:

- » **The V sign:** Winston Churchill made the victory sign popular during the Second World War. The palm faces forward with the middle and forefingers held erect. More than 80 years later, this gesture still represents peace (see Figure 2-1). Turn the palm of your hand toward you and flick your fingers once quickly, and the gesture becomes quite rude.
- » **The raised arm and tightly closed fist:** Generally this gesture is used as an expression of resistance, pride, militancy, solidarity, and defiance, which makes it such a powerful symbol. After having served 27 years as a political prisoner, Nelson Mandela left his jail holding this position. Donald Trump frequently employs this gesture to rally his supporters. During the George Floyd protests against police brutality and racism, demonstrators clenched their hands and raised their arms. Athletes also use a closed fist-pumping gesture to spur themselves on.
- » **The finger:** Americans hold the middle finger of the hand in an upright position, with the back of the hand facing out. In Britain, people tend to hold up their index and middle fingers with the back of their hand facing out. Both gestures mean the same thing, namely, “Sit on it!”



FIGURE 2-1:
This emblematic
gesture signifies
peace.

paul_craft/Adobe Stock

» **The horns:** Your index and little fingers are extended, pointing forward with your palm facing down, making “horns.” Your thumb crosses over your two middle fingers. Use this gesture in Italy, and you’re telling someone that his partner has been unfaithful. In Texas, fans of the University of Texas Longhorns football team adopted this pose as a sign of support, and it has nothing to do with infidelity. Fans at concerts flash this sign as an indefinite sign akin to “rock on,” some regarding it as devil’s horns.

» **The OK sign:** A circle made with the thumb and forefinger means “okay” in many parts of the world, while in other places, it represents “zero,” “nothing,” or is an obscene gesture representing a body orifice. It has even morphed into a sign of hatred, taking a once-positive gesture into the realm of negativity – just to add to the confusion.



REMEMBER

Because of different interpretations of the same gesture between cultures, the correct reading is dependent on the context in which the signal occurs.

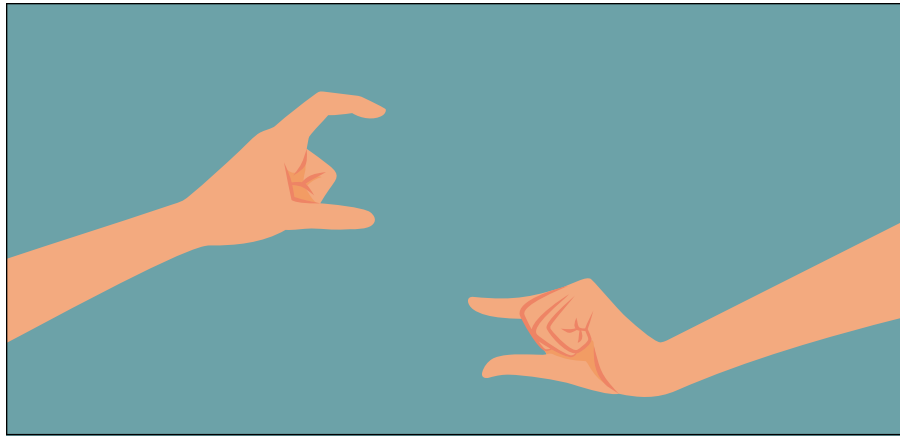
Illustrators

Illustrators create a visual image that describes, accentuates, or reinforces what the speaker is saying (see Figure 2-2). They tend to be subconscious movements,

occurring more regularly than emblematic movements. They help define physical, concrete items and indicate enthusiasm levels. For example

- » Pointing when giving directions
- » Showing the size or shape of an object
- » Raising your hands in the air as a sign of joy
- » Standing tall to demonstrate pride or confidence

FIGURE 2-2:
These hands
illustrate the
difference in size
between two
items.



nicoletaionescu/Adobe Stock

How you synchronize illustrators in relation to how you're speaking shows whether they're an unconscious movement or if you're using them deliberately for effect.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When a gesture is conscious, the preparation for the gesture begins before you speak. Watch someone illustrating their message with a physical signal and you may notice a slight pause between the words and the gesture. How and how many illustrators are used differs from culture to culture. In general, Latinos rely on illustrators more than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, who incorporate them into their way of communicating more than most Asian cultures. In some Asian cultures, extensive use of illustrators is often interpreted as a lack of intelligence. In Latin cultures, the absence of illustrators indicates a lack of interest. See Chapter 15 for more about gesturing across the globe.

Affect displays

Affect displays are movements, including your gait and facial expressions, which contain emotional meaning. For example

- » Bouncing on the balls of your feet can indicate excitement or impatience.
- » A genuine broad grin in which the sides of your mouth turn up and the outer edges of your eyes crinkle signals pleasure.
- » Covering your eyes, ears, or mouth indicates that you don't want to see, hear, or verbally respond to what's happening.
- » Holding on to your own hands or wrapping your arms around your body can indicate worry or concern.



Self-preening is an affect display that can indicate a desire to be liked or noticed. Even men and women at star-studded events can be seen running their fingers through their perfectly coiffed hair or adjusting their designer attire to improve what's already commanding attention.

Because you have little conscious control over your affect displays, they may send out signals you'd rather keep secret. Occurring less frequently and with less consciousness than *illustrators*, affect displays convey universal emotions – such as love, frustration or anger – and can be understood fairly easily, though cultural mores determine the degree and frequency with which they occur.

A lack of affect displays doesn't indicate a lack of emotion. Cultural considerations determine what is acceptable behavior. A person from Japan expressing anger shows significantly fewer affect displays than their Italian counterpart. However, this doesn't suggest that the Japanese person feels any less annoyed. The Japanese are taught to contain their emotions, whereas Italians are encouraged to express them in all their glory.

Regulators

Regulators are body movements that control, adjust, and sustain the flow of a conversation (see Figure 2-3). They're associated with turn-taking in a conversation and influence the ebb and flow of the discussion. Examples include

- » Moving away from someone indicates that you want to end the conversation.
- » Raising a finger or lifting your head indicates that you want to speak.
- » Showing your palm signals that you want the other person to stop.

Further examples of regulators include head nodding and eye movements, such as looking away from someone.

FIGURE 2-3:
This man is demonstrating affect and regulator displays. Putting his right hand in front of his eyes blocks out something causing him emotional distress while his left is in the stop position to regulate the flow of what he's observing.



Krakenimages.com/Adobe Stock

Because of cultural differences in the use of regulators, how people respond to the flow of information can be confusing. A misinterpreted regulatory signal in international politics and business can be interpreted as negative and lead to unfortunate consequences. See Chapter 15 for tips about how to behave in different cultures.

Adaptors

Adaptors include changes in posture and other movements made with little awareness. These body adjustments perform a specific function or make the person more comfortable. Because they occur with such a low level of awareness, they're considered the keys to understanding what someone's really feeling.

Adaptors principally comprise body-focused movements, such as

- » Rubbing
- » Touching
- » Scratching
- » Twitching

Adaptors are triggered by situational circumstances and tend to increase as anxiety levels rise. They are not intended to progress or support a conversation.



ANECDOTE

Hannah's boss recently promoted her to a position of prestige and responsibility within the firm. Shortly after her promotion, Hannah was asked to address a contingent of influential visiting dignitaries. As this was the first time Hannah had been asked to speak in public under intense scrutiny, she was understandably nervous. Before she spoke, Hannah licked her lips and brought her hands to her mid-section, protecting her solar plexus, where she briefly rubbed her fingers before consciously smiling at the audience and speaking.



WARNING

The significance given to adaptors may be overstated and oversimplified. Many adaptor movements – such as shifting positions while seated – may simply be a way of getting comfortable, not a revelation of deep-felt emotions and attitudes. Always consider a cluster of gestures and consider their context when deciphering body language.

Inborn responses

A newborn baby latches onto its mother's breast and suckles. A child born blind and deaf smiles, frowns, and cries. These reactions aren't learned behaviors. They're inborn responses to specific stimuli performed unconsciously, unprompted, and without self-analysis.

Some movements are so familiar that you don't think about them (see Figure 2-4). For example, each of us has a dominant thumb, which automatically goes on top of the other thumb when you interlock your fingers. If you haven't thought about this, you probably have to look to see what you're doing. It's not that you can't reverse the position and put the other thumb on top. Of course, you can. The position just may feel awkward and uncomfortable.

Other examples of inborn responses include

- » The rapid raising and lowering of the eyebrows as a universal sign of greeting
- » Slamming fists, baring teeth, and stomping feet to denote rage



ANECDOTE

While signing an oath during his proclamation ceremony, King Charles III stopped writing and signaled to an aide to remove a tray of pens that was in his way. The king's inborn responses included flicking his hand toward the tray, pushing the tray away, and baring his teeth in frustration. The king was under intense pressure, feeding his annoyance and frustration. Once the offending tray was removed, the king inhaled deeply and resumed signing with a calm demeanor.

FIGURE 2-4:
An inborn response is a natural reaction to a situation requiring no thought, training, or skill.



Kirill Zdorov/Adobe Stock



The study of animal behavior, especially in a natural environment, was pioneered by Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, an Austrian scientist and head of the Max Planck Institute for Behavioral Physiology in Germany. His interest in humans as “signal carriers” significantly contributed to human ethology, the formation and evolution of human character, and the study of inborn actions.

Learned gestures

English zoologist, human behavioral scientist, and author Desmond Morris concluded that human beings have an abundance of gestures, movements, and expressions that, in addition to being genetically inherited, are learned behaviors. Some are discovered, others are absorbed, some are taught, and still others are acquired in a combination of ways.

Discovering actions for yourself

Most people around the world are born with comparable body parts that move in pretty much the same way. A French farmer, a London banker, and a techie in Silicon Valley discover, at some point in their lives, how to fold their arms across their chests and place one leg over the other in a similar action. They figure out how to do this without being told.

Absorbed actions

When you observe a crowd of teenagers, celebrities on the red carpet, or a gathering of international CEOs, you notice that a similar pattern of behavior exists within each grouping. Humans are imitative characters, easily influenced by the actions of others, especially if the others are of a higher status. Unaware of what they're doing, people within the individual groups replicate the actions, gestures, postures, and expressions of the group's alpha person.

Trained actions

Some actions have to be learned. Say you want to wink. You give it a go, and it doesn't quite work. You give it another go. This time, you're a little better, but there's still plenty of room for improvement. Desperate to be an adept winker, you deliberately and doggedly practice until you manage to close one eye while the other remains open. Bingo! You've trained yourself to wink (see Figure 2-5).

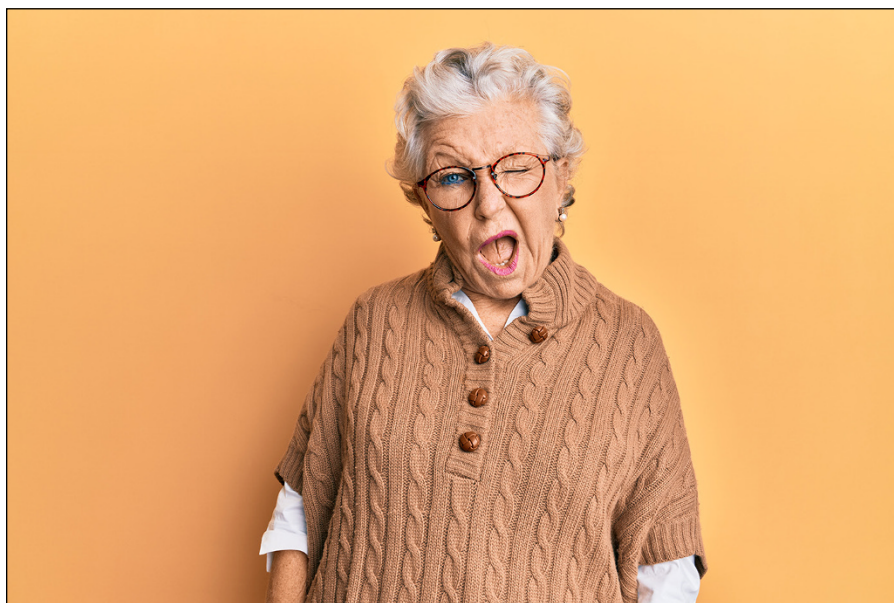


FIGURE 2-5:
Winking is a trained action that connotes connection, compatibility, and secrecy.

Krakenimages.com/Adobe Stock

While most of you aren't going to join the circus, where somersaulting and walking on your hands are trained actions, you may be called upon to shake another person's hand. A proper handshake is a trained action. See Chapter 9 for more about different kinds of handshakes.

Refined actions

Consider the way that you cross your legs. As a child, you discover that sitting with your legs crossed can be a natural and comfortable position. As you mature, you notice how your role models cross their legs, and before you know what's happened, you've refined how you sit.



WARNING

Awareness of cultural differences can influence your actions. For example, showing the soles of your feet, sandals, or shoes is viewed as rude in many Asian countries. To display what is considered unclean is perceived as insulting. If in doubt, remove your shoes and point the soles of your feet toward the floor. (For more about body language in different cultures, see Chapter 15.)

Spotting Differences in Body Language

Researchers have observed and documented almost 1 million different types of signals and gestures that communicate specific attitudes. To keep things simple, listed below are four familiar attitudes and some of their identifying characteristics:

» **Condescending:** The goal here is to make the other person feel dismissed:

- Looking down your nose at someone or lifting your chin in the air to avoid them entirely
- Raising your upper lip and wrinkling your nose
- Pointing the palm of your hand or your finger toward the other person
- Rolling your eyes
- Flicking your hand backward as if batting away an irritant
- Deadpanning, in which you offer only closed lips, a slack jaw, and dull eyes



ANECDOTE

Liz was tired of hearing Lynn brag about her most recent achievements. While she politely listened with a hint of a smile on her lips and her head tilted sideways as if she was engaged in the conversation, at one point she had heard enough and rolled her eyes skyward with irritation and exasperation in response to the woman's gloating.

» **Assertive:** The gestures demonstrate accessibility as well as control.

- Strong stance and forward-facing gestures
- Balanced amount of eye contact

- Appropriate smiling
- Steady rate of breathing
- Firm and clear movements with feet, arms, and hands pointing outward

» **Aggressive:** The body language is hostile.

- Direct eye contact coupled with lowered eyebrows and little blinking
- Slow and deliberate movements
- Pursued lips
- Clenched fists and a tight jaw
- Flared nostrils, gritted teeth
- Puffed out chest and head held high
- Invading your personal space
- Unwelcomed physical contact
- Blading, in which your dominant leg steps back, providing a solid stance, and you present your shoulder and arm as you turn your body away to protect your face and abdomen



Rhesus monkeys raise their brows, flare their nostrils, fix their gaze, and close their jaws when they're about to attack. Flaring your nostrils enables you to take in more oxygen and raise energy levels.

» **Submissive:** The cluster of body movements signals compliance and deference.

- Hunched shoulders and lowered chin
- Motionless with arms held close to the body's sides
- Knees slightly bent
- Widened eyes
- Looking attentively at the other person or looking away
- Mouth in a smiling position
- Hands out and palms up
- Slow, small, hesitant gestures
- Self-touching



Observe everyday people in the presence of royalty or religious leaders. You might notice them lowering their bodies by hunching, bowing, kneeling, or even prostrating when formally greeting someone in a superior position (see Figure 2-6).

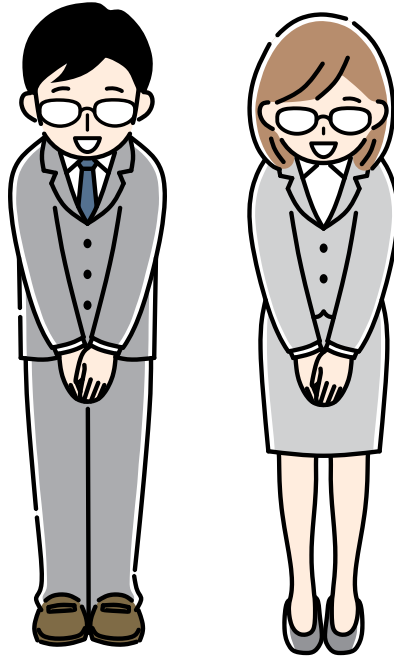


FIGURE 2-6:
Lowering your body is a sign of submission and demonstrates respect for your superiors.

トラノスケ/Adobe Stock

Offering a Final Word on Nonverbal Behaviors

You don't have to be a professional performer for your body to communicate your emotions, thoughts, and intentions. Nor do you have to be a mind reader to fathom the people you interact with. You need an awareness of nonverbal behavior and how body language influences communication. Some movements and expressions are subtle; some are obvious. Some are designed to reveal; others seek to hide. All body movements and facial expressions tell a story. You just need to know what to look for to understand the tale.

2

Starting at the Top

IN THIS PART . . .

Use your head to do the talking.

Get the low-down on facial expressions.

Eyeballing your way to success.

Learn how your lips do more than lecture.

- » Positioning your head to display status and emotions
- » Nodding your head in agreement and acceptance
- » Tilting your head to indicate interest
- » Shaking your head as a sign of negativity

Chapter 3

Heading to the Heart of the Matter

Whether you hold it high, cant it in contrition, or drop it in despair, how you position your head reveals what you think of yourself and the person, place, or thing you're engaging with.

Head movements expose attitudes, replace spoken words, and support or challenge what's said. You can steer someone to look or move in a specific direction by using your head to guide them, or you can point with your head when finger-pointing would be rude or inappropriate.

Head nods and chin thrusts emphasize words and phrases. In a meeting, the chairperson nods toward the person they want to speak. At the dinner table, parents bob their heads while looking at their children, indicating that it's time to dig into dinner. The bouncer at the nightclub bows his head toward you, and you're in the door.

In this chapter, you discover how a slight shift in speed and angle can distinguish between being perceived as interested or dismissive, thoughtful or arrogant, or playful or angry.

Demonstrating Power and Authority

Power is, indeed, a heady thing, and people in positions of power hold their heads high. An upright head reinforces the appearance of superiority over people who drop their heads forward, signaling deference.

The following sections explain the meanings behind head signals.

Signaling superiority

So, you've recently been voted class president, won a Fulbright scholarship, or been awarded the Medal of Freedom. Upon hearing the news, you lift your head and square your shoulders. Your body assumes a position of superior rank.

Sure, you may drop your head in a moment of thought, as a sign of respect, or even to demonstrate humility, but when you want people to pay attention and focus on you, hold your head high (see Figure 3-1).



FIGURE 3-1:

By lifting the back of her head while holding her chin parallel to the floor, this woman projects a sense of calm assertiveness.

contrastwerkstatt/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you feel blue, down in the dumps, or just not quite on top of your game, raise your head and hold it upright for 60 seconds. Notice your mood shifting from low to high. Don't lower your head until you notice your feelings change from negative to positive. If you're feeling particularly glum, you may have to hold the position a bit longer.

Demonstrating arrogance and assertiveness

If you're unsure whether someone's demonstrating arrogance or assertiveness, look at the tilt of the head. If the head is tilted back and the chin thrust forward, you've spotted a sign of arrogance. If the head is lifted from the crown and the chin is parallel to the floor, you're looking at an assertive position.



ANECDOTE

Underneath his bellicosity, Ted is quite insecure. He exaggerates his body language to appear superior. He tends to throw the crown of his head backward, lifting his chin and looking down on the people around him. People describe Ted as arrogant and say they feel uncomfortable in his presence (see Figure 3-2).



Daxiao Productions/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 3-2:
Thrusting your chin forward, tilting your head back, and looking down your nose are signs of arrogance.



WARNING

Before labeling someone based on their body language, gather all the information you can. You may have to hear beyond the words and see beyond the body language to really understand what that person is experiencing.

Displaying aggression

If someone approaches you in an aggressive state, you may notice that their head is thrust forward from their shoulders (see Figure 3-3). In extreme cases of aggression, someone may use their head as a missile, projecting it forward in a head butt to hit the other person. Ouch.

FIGURE 3-3:
The forward thrust of these two people's heads, finger-pointing, and facial expressions of rage are signs of aggression.



Drobot Dean/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Miguel was driving along a narrow country lane with his wife seated beside him and their young son in the back seat. Unexpectedly, a speeding sports car careened around a corner and almost ran into the front of their car. Miguel slammed on his brakes, forcing the other driver to swerve hard to avoid a collision. The sports car driver leaped out of his seat with his head jutting forward, his face red with anger, his neck sinews extended, and lips snarling over bared teeth. Miguel recognized the signs of extreme aggression from the man's head position alone. As quickly as he braked, Miguel put the pedal to the metal, leaving his aggressor in a trail of dust. To further your appreciation of facial expressions and how they convey attitudes, turn to Chapter 4.

Showing disapproval

Remember when you were called into the principal's office and knew it wasn't because you'd won the citizenship prize? Or, do you remember when your boss

summoned you to inquire why you hadn't met your monthly target? Or what about when your tennis partner threw you a look after you hit the ball into the net, losing the match? We've all been on the receiving end of the disapproving look. My children assure me I've been known to give them The Look, too.

As with all gestures, the disapproving look (see Figure 3-4) involves several actions, and you have several ways of positioning your head to convey the same message:

- Tip the top of your head forward and your chin down. Furrow your brow, tighten the corners of your mouth, and purse your lips.
- Straighten your body, hold your head upright, close your lips, and stare with icy precision at the object of your displeasure.
- Lower your head, stare at the floor, purse your lips, and slowly pick at your clothes as if removing an invisible bit of fluff.



FIGURE 3-4:
This woman's icy stare, pursed lips, and lowered chin indicate her displeasure.

Krakenimages.com/Adobe Stock



TIP

To read body language accurately, you must observe all the gestures a person is making. The full message lies in the combination of actions, not in a single movement.

Conveying rejection

In Western society, the head shake is the most common way of expressing a negative reaction. Anthropologists believe turning the head horizontally from left to right with equal emphasis on each side to express rejection stems from our infancy. If in doubt, observe how newborns and toddlers rapidly turn their heads from side to side, rejecting the breast, bottle, or spoonful of food.

The head shake has two speeds of delivery:

- » **Fast:** If the listener shakes their head rapidly with parted lips and rapid breathing, they're rejecting what they're hearing and want to speak.
- » **Slow:** A slow back-and-forth sideways turning indicates the listener's incredulity at what they've just heard.



ANECDOTE

John and Aurora were discussing a possible candidate to join their team. John was in favor of the applicant while Aurora was doubtful. During their debate, Caroline quickly shook her head from side to side, inhaling with her lips slightly parted, indicating that she rejected John's point and wanted to interject. John raised his hand to silence her, at which point Caroline exhaled and slowly shook her head from side to side, indicating that she couldn't believe what she was hearing. (For more about the power of hand signals, see Chapter 9.)

Catapulting

In an office environment, you may notice people sitting at their desks, hands clasped behind their heads, elbows pulled back, and their chests puffed out. This position, known as the "catapult," increases your size as your body expands (see Figure 3-5). Depending on your facial expression, the catapult can make you appear self-satisfied, smug, and even threatening. (Turn to Chapter 4 for more about how facial expressions convey messages.) This position also indicates that you need to stretch.



TIP

If you decide the catapult is the pose for you, make sure that you use plenty of antiperspirant and deodorant. The sight and smell of sweat in an enclosed environment are unpleasant at best.



WARNING

Choose your gestures carefully. If your boss calls you into their office to have a word, or you're if you're interviewing for a job, leave your catapult at the door.

FIGURE 3-5:
The catapult
position makes
this man look
self-confident.



fizkes/Adobe Stock

Tossing your head

Women and gay men have been known to toss their heads in displays of annoyance, disdain, or haughtiness. They flick their head backward and give it a small shake.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

If you want to see a clear example of the haughty head flick, tune into *Downtown Abbey*. Maggie Smith's portrayal of Lady Grantham is dotted with disdainful shakes of the head. Watching Daniel Levy, playing the part of David Rose in *Schitt's Creek*, toss his head in haughtiness and annoyance is a treat not to be missed.

Beckoning with your head

When you want to attract someone's attention – be it a potential lover or to offer a helping hand – the head beckon is an effective gesture when a shout, whistle, or even a wave would be inappropriate. This movement is a diagonal backward throw and may be repeated several times depending on your request's urgency.



ANECDOTE

Alex is Debra's ballroom dancing teacher. During one bachata performance, Alex sensed Debra's uncertainty about which hip she was to flip. Rather than shouting out "left!" he flicked his head toward her left, saving Debra the disappointment of losing points in the competition.

Touching someone on the head

The head is strong and sensitive, and, in some cultures, it is seen as spiritual, for it holds and protects the brain, the body's command center. Also, your sensory organs – mouth, eyes, ears, and nose – are contained in your head where your thoughts and intentions are stored, making it a vital part of your body for conveying information.

While you might be tempted to touch your friends' children on the head, ask first. As a result of child protection regulations, teachers, caregivers, and other people in authority no longer have permission to touch their charges on the head or anywhere else on the body and can be punished if they do so.



ANECDOTE

When Adam takes his daughter to preschool, he strokes her head before leaning over and giving her a kiss. He has yet to touch his boss's head when he arrives at the office, as the difference in their status makes doing so inappropriate, if not downright creepy.



TIP

If someone touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell them to stop. No one has the right to touch you without your permission.

Showing Agreement and Encouragement: The Nod

In most cultures, the nod is an easily recognized and frequently used head movement to indicate a positive response. As with many gestures, the head nod doesn't have just one meaning. In addition to signaling affirmation, agreement, acknowledgment, and approval, this up-and-down movement is a gesture of recognition, comprehension, encouragement, and understanding. Confusing the issue, the head nod means "no" in some cultures. (See Chapter 15 for further insights into how culture impacts body language.)



WARNING

Sometimes, people nod as if agreeing when just the opposite is true. To avoid being duped, look at every aspect of a person's body language before making a judgment.



TRY THIS

If you want to establish a positive environment but are not feeling quite perky, nod your head intentionally. Before you know it, you will feel rather jolly. Nodding your head can create positive feelings; like laughter, head nodding is catching. You may surprise yourself as you nod along with someone, even if you don't agree with them. The head nod is a great place to start for creating rapport, reaching an agreement, and getting support.

Encouraging the speaker to continue

When you're listening to another person and want to keep the conversation going, lean in and nod your head. By nodding in a measured manner, you indicate that you're paying attention and want the speaker to continue. This slow, rhythmic nodding encourages the speaker to say more and talk longer. Likewise, if you fail to nod your head while listening and sit with your head still and your face blank, the speaker thinks you aren't interested or paying attention. They find it difficult to continue and quickly end the conversation.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Listeners who frequently nod during an interaction can prompt the speaker to generate three to four times more information than when no head movement occurs. Experienced interviewers employ head-nodding to obtain additional information and generate further discussion.

Showing understanding

Although the slow head nod encourages the speaker to continue, shifting gears and speeding up your nodding indicates that you understand what they're saying. The fast head nod demonstrates a sense of urgency and support for what the speaker is saying. The gesture can also mean you want to interject and take over the speaker's role. As with all body language, you have to look at the cluster of gestures to determine what messages are being sent.



TIP

You can tell the difference between someone who's interested and encouraging as opposed to someone who wants to take over the conversation by observing where they're looking. If the listener is looking at the speaker, they're demonstrating support. They want to take over the conversation if they're looking away from the speaker with parted lips.



TRY THIS

When you're speaking and want to confirm your listener's level of support, sneak a peek at their eyes. If they're enlarged and focused on you, they're paying attention. If their eyes are dull and lifeless, they're probably bored or uninterested.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The strength of the nod – the degree of the up-and-down action – indicates the listener's attitude. When you agree with what you hear, you nod your head firmly in confirmation. If you nod your head slowly, you're still considering your options.



REMEMBER

When making a formal presentation, the head nod is a practical gesture for emphasizing words and phrases. Use it sparingly. Too much repetition reduces the impact of any technique.

Affirming with a micro-nod

People often end their statements with a barely perceptible dip of the head. In a quick motion, the head pulls downward, followed by a softer return to the upright position. The action affirms and emphasizes the speaker's commitment to what they've just said. This movement can also be perceived as a slight attack or warning that the speaker is serious. Best pay attention!



ANECDOTE

One of former U.S. president George W. Bush's trademark gestures is the micro-nod that he frequently employs when uttering his trademark phrase, "Make no mistake about it." That little dip of the head underscores his words, in case you weren't paying attention.

Displaying Attention and Interest

Whether you call it tilting, cocking, or canting (sloping) your head signals that you're interested in what you're observing. In addition, when you tilt your head upward, you make yourself appear taller and deserving of attention. This section covers all manner of head tilts, cocks, and cants.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Observe men and women watching or listening to something, giving it their full attention. You may notice a difference in how they position their heads. Men tend to tilt their chins upward, pulling their foreheads back. A woman tends to cant her head by lowering her chin and angling her head toward the subject of interest. If you notice someone tilting their head sideways in your direction, you could be correct in assuming they're demonstrating appeasement. They also could be flirting with you. The sideways head tilt is particularly seductive because it exposes a person's neck, sending out signals of vulnerability and submissiveness.



TIP

Because the head tilt conveys submission, be sure to keep your head upright when making a serious point.



ANECDOTE

Tam is head of PR for an international telecoms company. Although excellent at her job, she initially struggled to get people in the organization to take her seriously. Several senior executive committee members described her behavior as flirtatious and provocative, which made the men in the room uncomfortable. When presenting at meetings, she tended to cant her head while smiling seductively and looking out from under her eyelashes. These behaviors were undermining her stature, power, and authority. Tam was shocked when she saw herself on video. After exploring the negative impact of her body language and finding more appropriate gestures for getting what she wants at work, Tam now presents with authority, holding her head high and saving the cants for the weekends.



TRY THIS

If you want to gain someone's solicitude, tilt your head to one side, smile warmly, and gaze at them with expectation. This gesture is similar to what a child does when seeking approval, comfort, rest, or tender bodily contact. Although you may not press your body against the other person, the head tilt alone is enough to stir up protective emotions.



TRY THIS

If you want to show that what you're saying is meant in a genial manner, give a short, sharp downward tilt of your head and add a wink of the eye. People recognize this gesture as a friendly acknowledgment, both humorous and conspiratorial.

Cocking your head

The head cock is a teasing, cajoling action that breaks down a person's resistance (see Figure 3-6). It is a submissive gesture and demonstrates a subservient position. Cocking your head involves dipping the forehead and twisting the chin as you incline your head toward someone. This gesture is frequently used as a non-contact greeting and relates back to the days when men doffed or touched their hats in recognition or tugged their forelocks in acknowledgment. Dipping your head is an appealing and provocative gesture, eliciting nurturing and protective feelings from the person you're seeking to entice. Recall Clark Gable as Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*. With great charm, he cocked his head to those with whom he courted favor, whether it was Mammy, the ladies of Southern society, or one of his jailors.



FIGURE 3-6:
The sideways head tilt conveys interest and a friendly attitude.

antianti/Adobe Stock

WHO CANTS THE MOST?

An Italian research project investigating head positions in paintings from the 13th to the 19th centuries revealed that commissioned portraits of powerful men seldom depicted them with their heads canted. However, religious and pious figures were frequently portrayed in this attitude. The study also found that female figures are depicted with their heads canted more frequently than male figures.



REMEMBER

A simple head cock can produce protective and compassionate feelings in others.

Sitting tête à tête

People who put their heads close together are showing that a tie exists between them and that no room is available for anyone else. The action is one of exclusion and prevents others from overhearing what they're saying.



TRY THIS

The next time you're sitting with your friends having a good gossip or sharing a risqué joke, observe how your heads come close together. When the punch line is delivered or the story's dénouement is revealed, note how the position of your heads changes, either coming in even closer with the thrill of conspiracy or pulling back with relief.

Indicating Submissiveness or Worry

People lower their heads when they're feeling submissive. The act makes them look smaller and less threatening. If your intention – conscious or not – is to appear compliant, dipping, tilting, canting, and cocking the head all do the job.

Self-touching gestures – such as holding your head at the back of your neck or placing your hands on top of your head like a helmet – provide comfort, reassurance, and protection. And they help to alleviate your stress. (See Chapter 9 for more about self-comforting gestures.)

Dipping and ducking

If you've ever walked between two people deep in conversation, you may have ducked your head to avoid invading their space. In addition to making yourself

smaller, this deferential gesture serves as an apology for any inconvenience you may have caused by penetrating their territory. (See Chapter 12 for the rules surrounding personal space.)

The head dip is a means of acknowledging someone in an elevated position. When you meet kings, presidents, or your partner's parents, don't be surprised if you make a slight involuntary dip of your head in recognition of their higher rank.

Cradling for comfort

Your neck is one of your body's most exposed – and, therefore, vulnerable – areas. Clasping your hands behind your neck is a subconscious way to protect, calm and comfort yourself.

Supporting the back of the neck creates a sense of security. In times of uncertainty, people can be observed with their hands holding the backs of their necks. Subconsciously, they're protecting themselves from real or imagined threats; this gesture provides safety, comfort, and reassurance.



ANECDOTE

Sean was attending a board meeting during which several contentious issues were raised. At one point, he sat back in his seat, put his hands behind his head, and rubbed his neck. Anyone paying attention would have noticed that Sean's self-comforting gestures indicated that he was feeling stressed and in need of a little TLC.

Clasping the head

When the stakes are high, whether on the sporting field or trading floor, at campaign headquarters, or a disaster site, people frequently hold onto their heads as if creating a crash helmet. The head clasp is a protective gesture in which the hands rise up and cover the top of the head. Head clasping is a natural, subconscious response to calamity (see Figure 3-7).



ANECDOTE

Jeni and her son Ben were cuddled on the couch watching a football match. When their team's goalkeeper failed to deflect the winning goal, both Jeni and Ben grabbed their heads in disbelief, mirroring the action of the disappointed and furious team manager.

FIGURE 3-7:
Holding your
head is a natural
response to
stress.



crizzystudio/Adobe Stock

Showing Boredom

If you're propping your head in your hand while your eyes take on a glazed expression, you could be sending out signs that you're bored. You rest your head in the palm of your hand because your head feels too heavy to stay upright on its own. Your palm cushions your jaw, your fingers cradle your cheek, and your chin drops in a nod.



TIP

Before determining if you're boring someone, look into their eyes. If they're bright and alight, you've got that person's interest, even if they're resting their heads in their hands. If their eyes are dull and unblinking, they've tuned you out.

Indicating That You're Deep in Thought

If you want to know what someone deep in thought looks like, turn to Auguste Rodin's sculpture, *The Thinker*. The subject is in a forward-leaning position, resting his head upon his hand.

When you're deep in thought, you likely place your hand on your cheek as you reflect. It doesn't matter if you're leaning back in your chair or perched on the

edge of your seat; your hand usually ends up supporting your head while you ponder the possibilities.

Your body energy indicates if you're deep in thought or bored to distraction. When you're engaged in thought, your body is alert and attentive. When you're bored, your body goes limp. Being aware of the signals your body sends out helps you communicate clearly. For further benefits of awareness and nonverbal behavior, go to Chapter 19.



TRY THIS

If you're in a meeting, attending a lecture, or at a dinner party and you're bored beyond belief, adopt the behaviors of someone engaged and interested and act as if you're captivated by the conversation. Doing so may shift your perspective.

Head resting on hand

When people are thinking, they may put their chins into their palms or extend their index fingers up their cheeks while their remaining fingers curl below their mouths. This gesture is particular to the evaluation posture (discussed in Chapter 9) and indicates that the person is thinking about what to do next.



PEOPLE
WATCHING



ANECDOTE

If two or more people are in a discussion and one pulls his head back, you can bet that that person is critical, cynical, or doubtful about what the speaker is saying.

Faruk and Sam were leading a discussion about their company's latest product launch. Faruk tends to monopolize discussions, making it difficult for other members of the team to contribute. Sam, who is sensitive to others' reactions, noticed that the marketing head, Charlotte, was sitting slumped with her head propped in her hand. Charlotte's eyelids were heavy and her facial features were slack. Recognizing that one of the team's most valuable players was bored with what she was hearing, Sam asked Charlotte for her input, engaging her in the discussion.

Chin stroking

Chin stroking with the thumb and index finger is a gesture people use when they're deep in thought or making an evaluation. The index finger may also stroke the upper lip. If a man has a beard, he may even pull on it.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In his book, *Rhetorical Gestures*, 18th-century actor Henry Siddons says of the chin stroke, "This gesture signifies the wise man making a judgment."

- » Matching words and facial expressions
- » Masking expressions
- » Expressing a range of emotions

Chapter 4

Watching Facial Expressions

Face it. Facial expressions expose unspoken thoughts, feelings, and intentions, which can lift your spirits or drag you down. Like it or not, you can count on your face to reveal whatever emotions you experience, thoughts you harbor, or actions you're considering. Problems occur when the look on your face doesn't match your words because people believe what they see.

Someone proclaims, "I love you. All I want is your happiness. I'll do anything for you." Sounds good to me. The only problem is that the downturned mouth, dull eyes, deep vertical lines between the eyebrows, tight jaw, or slack cheeks indicate something's not quite right. The words are saying one thing while the face is saying something else.

Whether you want to hide your feelings or share them with the world, the curl of your lip, the twinkle in your eye, or the flare of a nostril tell a tale.

Letting Your Face Do the Talking

Take a healthy measure of lips, teeth, jaws, cheeks, eyes, and even your nose; you can produce facial expressions for all occasions. With more than 44 muscles in your face – 22 per side – you can communicate your thoughts, feelings, and intentions through a wiggle of your nose, a lift of your lip, a twinkle in your eye, or puffed-out cheeks.



ANECDOTE

Harry was having a rough day. He was struggling with work and battling with his family, his wife was causing him problems, and he felt like he was under the hammer. At one point, after a particularly challenging encounter with his siblings, he sat back in his chair and puffed out his cheeks as he exhaled through floppy lips. Harry was emotionally exhausted.

Say that you think the person sitting across from you is attractive. Although you want to engage in conversation, you feel reticent. To test the waters, you establish eye contact, holding it a little longer than usual while giving a hint of a smile. If you're really feeling up for a flirt, drop your chin a fraction to show your willingness or tilt your head backward as a silent invitation (see Figure 4-1).



FIGURE 4-1:
The tilted heads, eye contact, smiles, and close, open body positions indicate mutual attraction.

Peterchen/Adobe Stock

THE ENGINE BEHIND THE EXPRESSION

The nerve that controls your facial muscles – the cranial nerve VII – is like a tree. The tap root is located deep within your brain's limbic system, that part of the brain where your emotions are stored. From this root extend three branches, controlling facial responses to stimuli. The first branch regulates the tearing and salivating process. The second branch is responsible for transmitting taste messages. The third branch controls movements such as the smile, frown, and squint. Because human facial skin is flexible and the muscles underneath respond quickly to brain impulses, you can clearly convey your thoughts, feelings, and intentions through facial expressions.



TIP

In Chapter 3, you discover the implications of different head positions and how they work in combination with facial expressions to convey meaning.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Women tend to drop their chins, widen their eyes, and look up from under their brows when they're showing interest, while men tend to tilt their heads backward and look down their noses.

You may want to send a message telling someone that their behavior isn't acceptable. A lowered brow, tightened lips, and a slight head shake are usually enough to make your point (see Figure 4-2).



FIGURE 4-2:
Her tight lips, arm
crossed over her
body, and raised
hand indicate
she's had enough.

Cookie Studio/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

When George was 4 years old, he was a page boy at his aunt's wedding. Following his younger sister's example, he purposely stepped on the bridal train as the bride was about to set off down the aisle. Fortunately, the dress remained intact. Outside the church, George's mother gave him a stern talking to. Her furrowed brow, tightened lips, and a forward head tilt let little George know he was in mommy's bad books.



TRY THIS

The next time you disagree with someone and believe it would be inappropriate to say so out loud, you can engage the other person in a bit of ocular one-upmanship. Establish eye contact and hold the person's gaze slightly longer than normal with your mouth closed. Another approach is to not look at the other person at all.



ANECDOTE

Martine was furious with her sister-in-law, Rachel. Rachel had been spreading rumors about the family and causing chaos. At a family gathering, Martine found herself in a small group with Rachel. Because Martine vehemently disagreed with how Rachel behaved, rather than engaging with her sister-in-law and causing a scene, Martine froze the other woman out by refusing to acknowledge her. Martine averted her eyes, lifted her chin, and shut her mouth as she steered clear of her sister-in-law. The look on Martine's face said, "Stay away!"



WARNING

Be aware that looking another person directly in the eye can be perceived as aggressive if the expression is too intense or held for too long. In some cultures, direct eye contact is unacceptable. See Chapter 15 to find out more about cultural differences.

Recognizing Facial Expressions

As with all body movements, the expression on someone's face conveys what's going on inside their soul. While they can lie with words, their body speaks the truth. Flashing their eyebrows in recognition, frowning when puzzled, wrinkling their nose in disgust, flaring their nostrils in anger, smiling with pleasure, and chewing their lips when distressed are just some of the facial expressions that reveal a person's internal state.

Open facial expressions – in which your eyes are engaged, your mouth is relaxed, and your head is tilted with interest – invite conversation, whereas closed expressions – pursed lips, a furrowed brow, and squinted eyes – discourage interaction. Lean forward and lift the corners of your mouth to indicate that you're keen to engage, establish, and maintain eye contact. If you want to be left alone, avoid eye contact, pull away from the other person, and let a frown settle on your features. You'll be on your own in no time.

Smiling with happiness

If your grandmother was anything like mine, she'd tell you to put on your happy face when meeting someone new because she knew that people respond positively to positive behavior.

Facial displays of genuine, unadulterated, free-flowing happiness can't be missed. When you're experiencing pure joy, your mouth muscles rise, your lips pull back, your cheeks lift, your eyes narrow, and your eyebrows slightly dip while lines radiate at the outer corners of your eyes.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The *zygomatic major* muscles, which run down the side of the face, are under your conscious control. These muscles are attached to the corners of the mouth and manipulate their forward and backward movements. The *orbicularis oculi*, which act involuntarily, are the muscles that lift the cheeks and pull the eyes back, producing lines that radiate from the outside corners of the eyes.



TIP

If someone smiles at you and says they're happy, but a little voice inside your head tells you to look at their eyes, look at their eyes. Then look at their cheeks. When one is smiling with happiness, the fleshy part of the eye between the brow and the eyelid moves downward, and the end of the eyebrows dip slightly.

Different types of smiles

The smile is a variable facial expression that can reveal some emotions, cover others, and keep people feeling safe and secure. Scientists and laypeople have tended to limit their understanding of the smile, defining smiles as “true” or “false.” Psychology professor Paula Niedenthal at the University of Wisconsin–Madison points out that people smile in many different circumstances and in many emotional states. To limit one's understanding of the smile as “true” or “false” is to limit one's understanding of one of humanity's most important facial expressions.

Professor Niedenthal, Professor Magdalena Rychlowska of Cardiff University, and their colleagues at the University of Glasgow identified three different and readily recognizable smiles for reward, affiliation, and dominance:

- » **Reward smile:** The *reward smile* is the most intuitive of all three smiles, its purpose being to urge others to smile back or do what you want them to do. The expression is symmetrical as the *zygomaticus* muscles lift, the eyebrows rise, and the lips pull back (see Figure 4-3).
- » **Affiliative smile:** The *affiliative smile* communicates tolerance, acknowledgment, or a bond and shows that you are not a threat. The smile is thin, wide, and symmetrical, with the lips pressed together, covering the teeth (see Figure 4-4).

» **Dominant smile:** The *dominant smile* signals status and oversees the pecking order among individuals. The mouth is asymmetrical, as the facial muscles pull one side up, lifting the cheeks and eyebrows, while the other side stays in place or lowers.

FIGURE 4-3:
The reward smile is the most intuitive smile and encourages people to do a good job.



Creativa Images/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 4-4:
The affiliative smile can project tolerance, acknowledgment, and a bond between people.



Yakobchuk Olena/Adobe Stock

While the different smiles use different muscles, all three exercise that band of muscles lying just below the cheekbones, known as the zygomatics.

Recognizing subtypes of smiles can be critical in human interactions. For example, affiliative and dominance smiles can influence the outcome of games and negotiations. For surgeons who repair and reconstruct facial bones and muscles, knowing the different kinds of smiles and which muscles are necessary to produce them is useful.

Identifying different kinds of smiles should help people when communicating across cultures. Studies have shown that smile types vary from country to country, and the amount they are used also varies, impacting how people respond to what they see. For example, Americans smile so often that people from other cultures are taught to smile more when interacting with them. In Russia, the opposite is true.

It's not a question of "true" and "fake" smiles. Rather, there are different types of "true" smiles. With this understanding, people might pay more attention to what they see and avoid misunderstandings.



TIP

When you're taking someone's photograph, and you want them to smile, find another word to replace "cheese." Saying "cheese" pulls back the zygomatic major muscles, resulting in a forced and artificial-looking photo. My family calls out "sausages" because the word always elicits a laugh.

For more about different smiles and the messages they send, turn to Chapter 6.

Revealing sadness

Look at someone who's feeling blue, and – unless they're trying to mask their emotions – their facial features are slack and sagging. Their eyes are dull and lifeless or tightly closed and scrunched up. If their feelings are intense, the sides of their mouth are cast downward. Everything about his visage indicates sorrow, despondency, or despair.



ANECDOTE

Charlene attended her beloved grandmother's funeral. Before leaving for the church, Charlene's mother told her to be stoic and make her grandmother proud by not crying publicly. As the pallbearers carried her grandmother's coffin into the church, Charlene's lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears and squeezed shut as her cheeks raised and her chin wrinkled. Charlene could not mask her sadness. (Later in this chapter, you look at how people mask their emotions.)

When you're experiencing grief or sadness, be prepared for your lips to tremble. Your eyes become moist, and you may cover your face with your hand to contain your feelings and block out whatever you're responding to with feelings of sadness (see Figure 4-5).



FIGURE 4-5:
This woman's slack jaw and lifeless look in her eyes reveal her sadness.

blvdone/Adobe Stock

Demonstrating disgust or contempt

Narrow your eyes, wrinkle your nose, and twist your lips into a grimace to demonstrate disgust or contempt. Drop your chin, lift it a fraction, and turn your head slightly to the side. People showing disgust tend to look down on the person or object of their contempt. In extreme cases, they may lift their upper lip, pulling the nose upward (see Figure 4-6).



ANECDOTE

Anne and her mother, Jean, were having a heated political discussion. Anne's views were in direct opposition to those of her mother, who, full of contempt, wrinkled her nose, narrowed her eyes, tightened her lips, and shook her head in disgust as if she'd just smelt an over-ripe stilton.

FIGURE 4-6:
The pulled-up
nose, squinted
eyes, raised
upper lip, and
dropped jaw
indicate
contempt.



AlexandreNunes/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Nicola is extremely talented at spotting new trends in consumer behavior. Although Tess, her boss, admires her perception, she also feels threatened by Nicola's youth, energy, and ability to engage with clients. During meetings, Tess responded to Nicola's contributions to the discussion with pursed lips, narrowed eyes, and a small shake of her head, unconsciously showing signs of contempt. Her insecurity was driving her behavior. Had she been aware of her feelings and actions, she might have chosen to signal her pride in her protégé by adopting an open expression with a positive head nod rather than a negative shake. (Later in this chapter, you gain insights into the impact of open and closed facial expressions.)

Conveying anger

Chances are that you've been angry at some point in your life, and the feeling was reflected in your facial expression. When you're angry, you tend to stare hard at the source of offense. Your eyebrows pull down and inward, causing your forehead to furrow. Your lips tighten and turn down at the corners, or they may open stiffly as if in a frozen shout. You may also grit your teeth together. Some people flare their nostrils when they're very angry. Finally, if you're incandescent with rage, your face can turn white as the blood drains from the epidermis (see Figure 4-7).

FIGURE 4-7:
These youngsters' faces are white with rage.



shara/Adobe Stock



TIP

If your anger is about to get the better of you, inhale deeply through your nose, breathing into your lower abdomen while keeping your upper chest loose and tension free. Hold for a count of three. Pause. Then, exhale through your mouth to a slow count of five. Pause. Deep breathing feeds oxygen to the brain, putting you into a calm state and enabling you to regroup and consider your response to whatever it is that's triggering your anger.

CHANGING COLORS

According to zoologist Desmond Morris, as a part of the fight-or-flight response facial color indicates rage level. If someone menacingly approaches you and their face is pale, they're more likely to attack than if their face is red. If the face is red, they've already experienced their deepest rage and have passed the point of attack. Although people think of those whose faces are red with rage as being the ones to fear, the reddened face is a sign of an internal struggle, frequently resulting in shouting and harsh language. Despite their threatening behavior, the puce-faced individual is unlikely to do you real physical harm.

Distinguishing between surprise and fear

Expressions of surprise and fear are closely connected. In both expressions, the eyes widen and the mouth opens. The differences are subtle and found primarily in the attitudinal shape and position of the eyebrows, eyes, and mouth:

» **Surprise!:** An expression of surprise is open. Your eyebrows shoot up in an arch and horizontal wrinkles appear on your forehead. You widen your eyes and the whites become more noticeable. Your jaw drops, leaving your mouth slack (see Figure 4-8).



FIGURE 4-8: Signs of surprise include wide eyes, raised brows, and a slack jaw.

Drobot Dean/Adobe Stock



TIP

Don't be surprised if you see someone covering their mouth with a hand when they're surprised, doing their best to hold back an extreme emotion. (Go to Chapter 9 for more information on how hand movements reveal feelings.)

» **Boo!:** When you experience fear, your eyebrows rise and pull together in a crooked curve. The center part of your forehead wrinkles. While your upper eyelids rise, exposing the whites of your eyes, your lower eyelids become tense and rise, too. Finally, your lips tense and may pull back around your open mouth (see Figure 4-9).

FIGURE 4-9:
This child's wide open mouth and eyes, curved eyebrows, and wrinkled forehead show that she's scared.



Ilshat/Adobe Stock

Recognizing rapport

When someone is listening to you speak, you may notice them chewing, sucking, licking, or pulling their lower lip between their teeth. These self-comforting gestures demonstrate that your listener feels a rapport with you, feeling your pain and experiencing pleasure. (In Chapter 14, you discover the benefits of establishing rapport, and in Chapter 5, you can pick up some tips on how to build rapport through eye contact. Self-comforting gestures are explored in Chapter 8.)

Another message that lip-licking sends is that the person would like to speak and is holding themselves back. Before determining the message being conveyed, look at all the signals being sent.



ANECDOTE

During a recent Zoom meeting, Mira noticed that Joe, one of her team members, would open his mouth to speak, only to lick his lips and pull them between his teeth. While Joe is more introverted than other team members and needs to be encouraged to share his insights, Mira values his contributions. Mira finally asked Joe if he had anything to add to the discussion. Before sharing his thoughts and suggestions, he licked his lips. In the first instance, Joe licked and sucked on his lips to refrain from speaking. The second time, Joe's lip lick was a self-comforting gesture as he prepared to share.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

If you notice someone chewing on their lower lip while listening to you speak about something unpleasant or unfortunate, they are demonstrating rapport, showing that they feel connected to you and your story. If you're describing a fantastic meal you recently ate, and the listener licks their lips, they're also establishing rapport, demonstrating pleasure in your culinary experience. To discover the value of establishing rapport, flip to Chapter 14.

Messing up the message

Your message is clear if your words reflect what your face is expressing. Your meaning becomes muddled when your spoken words and body language aren't aligned. While your words may sound authentic, your listener buys what you say based on the look on your face. For example, if you tell your son-in-law how happy you are to see him while your facial expression looks like you've been sucking a lemon, don't be surprised if he resists your efforts to play nice.



ANECDOTE

When Will was five years old, he drew a rainbow on the wall next to the front door of his home. When his mother, Maggie, saw the Crayon-colored wallpaper, she was both annoyed and enchanted. The message she gave him was mixed. She frowned and pulled down the corners of her mouth as a sign of disapproval for his having damaged the wallpaper. At the same time, the sides of her lips twitched upward as she struggled not to smile. While scolding her son for damaging the wallpaper, her eyes crinkled in amusement and pride as she looked at her little lad and his artistic endeavor. You can see why the boy was baffled.



REMEMBER

When your facial expressions fail to match your words, your message is mixed, leaving your listener wondering what to believe.

Masking Emotions

If you've ever bitten your lips to keep from blurting out sentiments that would undoubtedly cause offense, if you've ever smiled when your heart was breaking, or if you've ever frowned when you've wanted to laugh, you know what masking emotions is about.



ANECDOTE

I recently attended a friend's funeral. As I looked at the other mourners, I noticed the similarity in facial expressions. All were tense, tight, and controlled. While people smiled at one another, the smiles were mostly close-mouthed and pinched at the corners, and their foreheads were creased. Eyes were moist, and people were swallowing, licking, and chewing on their lips to mask their sadness. (Turn to Chapter 6 for more about lips.)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Masking, meaning to conceal an emotion by portraying another, is primarily used to disguise negative emotions, such as sadness, frustration, and anger.

What's hiding behind the mask

Because facial expressions signal an individual's internal state, researchers at the Laboratory for Attention and Social Cognition at McGill University wanted to see how the wearing of masks impacts a person's ability to recognize basic emotions, namely happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, and neutral. Not surprisingly, the findings demonstrate that the recognition of all facial expressions is reduced when masks are worn. Interestingly, the reduction of recognition varies according to which emotion is displayed.

Disgust and anger are the most difficult to identify emotions when faces are masked, followed by sadness and neutral. Fear, surprise, and happiness are impacted the least. These findings indicate that anger and disgust rely on the lower face – the part that is covered by a mask – to convey the message more than other emotions do.

Further findings indicate that individuals high in agreeableness, with attributes like self-sacrifice and philanthropy, correctly identify facial expressions more accurately than those who score lower in that trait. The researchers also found that people who score high in extroversion – those who seek out social contact – are not as good at recognizing masked expressions as people who rank lower in that characteristic.

Wearing a mask during social interactions can influence communication between individuals. The doctor-patient relationship, for example, requires a straightforward interpretation of emotional states. Common feelings when dealing with medical issues are anger and sadness, which are the most difficult to identify when covered by a mask. In addition, human psychological development depends on the correct interpretation of social cues, as revealed through facial expressions. Educators wearing masks when working with children might want to consider the impact of mask-wearing on a child's social development.



ANECDOTE

One Sunday, Paul arrived at church in a foul mood. Putting on his friendly face for the new vicar, he responded to her "How are you?" with the single word, "Fine." His eyes were fiery, and his lips were tight. Leaning close to Paul with a warm smile and a twinkle in her eye, the vicar whispered into his ear, "You mean 'F-I-N-E: fed up, insecure, neurotic and enraged'?" Paul's head snapped back in surprise, his eyes opened wide in both astonishment and amusement, and his forehead flushed with having had his bluff called. "Yep. That about sums it up!" he replied, striding into the chapel with a spring in his step. Even his eyes crinkled with pleasure as his mouth pulled up and back, displaying his even, white teeth. (See Chapter 6 for more about different kinds of smiles.)

Culture and display of emotion

Way back in the 1800s, English naturalist, geologist, and biologist Charles Darwin posited that seven distinct facial expressions are universal, whereas other highly respected cultural anthropologists, including Margaret Mead, believed that facial expressions were culture-specific. To explain this discrepancy, Dr. Paul Ekman, psychologist and co-discoverer of micro expressions, came up with the term *display rules*. As he describes, these are rules that people learn as they mature and govern who can show which emotions to whom. These rules can repress, reduce, amplify, or even mask an emotional expression.

Display rules tend to operate in public and help explain why culture impacts facial expressions. In one of Ekman's experiments, he compared the facial expressions of Japanese and American university students watching unpleasant films. Unbeknownst to the participants, he videotaped their facial expressions while watching the film in private and when an authority figure was present. Ekman discovered that the facial expressions between both groups were the same when they watched the films in private. When a scientist was present, the Japanese students masked their expressions of disgust and fear with a smile. Ekman's experiment showed that Darwin's theory of universal facial expressions (when the students were alone) and Mead's belief in culture-specific expressions (when a scientist was in the room) resulted from display rules. While the idea that it is possible to control facial expressions was not original to Ekman, his research confirmed the theory. Culture affects what emotions an individual feels comfortable and uncomfortable showing. Chapter 15 is full of examples of culturally different nonverbal behavior.

FREEZING FACES

While smooth skin, a calm visage, and a face free of wrinkles may be cosmetically attractive, it comes with a price. Research shows that the Botulinum toxin affects not only how others perceive your emotions but also impacts your own perceptions of your emotions. The good news is that a University of California, San Diego, study found that botox is an effective treatment for certain depressions.

- » Conveying moods
- » Revealing thoughts
- » Deciphering signals

Chapter 5

Eyeing the Situation

When in doubt about a person's thoughts, feelings, or intentions, look to the eyes, the gateway to the soul. Because they're directly linked through the optic nerve to the limbic system – that part of the brain that controls your emotions – your eyes reveal your inner state more accurately than any other body part.

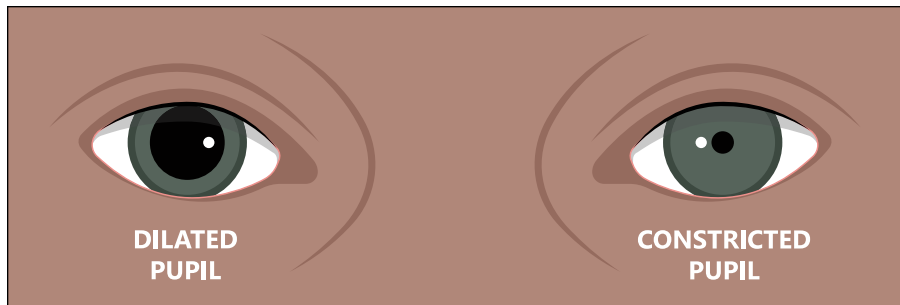
Your pupils – the dark disks in the center of your eyeball – enlarge and contract according to your mood and the lighting conditions. When you like what you see – or when it's too dark to see – your pupils enlarge, and when they shrink, you're either being blinded by the light or are in a negative state. Eyes respond involuntarily to stimuli with little means of control. Of course, if you want to increase the diameter of your pupils to make yourself look vulnerable, pleased, or appealing, smoke a bit of marijuana. Or perhaps not.

This chapter looks at the role eyes play in communicating your thoughts, feelings, and intentions. You discover how to use your eyes to convey interest, command attention, show disapproval, signal submission, garner sympathy, create intimate feelings, demonstrate dominance, and tell someone, "Enough is enough!" And because communication is a two-way street, you pick up tips for deciphering the eye signals others send your way.

The Power of the Held Gaze

Whether you're looking at someone in anger, disappointment, sadness, or with a heart full of love, the intensity of your gaze manifests the meaning behind your message. When a person holds eye contact with you, they're intimating one of two things: they find you attractive and interesting or they're feeling angry and hostile. How do you tell the difference? Look at their pupils: In the first case, they're dilated; in the second, they're constricted (see Figure 5-1).

FIGURE 5-1:
Under normal lighting conditions, enlarged pupils indicate interest and pleasure, while constricted pupils indicate negative feelings.



rumruay/Adobe Stock



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

The average gaze for an individual in Western cultures lasts 2.95 seconds, and the average mutual gaze is 1.8 seconds. In some Asian, African, and South American cultures, as well as in the Middle East, prolonged eye contact is perceived as hostile or discourteous. (See Chapter 15 to learn more about looking at people from different cultures.)



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

One of the signs of schizophrenia is the tendency to stare with a blank expression for long periods without speaking. The look is unflinching and can be unnerving to people unaware of the behaviors associated with mental illness. You can find out more about the behaviors linked to schizophrenia in *Schizophrenia For Dummies* by Jerome Levine (Wiley).

LOOK WHO'S WATCHING

Research shows that when Westerners interact, they look at one another on average 61 percent of the time. The speaker looks at the listener 40–60 percent of the time, and the listener looks at the speaker about 75 percent of the time. People spend about 31 percent of their time mutual gazing. If someone looks at you more or less than usual, something is influencing their response, positive or negative.

Building rapport

It should come as no surprise to read that people prefer to work with individuals with whom they have rapport, also known as having a comfortable relationship. One way to establish rapport is by looking at people when you speak and listen. If you want to build rapport – and why wouldn't you? – count on meeting the other person's gaze 60–70 percent of your time together.

Even if you feel uncomfortable establishing and maintaining eye contact, push through the pain to be an effective communicator. A person who can look other people in the eye comes across as comfortable, confident, and trustworthy. These three traits are vital for positive interactions and outcomes.

For more about rapport and how to build it through body language, pick up a copy of *Neuro-Linguistic Programming For Dummies* by Romilla Ready and Kate Burton (Wiley).



TIP

If you struggle to establish and maintain eye contact with another person and want to be perceived as a non-threatening and interested listener, focus your gaze on the triangular area between the speaker's eyes and mouth. While you are looking at the other person in this way, your gaze is less intimate and possibly less uncomfortable than staring directly into his eyes. (See Chapter 1 for other tips on building rapport and why it matters.)

Intimating interest

To show interest in a person – or an object – fix your gaze directly on the person or item you're addressing and hold for slightly longer than usual (see Figure 5-2). When you focus your attention on another person and hold their gaze for more than 2–3 seconds, you're intimating that they have your interest. To encourage them to look back at you, tilt your head and smile. Widened eyes, a tilted head, and a smile show interest and submission. (See Chapter 3 for more about head positions and Chapter 6 to gain insights into lip movements.)



ANECDOTE

Samantha attended an art exhibition with her friends, Frank and Peter. Their taste in art – South American contemporary with a twist – differed from Samantha's, who prefers Impressionism and 17th-century Dutch still lifes. Although Samantha wasn't enthralled by what she was observing, she wanted to appear interested and made herself look at the artwork for longer than she normally would. Not only did Frank and Peter believe that Samantha was enjoying the art, but she also discovered that by giving the work extra "eye time," she could recognize its artistic value.

FIGURE 5-2:
Maintaining eye
contact is a way
of showing
interest in
another person
and building
rapport.



Monkey Business/Adobe Stock

Creating intimate feelings

If you're gazing at another person and your eyes stray down his face onto other parts of his body, you're indicating an interest far removed from the business world or a friendly "hello." When your eyes wander over a person's visage, you're showing that you're attracted to them. If the look is returned, you may be onto a winner. If not, save your pride by reverting to a polite gaze, if you gaze at them at all. (The polite gaze is explained later in this section.)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When you gaze at someone you find attractive, your body releases a small dose of oxytocin. This hormone – frequently referred to as “the love hormone” – is associated with social, sexual, and emotional bonding.

While both men's and women's pupils dilate when they find someone attractive, women tend to turn up the heat by looking at the other person with a sideways glance. Referred to as the “come-hither” look (see Figure 5-3), it says, “I'm interested and available.” If she doesn't want to be so obvious, she might avoid looking at the other person, with the occasional eye darting back in the individual's direction. (For more information on all the uses and meanings of sideways glances, check out “The sideways glance” section later in this chapter.)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The word “hither” means “this place” or “the place where I am.” The term “come-hither” first appeared around 1895 in newspapers to imply a woman's sexual interests.

FIGURE 5-3:
The come-hither
look signals a
sexual interest.



SM/Adobe Stock

Showing disapproval, disagreement, and other negative feelings

Of course, not all gazes are warm and friendly. A steely-eyed gaze with contracting pupils indicates displeasure (see Figure 5-4). Beady little eyes, snake eyes, and shooting daggers with the eyes are sure signs of dispute, disapproval, or disagreement. If someone holds your gaze and their pupils are constricted, you can bet you're in their bad books.



TRY THIS

If you want to feel and be perceived as dominant, strong, and in control, slightly narrow your eyes.

PRESIDENTIAL GAZES

People who've met former U.S. presidents Bill Clinton and Donald Trump report that they both have a way of looking at you that makes you feel important and immensely interesting. They engage with their listeners by establishing eye contact upfront and letting their gaze scan slowly across your eyes and face as they speak. Whatever your political inclinations, you end up feeling that you are, for that moment, a truly significant and fascinating person.

FIGURE 5-4:
This man's
steely-eyed gaze
communicates
his resolve and
dominance.



Giulio_Fornasar/Adobe Stock



REMEMBER

When you're in a negative mood your pupils contract, making your eyes look harsh and hostile, aloof and distant, or just plain mean.

Demonstrating dominance

Dominant people don't hold back from establishing and maintaining eye contact. Their eye movements are mostly slow and controlled as they take in their surroundings. They seem comfortable when looking at another person for an extended period while being careful not to stare, which would make them look slightly mad or rude.

Equally, avoiding eye contact can demonstrate dominance. The person in control of the interaction establishes their authority by choosing when, where, and for how long to look at someone. The following sections explain how both the held gaze and eye contact avoidance convey dominance.

Scenario 1: Reprimanding

If an irate boss or disappointed parent has ever reprimanded you, you may recall the tension you felt when the person speaking refused to look at you (see Figure 5-5). You knew that you were going to get the full force of their glare at some point; you just had to wait to see when.

FIGURE 5-5:
Looking away
from someone
can show
contempt and
dismissiveness.



Яна Солодкая/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

When I worked as a hostess on a cruise ship, I was called into the cruise director's office early one morning. Scotty was a stickler for punctuality, and I had been late for an event the night before. I knew I was in for it because Scotty was well-known for shouting when angry. What I didn't know was how intense the confrontation would be. When I entered his office, Scotty was sitting quietly behind his desk, staring out at the ocean with his back turned to me. Without so much as a glance in my direction, he told me to sit down. Continuing to look out of the porthole, he began to berate me, not just for the previous night's transgression but for all my other perceived failings as well. Unable to remain quiet and let him blow off some steam, I argued back. Big mistake. He spun around in his seat and fixed me with a glare so forceful that I felt as though I'd been slapped in the face and punched in the chest. His stare was so intense and held for so long that I could not hold his gaze. Scotty told me that I'd better watch myself and that he was keeping an eye on me. As he said those words, I looked up to see his beady eyes boring directly into mine. Unable to sustain the eye contact, I looked away again. Scotty was definitely dominant in that discussion.



TRY THIS

When you're disagreeing with someone and want to make your point, hold eye contact slightly longer than usual. You can also deliberately avoid eye contact, raising the other person's anxiety level while demonstrating your contempt.

Scenario 2: In conversation

Someone demonstrating dominance spends more time looking at other people when speaking than when listening. This behavior could indicate that they're only interested in their own stories, not what someone else says. Besides watching their listeners to ensure that they're paying attention, a dominant speaker watches them to keep them from interrupting.

Scenario 3: Intimidating

You can grab the attention of an adversary by looking them directly in the eye without flinching. Direct eyeball-to-eyeball staring can be deeply threatening. Authoritarians and angry parents are known to stare without flinching as a means of intimidation.



ANECDOTE

Little Louis was at a large family gathering abundant with cake, cookies, and candy. Not surprisingly, Louis, high on a sugar rush, was full of mischief, and his mother was struggling to control him. Observing the scene was Louis's uncle Mike, who leaned down to the little lad's level, pointed his index and middle fingers to his own eyes, then toward Louis's, all the while looking his nephew squarely in the eye (see Figure 5-6). The message was clear: "Calm down, son. I'm watching you." For a few moments, Louis *did* calm down – until the sugar kicked in again – and off he went.



FIGURE 5-6:
Pointing your fingers to your eyes while staring at another person says that you're watching them closely.

Thunderstock/Adobe Stock

THE EVIL EYE

Belief in The Evil Eye derives from the feeling that a prolonged stare can damage people. This superstition is still held in Mediterranean countries, and people often carry amulets and other good-luck charms to ward off disasters. Fishermen commonly protect their boats from danger by attaching a pair of artificial eyes to the prows of their vessels as a means of outstaring a potential threat or enemy.



TRY THIS

If someone is trying to bully you or put you off, look them straight in the eye, narrow your eyelids, and focus directly on your target. If other people are around, let your eyes move slowly from one person to the next without blinking. Move your eyes first and then slowly let your head follow while your torso remains still. The effect is unnerving. If you need a role model, Daniel Craig as James Bond is your man.

The power lift

When you're presenting visual information during a meeting and want to help your listeners follow your train of thought, and why wouldn't you? -guide the audience's attention to where you want it to look. Using a pen is a simple way of controlling your listeners' attention. Point to your material and describe what you're showing. Then lift the pen off the page and hold it between your eyes and those of your listeners. This movement works like a magnet, helping your audience see as well as hear your message. Keeping the palm of your other hand open while you speak is a non-threatening gesture, which also facilitates understanding. (See Chapter 9 for more about how hands support your message.)

USING EFFECTIVE GAZES IN BUSINESS SITUATIONS

If you're uncomfortable looking people directly in the eye and still want to come across as a person to be taken seriously, keep your gaze in the triangular area between the other person's eyes and the center of their foreheads. As long as your eyes remain in that space and don't waver, you'll look confident, comfortable, and in control.

The Wandering Eye: Breaking Eye Contact

Because your eyes reveal your thoughts, feelings, and intentions – and you have loads of them – they move in many different ways, depending on your mood and attitude. For example, if you’re feeling submissive, anxious, alarmed, annoyed, or just plain uncomfortable, your eyes tend to look away from whatever is causing you grief. You might also avert your gaze to catch another person’s attention. Strange, but true.

The following sections explore how people avoid or minimize eye contact and the meanings behind the movements.

The eye shuttle

When you observe someone whose eyes are flicking back and forth, you can bet that they’re subconsciously looking for an escape route. Although their head remains still, their eyes rapidly move from side to side.



ANECDOTE

Philip was nervous. He was under investigation for some of his business and personal dealings. When interviewed by a journalist, his eyes darted up and down and from left to right, leaving the impression of someone wrestling with the truth and looking for a way out.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Fred was attending a conference when he saw Vanessa, a woman with whom he hoped to do business. With an overabundance of enthusiasm, Fred made a beeline for the woman, who was engaged in serious conversation with two colleagues. Fred introduced himself and, without being invited, injected himself into the discussion. Fred failed to notice that Vanessa’s eyes didn’t connect with his. Instead, they scanned the room, shuttling back and forth until she found her exit point. Fred never did do business with Vanessa or her associates. Had Fred been more self-aware, he might have had more success in landing a contract. See Chapter 19 for insights into the power of awareness.

The sideways glance

The sideways glance carries several meanings, including

- » Interest
- » Uncertainty
- » Hostility

To determine which feeling is being conveyed, consider the context and observe how the rest of the body responds.

When you look at someone from the corner of your eye and add a slight smile while raising your eyebrows, you're sending a sideways glance of interest, not hostility.

On the other hand, if you're speaking to someone whose eyes look anywhere other than at you, chances are they're not very interested in either you or what you're saying. If that's the case, move on.

During a conversation, if the listener shoots a glance out of the corner of their eye and combines the action with downturned eyebrows and a furrowed forehead, you can bet that they're feeling critical, dismissive, or hostile.



REMEMBER

People tend to look toward things that interest them and look away from things that don't (see Figure 5-7).

FIGURE 5-7:
This woman's sideways glance indicates that something has caught her interest.



nazarovsergey/Adobe Stock

DIANA'S DIPPING EYES

Diana, the late Princess of Wales, was exceptionally adept at evoking empathy by dipping her eyes and lowering her head. This gesture is particularly appealing because it makes the eyes appear larger and makes a woman seem innocent and somewhat helpless. Both men and women respond protectively as long as they don't think they're being manipulated. Even as a young child, Diana used this gesture to good effect. Although initially she may not have been conscious of what she was doing, experience taught her that when she used her eyes in this fashion, she engendered her public's empathy. During her 1995 BBC tell-all interview with Martin Bashir, the Princess repeatedly dipped her eyes as she spoke, revealing her to be a sad and lonely woman. You can watch this interview on YouTube.

The eye dip

Averting your eyes downward is a deliberate action designed to placate others, demonstrate humbleness, and mask your inner state. In the first instance, by avoiding another person's gaze, you're signaling your submissiveness.



ANECDOTE

Anka is a feisty, older woman. What she believes is right *is right*. She and Laurie, a younger version of Anka, were engaged in a heated discussion. Each woman had her point of view, and neither was prepared to back down. As their argument grew, their conflict hit a zenith. Anticipating from the intensity of the older woman's rage that a medical issue could occur if they continued to argue, Laurie lowered her eyes in a sign of submission to placate her friend. While Laurie didn't want to give in, she didn't want the elderly woman to become ill because of a disagreement.

Winking, blinking, and shutting you out

An engaging way to show a fun and friendly attitude is to wink. Winking intimates that whatever you're talking about doesn't need to be taken too seriously. Similarly, people sharing a secret frequently share a conspiratorial wink. A wink can be friendly, flirtatious, and conspiratorial, so consider the context before deciding what the wink means.



ANECDOTE

Peggy has a new hairdo. Previously cut in a boring bob, her hair is now short and sassy. She was invited to a rather staid event attended by a hoard of older men in gray suits and their worthy but dull wives. One of the men in gray, who still has a twinkle in his eye, made a comment to Peggy about her new sexy hairstyle. Looking at him over her shoulder, she ducked her chin, flashed him a smile, patted her

hair, and gave him a big wink. Both Peggy and the old boy knew that her flirty wink acknowledged that she knew her hairdo was causing consternation among the old folk, and she didn't care.



TIP

The wink can be conspiratorial, flirtatious, or friendly. If in doubt, look for other physical signals to help you decipher the wink's meaning.

Blinking is different from winking. When you blink, both eyes open and close, as opposed to the wink, which requires only one eye. While blinking is a sign of surprise and annoyance, the main purpose of blinking is to keep the eye surface moist, clean, and healthy.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Under normal conditions, the blinking rate is 8–22 blinks per minute. This can increase by four or five times when you're feeling under pressure.



ANECDOTE

Steve is a reticent man and not a natural presenter, unlike his wife, Elaine, who loves the limelight. Because he is the founder of a national charity, he must attend fundraising events and is frequently called upon "to say a few words." On a recent occasion, Steve stood at the podium and Elaine watched anxiously as her husband fumbled along, making rapid and frequent eye movements, signaling his insecurity. Not only was Steve blinking to excess, Elaine, as she anxiously watched her husband, blinked frantically, unconsciously sending signals for him to wrap it up.



WARNING

Lack of blinking can cause your cornea – the clear, thin top layer of the eye – to become dehydrated. Your vision becomes blurry, and you don't see as well.

Sometimes people shut their eyes unconsciously to remove you from their sight. Some people find that closing their eyes helps them to think, focus, and concentrate on what they're saying. Or maybe they're bored by you or feel superior to you. Hard to believe, I know, but possible. Whatever the reason, the action can be interpreted as rude and off-putting, even if that's not the intention.



ANECDOTE

I recently attended a workshop on – you guessed it – body language. I noted that when the facilitator spoke, she occasionally closed her eyes longer than felt normal. When one of the other participants pointed this out, she was surprised, having been unconscious of the habit. Upon reflection, the facilitator realized that she closed her eyes while speaking when she was unsure of what she was going to say next. She was unconsciously shutting out potential distractions while searching for an answer.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

Confident people establish more and longer eye contact than people who are uncertain or are attempting to hide something. To find out more about how confident people use eye contact, refer to the earlier section, "The Power of the Held Gaze."

WHO HAS A BLINKING PROBLEM?

Research shows that potential voters are more comfortable with candidates who look them squarely in the eye than with those demonstrating tics. During the 2012 debates between potential Republican presidential candidates, researchers investigated the corollary between candidates' blinking rates and voters' responses. During one debate, candidate Rick Santorum blinked at a rate of 61 times per minute, a more than 50 percent increase over the other candidates, who blinked an average of 27.8 times per minute. Although Mitt Romney's blinking rate averaged 33.9 times per minute, like the other candidates, this rate was tied to his comfort level. When rigorously challenged about his views on contraception, his blinking rate accelerated. When he was confronted with a question to which he could give a standard response, his blinking rate decreased notably. The voters responded, and Romney was elected his party's candidate.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When people lie, their energy increases and their blinking rate speeds up as they concoct their answers to difficult questions. However, just to confuse you, sometimes liars slow down their blinking rate. Even seasoned professionals have difficulty spotting liars and consider all the body movements and facial expressions before drawing a conclusion.

Active eyebrows: The eyebrow flash

Regardless of whether you know it, your eyebrows involuntarily and rapidly raise and lower when you greet someone (see Figure 5-8). Although this action can be so subtle as to be invisible to the naked or untrained eye, the movement draws attention to the face as it sends signals of acknowledgment. Japan is the exception to this rule, where the movement is considered rude and has sexual implications. (See Chapter 15 for more about body language worldwide.)



TRY THIS

Sit in a hotel lobby or at a bar and eyebrow flash everyone who passes by. You'll find that most people return the flash and smile. Who knows, they may even come over to talk to you.

In addition to raised eyebrows being a sign of recognition, they can also signify

- » Agreement
- » Surprise and fear
- » Excitement

FIGURE 5-8:
The eyebrow flash is a universal expression of recognition, surprise, and social greeting.



timtimphoto/Adobe Stock



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The eyebrow flash is universal and is even used by monkeys and apes to express recognition and social greeting. People who don't use the eyebrow flash when being introduced can be perceived as potentially aggressive.

Widening your eyes

The next time you get the chance, take a look at a baby's eyes. Notice that they're disproportionately large relative to the rest of their face. Large eyes make a person look more appealing, as any Hollywood starlet knows. Women frequently create the look of wide-eyed innocence and submission by plucking their eyebrows to make the eyes appear larger. They then raise their eyebrows and eyelids, a particularly appealing action that stimulates the viewer's oxycontin levels, unleashing a desire to protect and nurture them.



TIP

If you want to appear innocent and attentive, open your eyes larger than their normal size. Unless the person you're gazing at knows what you're doing, your likable appearance charms them.

Raising your brows and lowering your lids to make your eyes appear larger is a complicated technique that Marilyn Monroe used to maximum effect. (Rihanna and Kim Cattrall are pretty good at adopting this pose, too.) Most men – and some women – go weak at the knees when they look at photos of these women with their lowered eyelids and raised eyebrows. Maximizing the space between the eyelid and the eyebrow makes the eyes appear larger, resulting in an innocent, sexy, mysterious look.

WIDENING AND HIDING FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT

Confucius said, “Look into a person’s pupils. He cannot hide himself.” Your pupils dilate when you’re responding positively to a stimulus. They contract when your response is negative.

In addition to responding to emotions, pupils respond to light. They enlarge when the lighting is dim to let in as much light as possible and contract under bright conditions to dim the light.

Consider these other tidbits:

- Newborn babies and young children appear to have larger pupils than adults. When in the company of adults, a child’s or an infant’s eyes often dilate in an unconscious attempt to look appealing and gain the adult’s attention. This phenomenon is one that toy manufacturers (and cartoonists) recognize. To see for yourself, go into a toy shop and have a look at the best-selling dolls and cuddly animals: The eyes are designed with oversized pupils.
- The ancient Chinese gem traders were experts in watching their buyers’ eyes when negotiating prices. If the pupils dilated, the trader knew he was offering too good a deal and had to negotiate harder.
- Courtesans and prostitutes were known to make themselves appear more enticing and desirable by putting drops of belladonna in their eyes to dilate their pupils.
- The late Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis is purported to have worn dark glasses when negotiating business deals to prevent his eyes from revealing his thoughts. Similarly, many professional poker players wear sunglasses to hide their feelings about the cards they’ve been dealt. *Vogue* magazine editor, arbiter of fashion, and one of Roger Federer’s best friends, Anna Wintour, is never seen in public without her trademark dark glasses, making her appear mysterious and unapproachable.

Unless, like the courtesans, you’re prepared to use artificial means, pupil dilation is beyond your control.

Flicking, flashing, and fluttering

Fluttering your eyelids – that is, opening and closing them in rapid sequence – is usually associated with flirting. It’s also a gesture you may find yourself using when you’re on the spot and have to come up with a quick answer. Obviously, it can also simply mean that something in your eye is causing irritation.

Flashing eyes – like Penelope Cruz’s in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* – indicate hot emotions such as anger or jealousy, although if you flash your eyebrows (refer to the preceding section), you’re suggesting agreement or interest.

Eye movements and meaning

You may find people purporting that the direction of your eye movements indicates how you’re processing information. Based on an approach to communication, personal development, and psychotherapy created by Richard Bandler and John Grindler and known as NLP, short for Neuro-Linguistic Programming, the theory states that we take in information through three different channels – auditory, visual, and kinesthetic – and that our eye movements indicate which channel is functioning (see Figure 5-9):

- » **1 Upper left:** Visualizing what you’re saying as they listen to you
- » **2 Upper right:** When someone is digging into their memory bank, their eyes turn right and up
- » **3 Center left:** Identifying unfamiliar sounds
- » **4 Center right:** Recalling a sound you’ve heard before
- » **5 Lower left:** Remembering a certain taste, smell, or a feeling
- » **6 Lower right:** Reliving a past experience

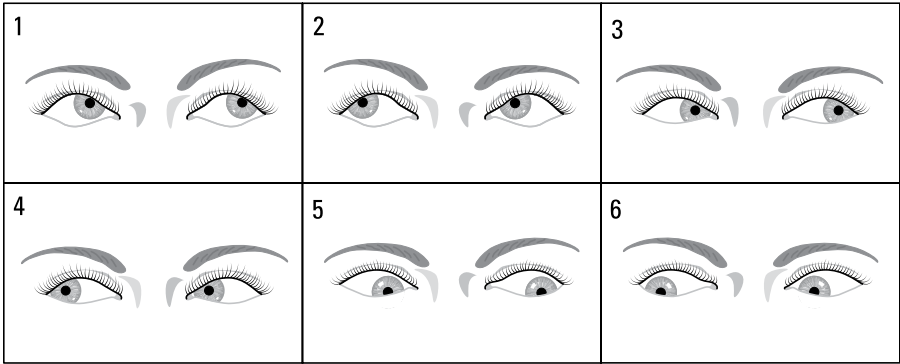


FIGURE 5-9: Eye movements indicate which channel is functioning.

- » Revealing attitudes
- » Conveying thoughts
- » Laughter is the best medicine

Chapter 6

Mastering Lip Reading

“**R**ead my lips,” said former President George H.W. Bush when running for office way back in 1988. The saying has become a classic. Although you use your lips to verbalize your message, they’re equally adept at revealing thoughts, feelings, and intentions without uttering a word.

In this chapter, you discover how various lip positions, including a snarl, a pout, and a lopsided grin, reveal your inner state, telling an observer what’s on your mind and in your heart.

Revealing Thoughts, Intentions, and Emotions

Your lips convey your thoughts and emotions through a complicated series of muscles running over, under, in, and around the sides of your mouth. Because the muscles can work independently, they can pull and twist your mouth into weird and wonderful positions. One side of the mouth can mirror the other so that the whole mouth conveys the same message, such as when the sides of your lips turn up in a smile of joy and delight or when they pull downward in disappointment or

sadness. Your lips can also stretch in opposite directions – one side going up and the other side going down – indicating mixed emotions. The upper lip can rise in a sneer. The lower lip can tremble in fear. Whether loose or tight, the tension in your mouth muscles and how you move your lips reveal the emotions that you’re experiencing.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The complicated series of muscles that control the lips include the orbicularis oris muscles, which sit at the sides of the mouth. Their function is to pull the lips back and push them forward. Other muscles controlling mouth movements include the elevators – such as the levator labii superior – which lifts the upper lip – and the mentalis. The mentalis muscle, which sits at the tip of your jawline, pushes up your lower lip, causing your chin to wrinkle and making you look doubtful or displeased.

The unconscious tension in your lips indicates how you feel, regardless of what you say. You say you’re feeling fine? Then why are your lips trembling? You say you’re happy? Then why are your lips stretched across your mouth like a razor’s edge? Whatever emotion you’re experiencing – including anticipation, pleasure, and irritation – your lips are telling on you (see Figure 6-1).

HEAD AND NECK MUSCLES

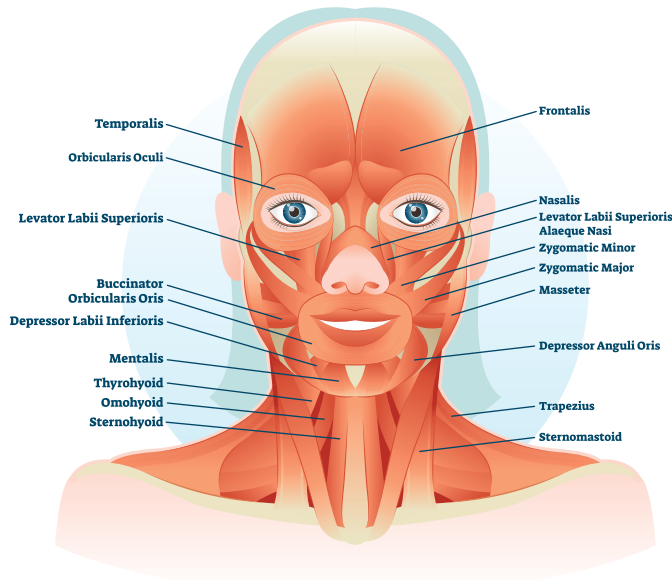


FIGURE 6-1:
A combination of
muscles in the
lower two-thirds
of the face
control creates lip
movements.

VectorMine/Adobe Stock

Tight lips

Tight lips indicate tension. Now, don't be fooled into thinking that tension is always a bad thing. Yes, your lips tense when you're angry and annoyed. They also tighten in anticipation, for example, when you're sexually aroused.



ANECDOTE

From the moment Amanda met Simon, she knew he was the one for her. Not wanting to give her hand away too quickly, she worked hard to hide her feelings. Amanda said that whenever she saw Simon, she could feel a big grin wanting to burst forth across her face. In order to prevent this from happening, she tightened the muscles around her mouth, pulling her lips together in a pursed pose. Unbeknownst to her, Simon could spot the sparkle of interest in her eyes and recognized the pleasurable tension Amanda's tightened lips were revealing. The good news was Simon found Amanda quite cute, too. (For more about how eyes convey messages, see Chapter 5.)

When you see someone whose lips are tight, tense, or taut, you can safely bet they're holding back some kind of emotion, including sadness, anger, or attraction.

A stiff upper lip

Maintaining a stiff upper lip dates back to the 1800s and is typical of the upper-class English approach to protecting private thoughts and keeping emotions contained (see Figure 6-2). The stiff upper lip comes in handy when you want to maintain your dignity. During funerals and times of sadness, you frequently see people tightening their upper lip muscles in an attempt to mask their sadness. You can also see people tightening their upper lips when trying not to laugh. In Chapter 4, you can find more ways to mask your emotions.



TIP

Tighten your upper lip muscle when you want to contain your emotions.



ANECDOTE

During her cousin's wedding, Seong struggled to keep a straight face. Seong's upper-class British cousin, Henry, and his family are quiet and understated, adhering to the principle of less being more. The priest delivering the sermon was American, evangelical in his words and flamboyant in his gestures. Extreme facial expressions and a multitude of bodily movements conveyed his passion beyond the groom's family's experiences and expectations. Seong held her upper lip tight across her teeth to keep from laughing. (Turn to Chapter 15 to learn more about traditions and behaviors in different cultures.)



WARNING

While a stiff upper lip can make you look brave, it can also make you look suspicious because the expression is restrained. As with all gestures, consider the context before leaping to a conclusion about the meaning of an individual gesture or expression.

FIGURE 6-2:
Tighten your lips
if you want to
hold back
information,
including your
thoughts and
emotions.



timtimphoto/Adobe Stock

Tight lips and a locked jaw

When you react negatively to a stimulus, your jaw locks and your lips tighten. Whether you pull back your lips and bare your teeth, contain them in a line across your lower face, or push them forward in a puckered prune position, locked jaws and tight lips display feelings of anger, upset, frustration, aggression, irritation, and exasperation – in other words, negative emotions.



ANECDOTE

Graeme was invited to attend a senior leadership meeting at which several of the company's key decision-makers were present. As a junior member of the team, Graeme was expected to listen and not speak unless asked for his opinion. Disagreeing with some of what he was hearing and feeling frustrated with his inability to participate, Graeme caught himself pursing his lips while frowning and shaking his head. Aware that he could reinforce his negative feelings by maintaining that pose, he relaxed the muscles around his lips and across his face, adopting an open and interested expression.

After the morning break, one of the senior executives asked Graeme if he had anything he wanted to add to the discussion. The older team member had noticed Graeme's pursed lips and inferred his disagreement and frustration. He also remarked that he noted and was impressed that Graeme changed his body language during the meeting, making the younger man appear engaged and interested in the discussions. The seasoned veteran thought someone who showed that much desire to participate, coupled with an awareness of the impact of his behavior, deserved a chance to be heard. (Turn to Chapter 19 to discover how awareness improves communication.)

Chewing on lips

When people feel anxious, they often chew on something such as a pencil, a finger, or a lip. They may also hang out by the refrigerator, eating whatever they can find. Subconsciously, they're seeking the comfort of their mother's breast, that soft, warm place of well-being and security. The lip is the easiest object to chew on because it's right there. You don't have to chew on an object or stick your thumb in your mouth. You just chew on your lips to ease your anxiety.

The three main lip-chewing gestures associated with anxiety are

- » **Lower lip bite:** The upper teeth bite down on the lower lip. The teeth rub against the lip, pulling it in and out of the mouth.
- » **Upper lip bite:** The lower teeth protrude forward and catch the upper lip. The teeth may slide back and forth on the lip in a sucking-like manner.
- » **Lip-to-lip bite:** The upper and lower lips come into contact, pulling inward and resting tightly on the teeth.

In addition to showing anxiety, chewing your lips also signals self-restraint. As long as you're quiet about it, the comforting gestures of licking, sucking, and biting your lips can calm you down and prevent you from saying something that you may later regret.

Loose lips

Loose lips signal a relaxed state. They're also common to people who are depressed or sad. Lack of tension indicates that you've let go, or in some cases given up.

Pouting, pursing, and puckering

The pout is a comprehensive gesture associated with unfulfilled expectations, uncertainty, loss, and carnality. Depending on the intensity of your mouth's muscles and movements, pursed lips indicate

- » Disappointment
- » Displeasure
- » Frustration
- » Sadness
- » Sexual interest

- » Thought
- » Uncertainty

Whatever the reason for the pout, the facial movements are similar. In tandem, you contract your chin muscle and the side muscles of your lower lip. Your lips press together, your tongue rises against your palate, and your pharynx – which for simplicity, you may call the throat – constricts as you prepare to swallow. Most people find pouting quite easy – so easy, in fact, that small children, influencers, and stropky teenagers have mastered the expression. Figures 6-3 through 6-5 show the versatility of the pout.



FIGURE 6-3:
This little girl's petulant pout communicates her displeasure.

STUDIO GRAND WEB/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

One night when 18-year-old Cathy and her friends were out clubbing, they tried to emulate Victoria Beckham's trademark pout. One of the girls quoted her mother's advice: "You just put your lips together and blow." Boom!

Pursed lips – lips puckered in a closed, rounded shape and pushed forward – indicate disagreement or critical thought.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When you're pouting for negative reasons, such as showing disapproval, dismissal, or disagreement, your lips tighten, pinch at the sides, and push forward. When you're pouting in pleasure, your lips are soft, swollen, and sensitive.



FIGURE 6-4:
This woman's
pout conveys
sexual interest.

Olga Ekaterincheva/Adobe Stock



FIGURE 6-5:
This man's pout
lets you know
that he's thinking.

Mangostar/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you're presenting a formal proposal or offering a simple suggestion, the listener could be signaling their resistance to your idea if they meet your ideas with pursed lips. Pause and invite their comments. When you give them a chance to air their opinions, they feel acknowledged and more inclined to consider what you have to say. For more about helping people understand your point of view, have a look at *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).

Differentiating Smiles

You may know the expression, “Different strokes for different folks.” The same can be said for the smile. While some experts label smiles as “fake” or “real,” I disagree. Smiles vary. Whatever purpose they're serving – whether they're expressing genuine feelings such as great joy, are masterminded to achieve a specific goal, or are used to demonstrate dominance – all smiles have a special place in human interactions. In all its incarnations, your smile is a powerful means of communicating your thoughts and feelings about specific stimuli. Figure 6-6 shows the happy and contented smile.



FIGURE 6-6:
This man's smile
indicates he's
happy and
contented.

Jacob Lund/Adobe Stock

Before you start smiling, especially at strangers or in foreign lands, be aware that different cultures have different views about smiling. For example, the Chinese only smile among friends and family, while in Southern Europe, something's wrong if people don't smile at you, regardless of whether they know you. You can find out more about cultural influences on body language in Chapter 15.

The polite smile

Because the list of social situations requiring a pleasant expression is long, you smile politely more often than you may realize. You probably smile politely when first meeting someone. You might politely smile when delivering bad news. You may even politely smile when you want to scream, shout, and shake it all about.

Polite smiling (see Figure 6-7) is not a bad thing. While you might want to appear as friendly and trustworthy, you may not want to go so far as to become emotionally intimate. When closeness might not be appropriate, you can smile at someone politely, keeping a subtle distance between yourselves.



FIGURE 6-7:
While the polite smile is warm, it's not welcoming.

VAKSMANV/Adobe Stock

You can spot when someone is politely smiling at you. Their zygomatic major muscle – the one moving the muscles around their lips – engages, while their orbicularis oculi muscle – the one by their eyes – remains still.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Studies conducted by Professors Marvin Hecht and Marianne LaFrance at Boston University indicate that the smile is a submissive signal and that people in subordinate roles tend to smile more in the company of those who are dominant or in superior positions.

THE POWER BEHIND A SMILE

Smiles demonstrating a positive attitude facilitate relationships. Smiles involving the upward pull of the lips, which in extreme cases can trigger dimpling in the cheeks, function as social connectors. They arise from uncritical feelings, including joy, approval, and contentment. Researchers refer to these as “reward” smiles because of their motivational qualities. For example, when a young child unexpectedly smiles at their mother, their dopamine levels increase, making the mom feel happy and secure.

Negative smiles – such as those demonstrating dominance, contempt, or scorn – act as nonverbal threats and elicit negative physical reactions in the receiver. One study found that people on the receiving end of a dominance smile had increased cortisol levels – the stress hormone – in their saliva for up to 30 minutes after the encounter. In addition, a sneer, in which the upper lip curls upward, can lead to increased heart rates for those at whom this smile is directed. (Figure 6-8 shows a dominant smile.)

If you're in the midst of pain or sorrow, don't be surprised if you find yourself smiling. National Institute of Health research indicates that people smile and laugh while grieving to mentally shield themselves from the agony of their loss. If you've seen the 1989 movie classic *Steel Magnolias*, you may recall the scene at the cemetery where M'Lynn, played by Sally Fields, falls into a fit of uncontrollable laughter on the day of her daughter's funeral. Additional studies indicate that individuals smile when they're experiencing physical pain as a way of caring for themselves. Researchers found that individuals undergoing painful procedures would smile more often in the company of loved ones than when they were by themselves, concluding that people smile to reassure others.



TRY THIS

The next time you're among strangers, such as in an airport, shop, or just walking down the street, smile at people regardless of whether you know them. Note their reactions. Because smiling is contagious, your smile will generally be reciprocated.

The tight-lipped smile

When you stretch your lips in a straight line across your face, you're holding back information. Perhaps you're hiding your crooked teeth. Perhaps you have to be polite to someone you don't like. Perhaps you have a secret you're bursting to share and know you mustn't. Whatever your reasons for keeping your lips shut and stretched, you're concealing something.



ANECDOTE

Kamal was out with friends, celebrating a successful financial deal. Although he was happy to share some of the particulars of the arrangement, when one of the group asked him how much money he'd made, Kamal's lips sealed shut in a closed-lip grin. Clearly, that was too much information to share.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Frequently, you see photographs of masters of industry smiling with sealed lips. The closed-lip smile can create an impression of being calm, contained, and in control.



ANECDOTE

Liz recently had her photo taken for the company website. Like many people, she's uncomfortable posing for pictures and doesn't like how her face contorts when giving a full-mouthed smile. The photographer suggested she think of her most private, pleasurable secret – something she wouldn't tell anyone, ever. Her sealed-lip smile, in combination with her sparkling eyes, produced the best head-shot she's ever had. She looks warm, inviting, in control, and slightly mysterious. Her clients have commented favorably about the photo, wondering what made it so good. For more about how the eyes can send positive messages, refer to Chapter 5.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

According to one study, because the tight-lipped smile is contained, women tend to interpret the expression as a sign of rejection and dismissal.

The lopsided smile

When your muscles pull the sides of your mouth in opposite directions – one side going up and the other going down – you're showing opposite emotions on each side of your face (see Figure 6-8). In Western cultures, the lopsided smile signals

- » Contempt
- » Sarcasm
- » Embarrassment
- » Irony

The lopsided smile is a complicated smile. Because of the conflicting emotions it reveals, it elicits both negative and protective responses. When the side of your mouth goes downward, it indicates negative feelings such as sadness, anxiety, or unease. When the sides of your mouth go upward, it implies positive feelings like amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure. If you are simply angry, disappointed, or disgusted, both sides of your mouth will turn down. When you are clearly happy, both sides pull upward. The lopsided grin indicates a more complex feeling than a simple smile or frown.

FIGURE 6-8:
The dominant
smile can
demonstrate
signs of
skepticism
and contempt.



Serhii/Adobe Stock



The late Diana, Princess of Wales, was frequently photographed smiling lopsidedly. You could even call that signature smile a smirk. The Princess would tuck her chin into her neck in a protective move while looking upward from underneath her eyelashes in a show of defenselessness. At the same time, she would smile with one side of her mouth lifting up while the other side pulled down, signaling her contempt, irony, or embarrassment, depending on which emotion she was experiencing. This lopsided smile contributed to the love-hate relationship people had with the Princess. While the public perceived her as beautiful, beguiling, interesting, magnetic, and mysterious, she also elicited negative reactions. The dichotomy of her smile left people distrusting her and her motives.



If you're in a partnership with someone you feel contempt for, you might want to visit a counselor or cut and run. Feelings of contempt in a marriage are a leading predictor of divorce.

The drop-jaw smile

This smile, in which the lower jaw releases downward as the sides of the mouth pull upward, is a favorite of politicians, film stars, and celebrities. The expression conveys pleasure, surprise, excitement, and interest.

While their styles and interests may be different, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Meghan Markle, and Keira Knightley are dab hands at the drop-jaw smile. They widen

their eyes and drop their jaws while lifting their upper lips over their teeth. At the same time, they inhale as if preparing for something wonderful to happen. Men are equally adept at adopting this pose and, like their female counterparts, use it to indicate a connection with individuals in a large group of people. Both male and female politicians adopt this smile at rallies to project a positive image to large groups of people. Figure 6-9 shows a drop-jaw smile.



FIGURE 6-9:
This drop-jaw
smile indicates
surprise and
pleasure.

Mix and Match Studio/Adobe Stock

The turn-away smile

Turn your head down and away while looking upward with your lips in a sealed smile, and watch people rush to protect and nurture you. Women tend to adopt this smile more often than men because it makes them look vulnerable, playful, and secretive.



**TECHNICAL
STUFF**

According to the 19th-century English naturalist, geologist, and biologist Charles Darwin, turning the head away from another person while looking at him and smiling creates a “hybrid expression” composed of two opposite meanings. The upward-turning smile signals welcome, whereas the motion of turning away conveys avoidance. The tension these two opposing actions create is irresistible and more powerful than its individual parts.

THE GOLD STANDARD SMILE

The Duchenne smile indicates genuine enjoyment, engaging the mouth, eyes, and cheeks. In addition to happiness and pleasure, this smile denotes trustworthiness, authenticity, and affability. Individuals working in the service industries are encouraged to employ this smile to enhance the customer's experience and generate better tips for themselves.

One study found that the women who had Duchene smiles when photographed for their college yearbooks tended to have longer-term happy marriages than others whose smiles were not as intense. In another study, researchers analyzed baseball cards from 1952. They discovered that the players whose smiles engaged the eyes, the cheeks, and the mouth lived much longer than those whose smiles were less intense.

The possibility of a long life and a healthy relationship is enough reason to put on a happy face.

The full-blown grin

A full-blown grin – also known as the Duchenne smile – gives your face a good workout. The muscles around your eyes crease and crinkle as the sides of your lips stretch toward the tips of your ears. Your head pulls back, even if ever so slightly, and bingo! You radiate the feel-good factor.



When you're watching someone smile, note where their head moves. A forward tilt indicates humbleness. A backward tilt tells you that the person's pleased and proud.

SPOTTING LIARS

How easy life would be if you could spot a liar by looking at their face. Sadly, that doesn't always work. Even officials with years of experience in law enforcement struggle to spot liars from their facial expressions. However, if you look closely, you might spot one give-away when someone is being economical with the truth, especially when the stakes are high. Researchers conducting a frame-by-frame analysis of people being filmed pleading for the safe return of a missing family member noted that among those who were later convicted of killing the individual, the zygomaticus major muscle the one that pulls your lips into a smile – repeatedly engaged. This did not happen in the people whose grief was genuine.

Remembering that Laughter's the Best Medicine

Laughing and smiling go together like a horse and carriage. Some laughs burble up from the bottom of your belly, bursting forth with abandon. Others get stuck in your throat or in your back sinus passages. Some land in your chest, and all that escape are little bits of blowing air pushing through your nose like short trumpet blasts. Fortunately, your shaking shoulders and the smile spread across your face signal that you're laughing, not choking.

Whatever kind of laugh you've got – a giggle, snort, snicker, or good old-fashioned hee-haw – the depth and freedom of the sound indicate how you're feeling.

Sometimes, laughing is inappropriate but is still impossible to restrain.



ANECDOTE

Christina was in the university library studying for her exams when her phone vibrated in her jacket pocket. She carefully removed it so as not to be seen by the librarian, who was restacking the shelves nearby. Christina opened the message from a friend who'd sent her a joke. She read the text silently to herself until she got to the unexpected punch line, at which point a snort of laughter escaped from her nose before she could stop it. The librarian cast her a disapproving look, increasing Christina's laughter. She finally had to hold her lips shut and squeeze her nose to keep further sounds from escaping.



ANECDOTE

Nancy is known for her sense of fun. Her laughter comes from the depths of her being and can fill a room with joy and hilarity. One night, she and a group of friends were having dinner at a local restaurant. Nancy's smiling face and cheerful laughter caught the attention of diners at several other tables, who found themselves laughing, too. Eventually, a man from another group approached Nancy and begged her to let them all in on the joke as they were laughing so hard but didn't have a clue what they were laughing about.



Letting the Limbs Do the Talking

IN THIS PART . . .

Get your body in on the act.

Arm yourself for success.

Let your fingers do the talking.

Position yourself for success.

Who needs props? You do!

- » Recognizing how your body speaks for you
- » Finding ways to change your attitude
- » Exploring the effects of posture

Chapter 7

Taking It from the Torso

In addition to your body exposing your physical state – fit, firm, and flexible or out of shape, slack, and stiff – your posture reveals the state of your body, how you feel about yourself, other people, and your environment – in other words, everything that is impacting on your life. Slumping into your hips and drooping your shoulders while your belly flops over your belt isn't a particularly pretty picture because it reflects your current state of mind. Perhaps a poor self-image. Or the feeling of resignation that comes with being overworked and underpaid. Or exhaustion. While people may worry about you or feel sorry for you, this is not the posture that will make them want to play or work with you.

On the other hand, when you hold your head high with your chest open, shoulders back and down, a spring in your step, or a purposeful stride, you command positive attention. You radiate optimism and upbeat energy – a picture of confidence and self-assurance that draws people into your orbit. As they say in Central Switzerland, you look and feel “Tip top!” (Turn to Chapter 15 for more about body language and expressions in different cultures.)

In this chapter, you find out how your attitude influences your posture and how subtle signals convey your thoughts and emotions.

Gaining Insights into the Impact of Posture

How you use and abuse your body determines, one, how you feel about yourself and, two, how others perceive you. Jobs are won and lost, reputations are made and destroyed, and relationships are dissolved and cemented based on how people present themselves.

Job candidates who demonstrate self-assurance – as in they feel good about themselves – have better professional success than those who present a negative self-image (see Figure 7-1). Those in the first category tend to

- » Claim their space
- » Move with purpose
- » Use open gestures
- » Hold their shoulders back and down

People who feel depressed, insecure or uncertain tend to

- » Hold their heads down
- » Hunch their shoulders
- » Move hesitantly
- » Hold their arms close to their bodies



REMEMBER

Your posture reveals your inner state. How you present yourself through your posture influences how others perceive and relate to you.

Evaluating what your posture says about you

If you spend too much time slouching with a deadpan expression on your face and slumped shoulders, you'll appear inert and ineffectual and feel that way, too. On the other hand, if you align your body properly and hold yourself upright with an alert expression, you look and feel energized and ready for action.

FIGURE 7-1:
This woman's
upright posture
presents a
positive image.



VadimGuzhva/Adobe Stock

Play with your posture. To determine what your posture reveals about your self-image or mood, follow these steps:

- 1. Stand in front of a full-length mirror and take a good, long look at yourself.**
Observe how you're standing, the position of your head, and the look on your face. What message are you conveying?
- 2. Turn away for a moment. This time decide how you want to be perceived.**
Dominant, submissive, bored, angry, surprised? The list goes on. Carefully consider how you can convey that attitude through your stance. Of course, your facial expressions will also come into play because you need all your body parts to convey a particular attitude. (See Chapter 4 for the part that facial expressions play in conveying attitudes.)
- 3. Turn back toward the mirror, adopting the image you want to portray.**
What do you notice? What are the differences and similarities between your first and second postures?

By being aware of the messages transmitted by your posture, gestures, and facial expressions, you can consciously determine the image you want to convey. All it takes is time and practice.



TRY THIS

Should you find yourself in a downbeat, miserable mood that you want to get out of, do the following:

- 1. Sit down – preferably on a firm, straight-backed chair – with your feet on the ground, your hands in your lap, and your weight evenly placed and close your eyes.**
- 2. Inhale deeply from your diaphragm, through your nose – if your sinuses allow - to a slow count of 4, keeping your upper chest still.**

Pause for a count of 5. Exhale through slightly pursed lips to a slow count of 4. Pause. Repeat. As you breathe, allow your rib cage to expand as your diaphragm drops low into your abdomen.

- 3. Feel your chest gently opening as if it were a treasured book.**
- 4. Allow the crown of your head to lift from the base of your neck like a helium balloon tied to a string on a sunny day.**
- 5. Open your eyes.**

Observe your surroundings, appreciating what you see. Quietly give thanks for everything in your life – the good, the bad, and the ugly. It has all made you the person you are today.

- 6. Continue to breathe gently like a baby at rest.**
- 7. Settle into the moment.**
- 8. By now, your body is upright, free of tension, calm, contained, and ready to tackle the next challenge with a clear head and open heart.**



TIP

Not feeling good about your body is okay as long as you act as if you do. Why? Because the way you act reflects who you are. If you behave as though you have a positive frame of mind, you feel that way. People want to spend time with you. When you enjoy yourself as you are, you make it easy for others to be in your company. And you may even find that by acting as if you feel good about yourself, you actually do.

Indicating the intensity of feelings

Regardless of your mood – aggrieved, agitated, despondent, or full of cheer – the intensity of your feelings is reflected in your posture. People who are extremely agitated, exceptionally despondent, or enormously cheerful reflect these moods, in part, by how they hold their bodies. When your feelings are intense, it's like putting an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence. Intensity calls attention to itself. In moments of deep despair, your muscles slacken, your body collapses on

itself, and you look like a forlorn rag doll. When you're filled with passion and excitement, your muscles tighten, your sinews become taut, and your movements are forceful and concentrated (see Figure 7-2).

FIGURE 7-2:
This man's
slumped posture
indicates a
negative state of
mind such as
boredom.



pathdoc/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

Take yourself back to a time when your feelings were working at full tilt. Freeze-frame that image of yourself. What do you observe? You see that your muscles are working in direct proportion to the intensity of your thoughts, feelings, and intentions.

Some signs of emotion being acted out intensely are

- » Fist-slamming
- » Sharp finger pointing/waving/wagging
- » Slouching
- » Stomping
- » Passionate hugging
- » Uncontrollable crying
- » Physical collapse

As you read the words, you may recognize the feeling. Act out the gesture and the feeling intensifies. Add sound to the action and the feeling becomes even stronger.



ANECDOTE

Alex was being groomed for partnership at a large city law firm. Although considered to be a bright and capable lawyer, Alex had some unresolved anger issues. During a practice role-play for his interview, I purposely interrupted him several times while he was answering questions that I asked him. Angry with the interruptions and without thought, he started to rise from his seat and slammed his clenched fists on the desk in front of him while his facial muscles pulled his lips to a tight thin line. It was clear that Alex didn't like being interrupted. We watched the video replay together and agreed that alternative behavior choices would work more to his advantage.

Revealing personality and character

Do you want to rule the roost or play a supporting role? Do you accept nothing less than being the first to cross the finish line, or are you content being an also-ran? Your body's position, whether crisp and upright or limp and downtrodden, reveals what you think of yourself.



TRY THIS

Imagine yourself as an iceberg like the one in Figure 7-3. Below the water line is what makes you tick. This inner core contains your sense of self and is the base from which your actions arise. Here, you find your values and beliefs, drivers and motivators, and strengths and unique selling points (USPs). Above the water line is your outer self, what other people see and hear. The way you gesture, carry yourself, your manners and mannerisms, and how you choose to speak and dress reflect who you are based on what's below the water line.

If your self-perception is that of a strong, forceful, and dynamic character, your body is upright, your stride purposeful, and your gestures focused and contained. Think of Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. If you see yourself more as a simple, quiet, country type – along the lines of Martin Freeman in *The Hobbit* – your body may be more relaxed, your way of moving a bit easier, and your gestures more fluid. And if you're Jack the Lad from the 'hood, your body may strut and swagger, and your head movements appear quick and sharp.

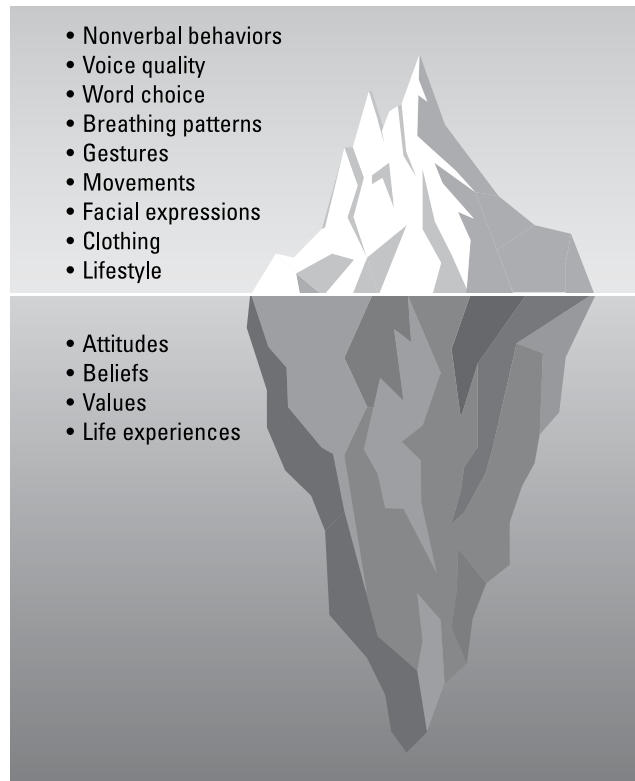


FIGURE 7-3:
What lies below
the water line
impacts what is
visible above.

Identifying the Three Main Postures

Although you have a repertoire of different postures you can adopt, you tend to prefer one to the others. You may prefer to sit, others may prefer to stand, whereas others are happy to spend their time lying down. You can become so associated with one particular posture that people who know you well can recognize you from a distance by how you move your body. Your posture is a clue to who you are and opens the door to understanding your character and personality. For example, the person who holds themselves erectly has a different temperament to a habitual sloucher.

The three main types of posture are

- » Standing
- » Sitting (including squatting and kneeling)
- » Reclining

Within this limited list, you can display your mood and temperament by how you hold yourself and position your head, arms, and legs. People who slouch give the impression of being dull, uninterested, or lacking in confidence. People who hold themselves upright appear engaged, energized, and alert.



According to research by the American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell, a person's posture reflects their past. People who've experienced prolonged depression may slouch and sag into their bodies, whereas people with a positive outlook tend to hold themselves upright.

Standing

Some people are happy to stand. This position enables them to think and move more quickly than if they had to pull themselves out of a chair or get out of bed. At parties, people tend to stand. Doing so enables them to walk toward someone they want to engage with and move away from someone they'd rather not get cornered by. Because moving toward and away from someone or something is easier when you're standing, this position is considered to be more active than sitting or lying down.

Meeting participants frequently stand because people think more quickly and come to decisions more expediently when standing than they do when given a chance to sit. It's the Let's Go position.



Kate attended a client meeting at an advertising agency in Denmark. When it was time for her and her client to brainstorm some ideas, they went to the Stand Up Room, which was designed for quick thinking and decision making. In the middle of the room was a tall stone table for people to lean on and take notes. The table was the only piece of furniture in the room. Kate found that, although it wasn't her preferred environment, she could make quick decisions and firm commitments.

Sitting

The seated position can be a less-energized position than standing. Because your body is bent in the middle, you may well collapse over your waist or flop back into your chair like a wilted flower if you're feeling a bit tired. Sitting is a more restful position than standing. The pressure is taken off your hips, knees, ankles, and feet. That's why you'll frequently see older people sitting at parties while the young ones stand.

Sitting postures convey different states of being depending on how your arms, legs, and head are positioned. If you're tired, you may unconsciously lean back into a chair, letting your legs and arms hang loose with your head tilted backward.

This is a sure sign that you're feeling worn out. At other times, you sit upright, ready for action. Your back is straight, you're leaning forward, and you look like you mean business.



TIP

If you go into your boss's office and notice their body is hunched over their desk, wait to be invited before speaking. Unless they're unconscious, your boss's body language tells you that they don't want to be interrupted. If your boss raises their hand with the palm facing toward you, turn and leave. However, you may enter if your boss raises a hand and gestures toward their office.



TIP

Although a relaxed sitting position aids thinking and reflection, be careful not to hold the pose for too long. You may end up feeling drained and dejected.



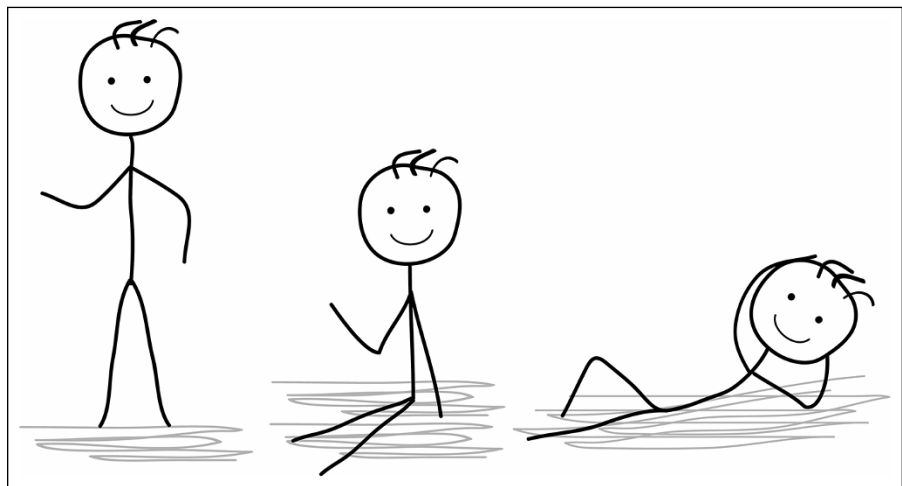
ANECDOTE

Leela was a focused student, obtaining top grades as an undergraduate and further honors as she gained her master's degree and PhD. She made a point of sitting in the front row during lectures, knowing that position left no chance of nodding off or demonstrating any signs of boredom or lack of interest. She felt that placing herself in the front row meant she could better concentrate on what the lecturer was saying.

Lying down

If you want to take some time for quiet contemplation, relaxation, and reflection, you may find that you want to lie down. This position is ideal for getting in touch with your feelings. While you won't find presidents or prime ministers adopting this pose at press conferences, they may do so privately when considering their options (see Figure 7-4).

FIGURE 7-4: Whether you're standing, sitting, or lying down, your posture impacts your thoughts and feelings.



Татьяна Лесогор/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

As a large firm's human resources director, Ahmed got quite agitated before budget reviews, knowing that the partners would challenge him on his training and development expenditures. One quiet afternoon, he found himself sitting with his feet on his desk, leaning so far back in his chair that he was almost prone. He felt clearheaded, relaxed, and able to sort his feelings from facts. After he decided how to address the partners at the review and felt confident in his choices, he sat upright in his chair and purposefully wrote his notes.

Changing Attitudes by Changing Posture

If you are in a mood you don't like, change your posture. By changing the position of your body, your frame of mind changes, too. Let's say that you're feeling dejected, down in the dumps, and just plain meh. Note your posture. All your body parts probably face downward and are closed in on themselves. Through a simple change in posture – for example, by holding your head high and standing with your shoulders back and down and your weight evenly distributed between your feet, you can take yourself to a new feeling of enjoyment, calmness, excitement, peace, or any other mood you want to experience.



TIP

Confident people don't always feel confident. They simply act as if they are.

WHISTLING HAPPY TUNES

In Rogers and Hammerstein's musical, *The King and I*, English widow Anna and her young son move to Siam (now Thailand) to teach the King's 26 children. Although somewhat overwhelmed at the prospect and feeling less than confident, she knew that if she showed her fear, she'd lose her authority and the respect of the king. When they were about to embark, her son asked if she were afraid and, if so, how she could go through this adventure. She said that, although she was scared, she would act as if she were brave. In the song *I Whistle a Happy Tune*, she sings, "While shivering in my shoes, I strike a careless pose, and whistle a happy tune, and no one ever knows I'm afraid." She knew that if she projected the image she wanted to create, people would respond to her accordingly and all would be well. And it was. She gained the respect of the king, the admiration of his courtiers, and the love of his children.

Using Posture to Aid Communication

I'm not saying that you can precisely ascertain what someone's thinking simply by looking at their posture. I *am* saying that you can tell a lot about people's state of mind by observing how they hold their bodies. Observing and registering what you notice about how people move and position themselves gives you an insight into how best to communicate with them.

Demonstrating your status through postural position

When you consider people in authority, you think of them in elevated terms. They don't have to be tall to show that they're on top of the pecking order; they just carry themselves as if they were. Open and confident posture is the norm for individuals in high-status positions. Conversely, people with lower status demonstrate their position by acting deferentially. Their posture is closed and protective.



ANECDOTE

Indira works for a large city firm. When she was put up for promotion, the male partners struggled when making their decision. Although Indira's capabilities were acknowledged as superb, something in her demeanor made them uncomfortable and uncertain. When Indira and I worked on her personal impact, she explained that she had been raised to show deference to people in positions of authority. Because of the hierarchical nature of the firm, she saw the partners as authority figures and behaved as she'd been taught. Her shoulders were slightly hunched, her chest somewhat rolled in, and her head slightly bowed. After practicing specifically targeted exercises, Indira's posture changed, as did her self-perception. She now stands upright, makes eye contact comfortably, and moves with authority. And she made partner.

The following are a few random bits of information about posture as a sign of status:

- » When a person deliberately defers to you, they're showing low-status behavior.
- » In many Eastern countries, and in the presence of royalty, bowing is expected as a sign of respect.
- » In the military, a sign of respect is standing to attention.
- » You're more likely to hold your hands on your hips in the presence of individuals whose status is equal to or lower than yours. Your body language is symmetrical and contained in front of someone whose status is higher than yours.

Leaning forward to show interest and liking

People who like each other tend to lean in toward one another. The more you like someone, the more your body inclines in their direction. The forward lean is a sign of intimacy and affection.

By leaning toward another person, you share space with them and show that you want to be close. Accomplished interviewers understand the power of getting physically close to the person they're interviewing. After they've created a rapport with the person, they lean toward them to show trust. By respectfully moving into another person's personal space, you demonstrate that you like them. (For more about building rapport, turn to Chapter 5)



PEOPLE
WATCHING

If you carefully observe a group of individuals interacting, you can tell their degree of attention, involvement, relative status, and how they feel about one another by how each one positions their body in relation to the others. People who are actively participating in the exchange lean toward one another. Those who are reflecting on what's going on pull back. The opposite of the forward lean is the backward lean, which indicates fear and displeasure. Someone uninterested in or bored with the conversation may slump and look in another direction.

If someone is really angry, they not only scowl but lean forward. If someone is filled with happiness, they smile as their body moves forward. In both cases, the person seems to want to experience the emotion fully. The expressions on the face reveal the emotion. The body's lean reveals the strength of the feeling. Although facial expressions give more information about emotions, posture shows the degree of intensity (see Figure 7-5).



TRY THIS

Stand upright with your feet hip-width apart, put your hands on your hips, lean forward, and frown. Now stand in the same position, lean back, and smile. This slight posture and facial expression change allows you to convey two very different moods.

When you're at a meeting that you've lost interest in, sit forward in your seat and rest your arms on the table while looking at the speaker (see Figure 7-6). This posture helps your energy level rise and makes you feel and appear engaged.



ANECDOTE

Douglas was preparing for a job interview. He was feeling conflicted about the interview because he was leaving his current job, not having progressed as far in his career there as he'd wanted. During a practice session, he leaned back in his chair, letting his chest droop and his head sink into his shoulders. When he saw himself on video, he realized the negative signals he was giving out. I encouraged him to sit toward the front of the chair and lean forward, letting his forearms rest on the table. When he saw himself again, he observed how much more interested, engaged, and likable he seemed.

FIGURE 7-5:
The forward lean,
closeness of the
bodies, and
expressions of
pleasure on the
girls' faces
demonstrates
their comfort with
one another.



Monkey Business/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 7-6:
Sit forward in
your seat, rest
your arms on
the table,
and smile to
demonstrate that
you're engaged in
the discussion.



Carlos David/Adobe Stock

Shrugging Signals

A child avoiding telling you the truth adopts the wide-eyed, head-pulled-back “What? Who me?” look as they raise their shoulders in disbelief. The student who the lecturer calls on to summarize the chapter that they haven’t read raises their shoulders in submissive apology. The person who wants to show a complete lack of interest gives a disdainful lift of the shoulders as they turn their head away. A submissive gesture, the shrug absolves the shrugger of any responsibility and indicates apology, disbelief, and lack of interest.

The attitude being conveyed and the individual performing the gesture informs the type of shrug. For example, people from Mediterranean and Latin countries shrug freely in different ways depending on the context, whereas Anglo-Saxons and Asians are more restricted in their use of physical movement. See Chapter 15 for more about body language across cultures.

Signaling a lack of knowledge

You’re at your first meeting of the day, feeling confident that you can answer any question your boss may throw your way. And then the unexpected happens and you freeze like a deer caught in the headlights. You don’t want to show your ignorance so you control your gestures. A well-trained observer, however, would spot the nanosecond micromovement of your shoulders as your head momentarily drops into your rising shoulders like a turtle pulling its head into its shell.



ANECDOTE

An elderly couple approached Guy in London to ask him for directions to Buckingham Palace. English was not their mother tongue, and they struggled to understand the young man as he gave them detailed directions. Looking at them as he spoke, Guy could tell that they didn’t understand what he was saying. They raised their shoulders and hands in bewilderment as they tilted their heads as if that would help them understand him better. By speaking slowly, using simple terms, pointing in the right direction, and counting on his fingers how long it would take them to get there – if they didn’t get lost – he hoped they understood him correctly. The final lift of the old woman’s shoulders indicated that they had their doubts.

WHAT MAKES A SHRUG?

According to zoologist Desmond Morris, the shrug comprises five elements, four of which are key to understanding the gesture. He labels these four key elements because they can, on their own, convey the message. The key elements of a shrug are

- **Hunched shoulders.** The shoulders are raised and lowered. Both shoulders are not required to convey the shrug. One shoulder hunching up on its own while the other remains still is an equally valid shrug.
- **Hands twisted into the palms up position.** The palms of the hands face upward in an open position. A shrug can be successfully transmitted through the upward turning of one or both hands.
- **Lowered mouth corners.** The head and body remain still as the corners of the mouth turn down.
- **Raised eyebrows.** Like the full-bodied shrug, an upward jerk of the eyebrows can convey astonishment, indifference, and bewilderment.



Any of these four individual gestures taken on their own and in context can be perceived as a shrug.

Another element that goes into a full shrug is an *amplifier*, or supporting element. The amplifier in a full shrug is tilting the head to one side. This element taken on its own can't accurately transmit the message; it has to work in combination with one or more key elements to convey the point.

Conveying unwillingness to get involved

In addition to conveying misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, and apology, the shrug can also indicate an unwillingness to get involved. Because of the submissive actions that make up a shrug – head pulled down into the shoulders, open forward-facing palms serving as a shield, raised eyebrows, and a tilted head – the action indicates that you don't want to be drawn in.

Raising your shoulders is a defensive behavior designed to protect your neck, one of your body's most vulnerable parts. By holding your open palms in front of you, you're showing that although you have nothing to conceal, you're also setting up a barrier between you and another person.



ANECDOTE

Rory is a secondary school chemistry teacher. Inevitably, at the end of lessons, a mess of test tubes, beakers, and other related items waits to be cleaned and put away in their proper place. When he asks his students who is responsible for the mess, without fail, they raise their shoulders, palms, and eyebrows as they turn away from him, signaling their denial of any responsibility.



TIP

To indicate that you want to remain neutral and uninvolved, raise your hand to shoulder height with your palm facing outward and slightly shrug both shoulders.

Implying a submissive apology

Because the elements in the shrug – hunched shoulders, open palms, raised eyebrows – are open and submissive, the shrug is the perfect gesture to use when offering an apology (see Figure 7-7).



ANECDOTE

A man of few words and the grand gesture, John had been in a foul temper for most of the day. Although Louise is usually quite patient and accepts her husband's moodiness, by late afternoon she was so frustrated that she burst into tears. Realizing that he'd been out of sorts and treating Louise unfairly, John left the house, returning shortly with a large bouquet of tulips, Louise's favorite flowers. Offering them to her, he apologized without actually saying, "I'm sorry." The lift of his shoulders, raised eyebrows, slightly turned down mouth, and dropped head as he presented the flowers to Louise conveyed his apology.



FIGURE 7-7:
Shrugging
indicates doubt,
confusion,
uncertainty, and
wonder.

Krakenimages.com/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

Although this exercise doesn't convey thoughts, feelings, or intentions, the shrugging gesture may bring you some relief when you're feeling tense or tired. Raise your shoulders up toward your ears and tighten them as much as possible. Hold that position for three to five seconds, and then release. Roll your shoulders in backward and forward circles to complete the tension release. To avoid injuring yourself when doing this exercise, be careful not to overdo the tightening.

LOOKING AFTER THE MACHINE

In today's world, poor posture is common. Many features of modern life, such as texting, sitting at a computer for long periods of time, lifting heavy items, and wearing poorly fitted shoes, put stress and strain on your muscles, joints, tendons, bones, and ligaments. Ideally, you want your body to be properly aligned, meaning that your head, shoulders, spine, hips, knees, and ankles link up, line up and work together. When your body is properly aligned, you can use your muscles more efficiently and avoid pain.

Research from the Mayo Clinic demonstrates how poor posture leads to numerous painful physical problems, including

- Headaches
- Jaw pain
- Back pain
- Hip, knee, and foot pain
- Shoulder pain
- Fatigue and breathing problems
- Digestion problems

To aid in establishing good posture, clinicians suggest the following exercise:

- 1. Stand with your back against a wall.** The back of your head, shoulder blades, and bottom should touch the wall's surface. Your heels should be 2–4 inches away from the wall.
- 2. To ensure a correct lower back curve, slide your hand between your lower back and the wall.** You want a tight fit. If you have too much space, pull your belly button toward your spine.
- 3. When you feel that your body is properly aligned, walk away from the wall.** See if you can maintain the proper alignment when you return.

Other practical tips for establishing and maintaining good posture include

- **Pay attention to your posture.** Check your posture throughout the day. Good posture feels natural, never forced.
- **Stand up and move.** If you work at a desk, you should sit for no longer than 50 minutes at a time. Moving your body after a long stint of sitting helps relieve muscle strain and improves breathing, circulation, attention, and productivity.

- **Adjust your keyboard.** Your keyboard should be at elbow level, allowing your wrists to remain straight when you type.
- **Adjust your chair height.** Your whole foot should be able to touch the floor, and your knees and hips should be at the same level.
- **Do not cross your legs when seated.** Your ankles should be under your knees. Maintain a small gap between the back of your knees and the front of your chair.
- **Sit back in your chair.** If the chair doesn't support your lower back, place a small cushion or rolled-up towel between your back and the back of the chair.
- **Hold your head high.** When you walk, look front not down.
- **Use your whole foot.** Smoothly roll your foot from heel to toe when walking and running.
- **Let your shoulders sway.** Keep your back straight and your elbows slightly bent, allowing your arms to swing freely.
- **Engage your core muscles.** Tighten those muscles whether you're standing, sitting, walking, or running.
- **Exercise.** Good mental and physical health go hand in hand. Aim to live a life in which you are fit, firm, and flexible. As you age, these attributes diminish and are replaced by soreness, stiffness, and a lack of flexibility. As the saying goes, *carpe diem*.

- » Building barriers
- » Demonstrating openness
- » Creating rapport
- » Reasons to touch

Chapter 8

Arming Yourself

Whether you're crossing your arms for self-comfort, opening them as a sign of welcome, or wrapping them around a loved one, how you gesture with your arms reveals how you feel and what you need.

Crossed arms have many meanings. Some people swear that crossed arms are a sign of defensiveness – and they are partly correct. Two arms folded over your chest can serve as a barrier. In addition to holding people at bay, the position keeps your emotions from bubbling forth. Crossed arms also signal stress, insecurity, and anxiety and are a self-comforting gesture. When you're feeling cold, what do you do? Fold your arms across your body to hold in the heat and keep out the cold.

Spreading your arms tells the world you're open and ready for business. Open arms suggest that you're approachable, receptive, and unguarded. When you hold your arms away from your body, you're allowing people to enter your space.

As for physical contact, touching can be a great tonic as long as you know who, when, where, and how to touch. Get touching right, and the person you make bodily contact with feels engaged and connected; get it wrong and prepare yourself for a sharp smack.

This chapter shows you how to recognize arm signals and increase your influence through physical contact.

Crossing Your Arms

People who say they cross their arms over their chests because the position feels comfortable have a point. Any gesture that matches the mood feels correct. So, whether someone feels relaxed or tense, confident or insecure, powerful or anxious, or simply cold, you can expect to see them cross their arms.

People cross their arms for a variety of reasons, including

- » Defensiveness
- » Showing power
- » Feeling anxious and fearful
- » Masking insecurity
- » Relieving stress
- » Providing self-comfort
- » Building rapport
- » Demonstrating inflexibility



ANECDOTE

Jim and Caroline are business partners. Usually, they agree on what needs to be done to grow their company. Recently, they argued over whom they should hire to head up their sales team. While Jim's candidate came with all the right credentials, Caroline received feedback that the potential hire lacked certain moral values. She was adamant that he not be offered the job, and while Jim argued in his defense, Caroline purposefully crossed one arm over the other as she said, "Not. Going. To. Happen." Her message of intractability was clear and firm.

Setting boundaries

When in the company of strangers or with people you neither like nor trust, you will probably cross your arms to distance and defend yourself. Look around the next time you're standing in an elevator, attending a public meeting, waiting to board a plane, or anywhere you and others feel uncertain, apprehensive, angry, defiant, or intimidated. Chances are that you'll see a lot of crossed arms.

BLOCKING OUT INFORMATION

Two groups of volunteers participated in an American research project in which they attended a series of lectures. The project aimed to examine the effects of the crossed-arms position on the retention of information and attitude toward the lecturer. The first group was instructed to sit in a casual, relaxed position with their arms and legs open. During the lectures, the second group was told to fold their arms tightly across their chests. The study showed that the group with the folded arms had a more negative view of both the lectures and the lecturer and retained 38 percent less information than the group that sat with their arms and legs uncrossed.

Crossing your arms shows interest and engagement when you're with friends and colleagues. Some people cross one arm over their body while raising their other arm upward so that the elbow of one rests on the hand of the other, with the chin balanced on top. The index finger may point up the cheek, the fingers may curl inward with the head resting on the knuckles, or you may open up the palm of your hand where your chin can sit. This latter pose demonstrates deep engagement. Or boredom. If you aren't sure which is which look at their eyes. To decipher what messages your eyes send, turn to Chapter 5.



WARNING

The meaning of the message lies with the receiver. Although individuals cross their arms for many reasons, studies consistently show that people react negatively to the crossed-arms position. Even if you're relaxed and comfortable with your arms crossed over your chest, the untrained eye might interpret your attitude as closed, defensive, or even aggressive.

Showing power

When you cross your arms, you make yourself look bigger, and bigger people tend to look powerful (see Figure 8-1). Men adopt this stance more than women, although plenty of women, including female law enforcement officers, willingly embrace this pose. This position is taken by Superman, club bouncers, and anyone who needs to intimidate others. The Washington, D.C., statue of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. depicts the assassinated civil rights leader with his arms crossed over his chest in a position depicting power and strength.

FIGURE 8-1:
Her serious expression, tailored suit, and crossed arms indicate a strong and serious attitude.



ajr_images/Adobe Stock

Demonstrating self-restraint

When the universe seems to be against you – you’ve been bumped from a flight, you’ve been unfairly treated, your washing machine has broken down again – you may cross your arms, make a fist, and tighten your torso in self-restraint. People experiencing anger as well as extreme anxiety adopt this pose. Depending on the intensity of their emotion, they may squeeze their hands so tightly that their fingers and knuckles turn white. Left unchecked, restrained hostility can lead to aggressive behavior. (See more about the meanings of clenched fists in Chapter 9.)

Sending mixed signals

Up-and-coming young men frequently cross their arms over their chests with their thumbs pointing upward (see Figure 8-2). This position demonstrates both apprehension and self-assurance. Unease is conveyed through the crossed arms while the thumbs-up position demonstrates self-confidence.

Masking insecurity

People may cross their arms to keep them from feeling exposed. Although it’s a staple among girls entering puberty, grown men in positions of power have been known to adopt this pose, too.

FIGURE 8-2:
His crossed arms
and thumbs-up
position project
confidence.



Alex/Adobe Stock



After their infamous presidential debate in 1960, haggard-looking Vice President Richard M. Nixon was seen speaking off-camera to the handsome John F. Kennedy. During their conversation, Nixon stood with his arms crossed over his chest, most likely in an effort to mask his insecurity around the Harvard graduate. According to his biographer, Nixon always felt insecure in the company of “Ivy League types,” whom he saw as superior despite his political stature.

Building rapport

People speaking with their arms crossed are not necessarily in conflict. They just may be comfortable and focused on the topic. If their legs are also crossed, they’re displaying their ease with one another as they stand in an off-balanced position. By mirroring one another’s behavior, they’re building rapport. If you want to know what I mean by rapport and how to create it through reflecting gestures, turn to Chapter 1.



If you’re in a group of people, all of whom have their arms crossed, break the pose from time to time to open your body. If you hold a closed position for too long, the atmosphere could become negative. See Chapter 14 to discover the impact of mirroring and matching other people’s body language.

Responding to stress

A natural response to anxiety and fear is to hold on for dear life. In addition to hugging yourself when you're feeling scared or apprehensive, you may clutch an object, like a coffee cup, a pen, or a cuddly toy, anything to soothe your stress and anxiety



ANECDOTE

Chrissie clutched a pad of paper tightly to her chest during a role-play with a client in which she had to enter her boss's office, sit across the table from him, and make a recommendation that she knew he wouldn't like. Although she said that she had to carry the pad for taking notes, the intensity of her hold on the pad indicated that she felt insecure, threatened, and in need of protection. Rather than looking strong, authoritative, and in control, she came across as weak, scared, and defensive. Not until she saw herself on video did she recognize the negative messages her body language was revealing.



TRY THIS

When you want someone to uncross their arms, give them something to hold or do. Because your body language influences your attitudes, maintaining a closed position for too long can create negative feelings. You can unlock their closed position and change the mood by giving the person with the crossed arms a task.

Conveying Friendliness, Honesty, and Joy

Open arms indicate a receptive, friendly, and trustworthy attitude. This position says that you have nothing to hide and are approachable and amenable. Open arms draw people to you, making them feel comfortable and at ease in your company.

Open arms are also a sign of elation. Go to any sporting event and watch the players. The moment the champion sinks their final putt, crosses the finish line, or scores the winning goal, their arms open wide with the thrill of victory.



TRY THIS

Hold your arms open if you want to persuade someone to accept your viewpoint. Open arms indicate a confident, constructive attitude and create a positive impression. You're perceived as sincere, direct, and trustworthy as long as your other gestures are equally open and forthright.

By leaving your body exposed – in an open and vulnerable position – you're indicating that you're ready and able for whatever comes your way.

The power of vulnerability

Professor Brené Brown is *The New York Times* author of six bestselling books and is a podcast host, researcher, and storyteller known across the globe as the

authority on the subjects of shame, vulnerability, and leadership. Her premise is that the purpose and meaning of life are to connect with others, and shame keeps people from doing that – “I’m not _____ enough” (good enough, smart enough, rich enough, and so on). Brown’s research indicates that the feeling of not belonging and being unloved separates people from connecting with others. She says, “The people who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe they’re worthy of it.” She referred to these people as wholehearted and discovered that they have the following characteristics in common:

- » **Courage.** The original definition of courage is “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” They have the courage to be imperfect.
- » **Compassion.** They are kind, both to themselves and to others.
- » **Connection.** Their connections are based on authenticity. They let go of who they thought they should be and became who they are.
- » **Vulnerability.** They welcome vulnerability as a vital component for connection. (Examples of vulnerability include asking for help, initiating sex, being rejected, waiting for a doctor’s report, and the like.)

Because vulnerability can feel uncomfortable, some people numb themselves through

- » Over-indulging, such as too much eating, drinking, and shopping.
- » The trap of certainty, where no room exists for ambiguity or indecision when it comes to opinions and beliefs.
- » Creating Perfection. They try to remove or replace perceived imperfections in their lives.
- » Relinquishing Responsibility. They pretend that they’re not responsible for how their actions affect other people’s lives, especially when they hurt someone.

Rather than dealing with your vulnerability in a negative way, Brown suggests the following:

- » Remove your mask and allow people to experience the real you in all your vulnerability
- » To love unconditionally, even when there’s no guarantee
- » To practice gratitude and joy, even during times of fear and anxiety
- » To believe, “I am enough.”

When you practice open body language and expose your authentic self, you release all shame and discover the power of vulnerability (see Figure 8-3). You may want to watch Brown's top-rated TED Talk, *The Power of Vulnerability*, and others on YouTube. Not only is she smart but she's also really funny.



FIGURE 8-3:
Open arms
indicate an open
attitude.

Viorel Sima/Adobe Stock

Hugging, stroking, and rubbing

Sometimes you might need a hug, a rub, or a smooth stroking to soothe, comfort, and calm yourself down. Your skin is your largest body organ, with plenty of space to touch. When you engage in a pleasant touch, your oxytocin levels increase. The levels of other “feel good” hormones, including dopamine and serotonin, also rise while the stress hormones cortisol and norepinephrine decline. Oxytocin makes you feel more

- » Generous
- » Empathetic
- » Nurturing

- » Collaborative
- » Grateful

An additional benefit of touching is that it can lower your heart rate and blood pressure and lessen anxiety and depression. While being touched by someone you love or at least fancy is nice, sometimes it's not always possible. At those moments, you may have to touch yourself (see Figure 8-4).



FIGURE 8-4:
The act of
touching is
comforting.

RealPeopleStudio/Adobe Stock

Below are examples of the most common self-touching behaviors:

- » Rubbing your neck
- » Stroking your chest
- » Caressing your arms
- » Rubbing your hands
- » Stroking your legs
- » Fondling your face
- » Fiddling with your hair

TOUCHING AND OLDER PEOPLE

According to research led by Isac Sehlstedt of the University of Gothenburg, older people like touching more than younger adults. When asked if they were easily bothered if someone they knew didn't touch them, the majority answered affirmatively, although older people don't tend to initiate hugs. Older people especially like a slow and gentle touch, like a loving cuddle as opposed to a big bear hug. While an older person may welcome a tender touch, culture and other social factors inform who, where, and how people should hug.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

One reason Martin Bashir's interview of Princess Diana was so compelling is the amount of self-comforting body language the late Princess displayed. When asked difficult questions or to recall painful times, her right arm unwrapped from the left. Her hand frequently slid under her jacket, moved over her heart, and caressed her upper chest and shoulder as her thumb stroked the dimple at her throat. Her youngest son, Prince Harry, demonstrates similar self-soothing behaviors when feeling stressed, although, like many men, when he's seated, he tends to rub his thighs more than his chest.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In simple terms, the soft, concave spot between your collar bones – the clavicle – is called the thoracic outlet. This narrow space is a highway of muscles, blood vessels, and nerves, all lying close to the skin. This area is a vulnerable and tender spot and is particularly responsive to touch.



TRY THIS

When you feel tense, insecure, or anxious, gently rub your thumb along your thoracic outlet and observe those negative feelings fade away.

Touching to Connect

Touching is a way to offer comfort, create a bond, and increase your influence. Some people use the gesture as a sign of reassurance, support, and encouragement. Others use it as a signal that they want to interrupt you. Touching frequently occurs when someone's expressing excitement or is feeling festive. You also see people touch one another during a disaster or when they're listening to another person's troubles. Life offers many opportunities to touch.

The act of touching isn't straightforward. Touch appropriately, and you come across as a caring, sharing kind of person. Touch incorrectly, and you're perceived

as an untrustworthy sleaze bag. Like most things, it's not what you do; it's how you do it. So, heed this advice:

- » **Who to touch:** Anyone you want to establish and maintain a relationship with. The closer the relationship, the larger the touchable areas. The more pleasure you receive when being touched in specific areas of your body, the more selective you are about who may touch you there. While touching is common in Latin countries as well as in Finland and Russia, you won't find much of it in the United States and Great Britain, where people tend to relate a touch to a sexual advance even though the intention may simply be to show support, express sympathy, or demonstrate empathy. Some people are natural touchers, freely giving and receiving hugs, kisses, and pats on the back. For others, touching for any reason is anathema. If in doubt, don't touch.
- » **Who not to touch:** Avoid touching work colleagues. Laws govern behavior in the workplace, which means that you can receive a formal complaint for making a gesture that may be interpreted as inappropriate physical contact. Don't touch anyone in a superior position to you, such as royalty, a president, or your boss, unless they initiate the gesture. And don't touch anyone who doesn't want to be touched. (See Chapter 12 for an illustration of inappropriate touching.)



TIP

To determine whether someone welcomes or rejects being touched, observe how they behave. People who touch themselves – for example, rubbing or stroking their faces, hands, arms, and legs – might respond positively to your touch. A person who avoids self-contact might be telling you to keep your hands to yourself.

- » **Where to touch:** How comfortable a person being touched feels depends on who's doing the touching and where on the body. Lovers have carte blanche when it comes to touching while acquaintances are limited to shoulders, upper backs, arms, and hands. While good friends may pat you on the bottom, uncles and cousins may not.
- » **Where not to touch:** Keep your hands off women's breasts, men's and women's genitals, and children's heads unless your relationship is intimate. Different cultures have different rules about touching. For example, what you may consider an affectionate gesture, such as patting a child on the head or ruffling a friend's hair, is highly insulting in Asian countries. (See Chapter 15 for more about touching in different cultures.)
- » **How long to touch:** When you're touching someone, get your timing right. Holding the touch for over three seconds might make someone wonder about your intentions. The longer the touch, the more intense the message. If you and the person you're speaking with know each other well and have a good rapport, you can feel comfortable touching one another during your conversation. If you don't know someone very well, you're both likely to feel

uncomfortable touching for any length of time. For example, think about a time when you accidentally brushed up against a stranger or someone you didn't know very well. You probably pulled away quite quickly unless your brush was more of a ruse than an accident (in which case, you might have waited a moment longer to see their reaction before drawing back).

Creating a bond

Touching helps create bonds in partnerships of all kinds, personal or professional. When people touch, the “love hormone” oxycontin is released, stimulating feelings of trust and safety. Unless, that is, the touch comes as a slap, pinch, or punch.

The double-handed touch is particularly effective for cementing a bond with another person. By increasing the amount of physical contact, you demonstrate that the connection the two of you share is more than just casual. Your boss might shake your right hand while patting your left upper arm, while your lover might hold your hand, turn their body toward you, and put their hand on your chest.



TRY THIS

The next time you shake hands with someone for the first time, lightly touch their hand or forearm with your left hand as you repeat their name. Doing so creates a positive, memorable impression by making that person feel worthy of your touch. Plus, repeating the person's name helps you to remember that the name is James, not John.

Touching between individuals of equal rank and status occurs regularly. Patting a friend on the back, giving a chum a hug, or squeezing a colleague on the arm conveys friendship and camaraderie.

THE POWER OF TOUCH

Touching plays a vital role in religious and superstitious rituals and social relationships. For example, the tradition of touching wood to ensure good fortune may stem from the ancient act of touching the sacred oak to appease Thor, the god of war and thunder. Touching iron for good luck comes from the archaic belief that iron holds magical and supernatural powers. In the Hindu religion, the touching of an elder's feet is a sign of respect. Shaking hands upon greeting someone and agreeing to a deal signals trustworthiness. In addition, a warm, gentle touch is a scientifically proven way to reduce high blood pressure and cardiovascular stress.



At Malik's annual rugby dinner, the players were jostling about, punching one another on the arm, slapping each other on the back, and draping their arms over each other's shoulders. The young men were comfortable with this level of reciprocal touching between equals.

Demonstrating dominance

Something to remember about touching is that it's a hierarchical gesture. The person who initiates the touch holds the authority. The doctor touches the patient, the coach touches the player, and the priest touches the parishioner. A person of lower status who initiates touch with someone holding a higher position could be seen as a bit impudent and impolite.



Henry was a newly promoted major in the Army. Henry's soldiers liked him, as did his fellow officers. All was going well with Henry's career until one evening after having had too much to drink in the officers' mess, the young officer became a bit too friendly and familiar. That he back-slapped and hugged officers of his rank was acceptable, but when he put his arm around his commanding officer, who had stopped by the mess for a quiet drink and conversation, he went too far. Henry's career stalled for a few years until he proved that he knew how to behave in front of his superiors.



When you shake hands with someone and they place their other hand on top of yours, they demonstrate that they are the top dog (see Figure 8-5). If you touch back, you're both showing your sense of superiority. For this reason, save the double-handed handshake for people of equal or lower status than you. You may be perceived as overly ambitious or familiar if you touch someone of superior rank as if you were their equal.

Increasing your influence

When you touch someone, they become more attentive and agreeable because of the "feel good factor" that comes with touching. Also, they're likely to agree to your requests. For example, restaurant customers tend to tip more when their server unobtrusively touches them on the hand or shoulder. When shoppers in a mall were asked to participate in a survey, those who were touched were more likely to agree to the request. They also reported that the task seemed less of a burden than did the shoppers who were not touched.



If you want your partner to take out the garbage, give them a snuggle and a kiss before making your request.

FIGURE 8-5:
The double-
handed
handshake
displays power
and status
between equals.



tippapatt/Adobe Stock

TOUCHING IS A TOUCHY SUBJECT

While the occasional high-five and pat on the back are acceptable in the workplace, any further physical contact is frowned upon. Yet, it still exists. Research demonstrates that men in power who touch women at work are signaling paternalism and control, while a woman's touch is interpreted as a prelude to intimacy with sexual intent. Additional research suggests that men perceive women as being uptight when they complain about men presumptuously touching them. Female students and women working in restaurants, offices, and factories are not immune to being touched by their male superiors, and they're expected not to interpret these gestures as sexual advances, even though they frequently are. (That is quite a disturbing commentary on society.) The research also shows that men may interpret a woman's touch as conveying sexual intent, regardless of whether they are. The findings demonstrate that if touching implies power or intimacy, and women are considered by men to be inferior in terms of status, a woman's touch is read as an intimate gesture because power is not a reasonable interpretation. Sad but, according to the research, true.

Reinforcing the message

Through simple touches you can convey myriad messages. When words fail you, your touch can express what you're feeling inside.

Say you're arguing with another person. The tension rises, cruel words are spoken, and you're slapped across the face before you know it. This is an extreme example of reinforcing a negative message. The gesture supports what's been said and is a physical sign of anger, frustration, and a desire to inflict pain.

Let's say your child falls down and scrapes their knee, so you cradle them in your arms and stroke their hurt leg as they cry. Here, the touch is a calming and placating action meant to reassure and comfort.

Now, let's say your friend is emotionally hurting and you hug them so that they feel cared for and understood. This type of hug tends to last longer than a quick "hello hug" and is best saved for people you know well.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

At the 94th Academy Awards, actor Will Smith leaped onto the stage and slapped the presenter, comedian Chris Rock, hard across the face. The action was in response to Rock's joke about Smith's wife. Now referred to as "the slap heard around the world," Smith's action reinforced his angry words. While the pain he inflicted on Rock was short-lived, Smith must live with the negative consequences of his unfortunate behavior for many years.



ANECDOTE

Lisa went to see her friend Caroline whose father had recently died. At one point during their conversation, Caroline started to cry. Instinctively, Lisa opened her arms and gently embraced Caroline, holding her until her sobs subsided. Caroline found Lisa's tender touch calming and comforting.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Savvy salespeople, marketers, and advertisers understand the importance of appealing to as many senses as possible, including the sense of touch, when selling to the buying public. You *see* the product, and your visual sense is stimulated. You *hear* the product – like the roar of the engine – and your auditory senses are stirred. And when you *touch* the product, whether soft carpet or smooth leather, your kinesthetic response reinforces the message that this product is something you like the feel of. (See Chapter 2 for more about kinesthetics.)



TRY THIS

If you're engaged in a social conversation and are attracted to the other person, allow your hand to touch theirs while you speak. When you're introduced and shake hands, you may let your hand rest slightly longer in theirs than you normally would. If they share your interest, they'll reciprocate and not pull away. If they're not keen, their touch will be brief and uncommitted. You can find out more about gestures to indicate physical attraction by having a look at *Flirting For Dummies* by Elizabeth Clark (Wiley).

- » Supporting your message
- » Illustrating what you're saying
- » Displacement activities

Chapter 9

Letting Your Hands Do the Talking

As the 18th-century German philosopher Emmanuel Kant said, “The hand is the visible part of the brain.” Second only to your face, your hands are your most visually expressive feature. Hand gestures can serve as a substitute for words. They can also support your spoken message by illustrating and amplifying what you’re saying. For example, when you’re giving directions to someone who’s lost, you most likely use your hands to get them back on the right path. When you’re emphasizing a point, your hands move in time with your words. When describing a shape or a particular scene, your hands create a visual picture of what you’re saying. These kinds of hand gestures make complicated explanations more comprehensible.

In this chapter, you discover how your hands support and add substance to your message. You see how to position your hands to convey authority and dominance and demonstrate openness and submission. You gain insight into another person by how they shake hands and learn the telltale signals the hands and fingers unconsciously reveal when you think no one is watching.

Reading Palms

Countless experiments have been conducted to record how people respond to hand gestures. Research consistently shows that when a speaker uses the palm-up position, most listeners react positively to what's being said. The positive response rate drops significantly when the speaker delivers the same message with the palm facing downward. And when the speaker points their finger directly at the listener, the positive response becomes practically nil.

The open-facing palm

The palm-up position signals openness, trustworthiness, and honesty. Oh, sure, con artists, professional liars, and guilty teenagers know the tricks and use the open-palm gesture when trying to convince you that they're genuine and sincere. You're not fooled because other gestures of honesty, such as an open facial expression, calm breathing, and a relaxed stance, are missing. (See Chapter 4 for more about facial expressions.)

In addition to demonstrating openness and honesty, the open hand is a submissive, non-threatening gesture, as seen in the open palms of beggars and penitents (see Figure 9-1).



FIGURE 9-1:
An open palm
indicates
trustworthiness,
openness, and
honesty.

Reza/Adobe Stock

The downward-facing palm

Turn your hand over with your palm facing downward, and bam! – you’re projecting power and authority. This gesture is frequently used when giving orders. Taken to its extreme, the gesture becomes associated with oppressiveness and tyranny.

The downward-facing palm is also effective when you need to calm a situation or ask for quiet (see Figure 9-2).



FIGURE 9-2:
The downward-facing palm projects strength and authority.

snapitude/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you want to calm a tense situation or ask for quiet, hold out both your palms pointed downward and fingers slightly separated and gently raise and lower your hands. Make sure your fingers are relaxed, or you may just be fanning the flames of the fire!

Closed-palm, finger-pointed

When you make a fist and point your index finger, you’re making your viewpoint clear in a dynamic way. Speakers will often raise their hands and point to different areas to emphasize their message. Pointing like this focuses the observer’s attention and energizes the speaker.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

During political campaigns, where emotions run high and passions run deep, candidates will speak to crowds to get their votes. Those who put their bodies behind their words speak with more passion and engagement than those who don't. When former U.S. president Barack Obama was on the campaign trail, sharing his vision with his supporters, he would raise his arm and pierce the air with a pointed finger as he spoke with passion and belief.



WARNING

Pointing your finger at another person is an invasive, threatening, and aggressive gesture. Research shows that when someone points their finger at you while delivering their message, you instinctively react negatively. You likely tune out what the other person is saying and probably make negative judgments about that individual.

The finger wag moves rhythmically sideways, back and forth like a metronome. This action is a silent warning or “telling off.”

The finger jab – the wag’s closest cousin – is like a stabbing motion and is quite intimidating (see Figure 9-3). Because it’s not one of the most conciliatory of gestures, use it at your peril.



TIP

If you habitually point and beat your finger when speaking, consciously practice palm-up, palm-center, palm-down, and fingers-loose positions. You’ll find that these gestures can create a positive and relaxed atmosphere.



FIGURE 9-3: Pointing a finger at someone draws attention to that person and can lead to negative feelings of judgment and blame.

pathdoc/Adobe Stock

Making a connection

Your hands are always making connections of some sort, be it with objects or with people. Whether handing a gift to a loved one, waving as a sign of acknowledgment, or shaking hands in welcome and agreement, your hands are one of your most valuable body parts for connecting with others (see Figure 9-4).

FIGURE 9-4:
A wave can be a sign of greeting and farewell and a way of gaining someone's attention.



retoncy/Adobe Stock

A wave of the hand can be a

- » Form of greeting
- » Sign of welcome
- » Salutation
- » Means of encouragement
- » Gesture of farewell

The hand wave can be seen from a distance, and while you're not touching the person or people to whom you're waving, you're making a connection by acknowledging their presence with the friendly show of your open-palmed hand. When waving in welcome, your palm faces front and rhythmically moves from side to side. This wave is similar to the gesture for goodbye.

Sports people, entertainers, and anyone wanting your vote encourage the crowds to shout their approval by raising their arms and waving their hands with their palms facing inward as if scooping up the applause. Whenever the great tennis player Novak Djokovic needs to generate support from the stands when he's struggling to win a point, he adopts this pose. Usually, the roar of the crowd helps him win the next point, game, set, and match.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Royals, celebrities, and people in positions of power wave to their fans as they walk the red carpet. They acknowledge their admirers without having to engage too closely with them. Those on the other side of the barrier feel recognized and briefly included in their idol's glamorous life. While Sophie, the Countess of Wessex, is a dab hand at shaking hands, her husband, Prince Edward, prefers to wave at the crowds rather than make physical contact.



TIP

One effective gesture that you can adopt when you want to connect with a large group of people is to hold out one or both of your hands with your fingers spread apart and your palms facing upward. This gesture acts like a magnet and draws people toward you.

SALUTING THROUGH TIME

Historians are uncertain about the origins of the hand salute. It probably dates back to late Roman times when assassinations were not uncommon. If a citizen wanted to see a public official, he was required to approach with his right hand raised to demonstrate that he didn't hold a weapon. A similar gesture developed for armored knights who raised their visors with the right hand when meeting a comrade.

Traditionally, the British military saluted by taking their hats off as a sign of respect. In the early 1800s, the Coldstream Guards amended that gesture. Because of the wear and tear on the hats by constant removal and replacing, the soldiers were instructed to clap their hands to their hats and bow as they passed by their superiors. Other regiments quickly adopted this procedure.

By the mid-19th century, the army salute took the form of an open hand, tightly closed fingers, and palm to the front – the gesture that remains today.

The naval salute is markedly different from the open-hand army salute in that the palm of the hand points downward toward the shoulder. This gesture can be traced back to the days of sailing ships when the ship's timber was sealed with tar and pitch to protect it from seawater. To preserve their hands, officers wore white gloves. As it was considered highly undignified to show a dirty palm when saluting, the hand was turned to a 90-degree angle.



TIP

When you want to establish a sense of trust and honesty, keep your hands visible. Otherwise, you may look like you're hiding something. (For more information on the impact of hiding your hands, see "Hiding your hands," later in this chapter.)

Open-hand gestures help your listener grasp an idea that you're explaining. When you turn your open palm in another person's direction during a discussion, you're demonstrating that you value their opinions:

- » Say you want to plant a thought in someone's mind without verbally force-feeding the idea. Bend your elbows at a 90-degree angle and hold out both hands side by side, palms facing each other. Then slowly beat your open hands rhythmically up and down and watch the light bulb turn on as your listener sees the picture.
- » The next time you're speaking and want to hear what someone else has to say, turn toward that person with your palm open and extend it in their direction. The gesture is as if you're giving them a gift. By handing them the chance to speak, they feel acknowledged and valued for their contributions.



TRY THIS

If you want someone to come on board with your way of thinking, draw both hands in front of you with your palms facing your body. In addition, this gesture can energize you and help you grasp your own suggestions or ideas when you're struggling to find the right words to express your thoughts.

Hands Up!

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, your hands are one of your most visually expressive features and are much like your voice because of how much they have to say.

Hiding your hands

When you conceal your hands by putting them behind your back or shoving them in your pockets, you're keeping them from telling on you. Take yourself back to your childhood. You've just been caught with your hand in the cookie jar. You quickly pull it out and stick it behind your back, saying, "No! Honestly! I didn't take anything!" And all the time, your hand stays hidden, twitching guiltily behind your back as the cookie crumbles.

Fast forward to your life now. You've been out on the town with your pals, arrive home as the sun's rising, and your parent/spouse/partner asks you where you've

been. Rather than owning up to whatever minor – or major – indiscretion you’ve committed, if you’re a man, you probably shove your hands into your pockets or cross your arms with your hands tucked neatly away while coming up with a good excuse. You busy your hands with a flurry of activities if you’re a woman. Either way, your palms stay hidden.

The hand rub: Good for you or good for me?

When you rub your palms together, whether slowly or at speed, you’re either cold or signaling an expectation. The slow palm rub can appear devious or crafty and may leave you feeling a little uneasy. You can bet that the beneficiary behind the rub won’t be you. The quick hand rub indicates excitement, pleasure, and enthusiasm.

Consider these examples:

- » A friend tells you how excited they are about a vacation they’re about to take, a promotion, or a fabulous idea. They may quickly rub their palms together as a smile of happiness spreads across their face. (See Chapter 4 to discover different types of smiles.)



ANECDOTE

Once upon a time, I lived and worked in Las Vegas. No, I wasn’t a showgirl. However, I occasionally went to the casinos and observed the gamblers. I noticed that people playing craps would quickly rub their dice together – sometimes even giving them a kiss – before tossing them down the table. This action and the look of concentrated anticipation on their faces indicated that they were willing something positive to happen. Most of the time, something positive did happen but for the casino, not the gambler. Turn to Chapter 4 for more about facial expressions.

- » The salesperson sits you down and asks whether you’re ready to pull out your checkbook as they slowly rub their hands together. Possible meaning? Buyer beware!
- » After finding out about you and what you want to purchase, the salesperson rubs their palms together quickly and says, “I’ve got just the thing for you!” Here, the message is that they expect the result to be to *your* advantage. And if it works out for you, it works out for them. Win-win.

The folded hand

Folding your hands signals containment, control, or protection. This gesture can also reveal frustration or hostility, depending on the intensity of the hold. If your

hands are loosely folded, you look comfortable and contained. If they're tightly folded, you're showing signs of tension.

The clenched hands

People who are scared, nervous, or holding back a strong negative emotion tend to clench their hands. The stronger the emotion, the tighter the clench and the whiter their knuckles become. In addition, a clenched fist can also indicate contained excitement and power, depending on where the hands are placed. For example, you might clench your fist and pump the air when your proposal has been accepted, you are offered your dream job, or your favorite team wins their playoff.



TIP

As always, observe the cluster of physical signals and consider the context before judgment.

In front of the face

Studies indicate that the higher the hands are held in the clenched position, the stronger the emotion. So, if your boss is sitting with their elbows resting on their desk and hands clenched in front of their face, they'll probably be difficult to handle. Putting their hands near their mouth indicates that they're holding back what they'd like to say. Be careful not to push your boss too far – they might unclench those hands and let the words fly out!

In the mid-position

Say you're working at your desk, frantically beaver away to meet a deadline, and someone comes in for a chat. Although you're frustrated at having been interrupted, you want to appear cordial while still holding the interloper at bay. You stop what you're doing, fold your hands on your desk, and ask, "How may I help you?" Folding your hands and keeping them at this mid-position signals that, although you're irritated, you're not yet ready to explode.

The fig leaf

Sometimes, you may stand with your hands folded in front of your pelvis. This is a comfortable position and gives your hands a place to land. In addition, at the subconscious level, the hands act like a shield, protecting you from perceived threats.



ANECDOTE

Stewart was scheduled to speak at a high-profile event and was feeling nervous. Sitting in the VIP section of the audience next to his wife, Stewart had tightly folded his hands in his lap in a self-restraining gesture. Several times, Stewart's wife reached out to unclench his hands. Stewart subtly swatted her hand away each time and held on even more tightly. Stewart was anxious about his speech, trying to calm himself down, and was annoyed by his wife's interference.



TIP

If you're speaking with someone whose hands are tightly clenched (see Figure 9-5), you can bet that they are containing a negative emotion, such as anger or anxiety. Give them something to hold or a task to perform to get them to unlock their fingers and expose their palms. If they resist your efforts, leave them alone. They may not be ready to let go.



FIGURE 9-5:
A clenched fist can signal power, containment, excitement, and frustration.

Kiselov/Adobe Stock

Letting the Fingers Do the Talking

Some hand gestures are based on precision and power grips, which are the two ways of holding onto an object. (See the *Body Language For Dummies* app for some examples.)

The precision grip

When you're speaking and want to express an idea accurately or describe something of a sensitive nature, press your fingers and thumb together as if you were holding something small. This action draws attention to the delicacy of the subject at hand.



TRY THIS

To focus your listener's attention and be seen as authoritative, place your index finger against your thumb with your palm facing outward and your fingers softly rounded. This way, you avoid intimidating your audience and will likely be perceived as thoughtful and goal-orientated. This gesture is a favorite of modern politicians. Gosh, what a surprise!

In some countries, this gesture, recognized by some as the okay signal, is considered rude (see Figure 9-6). Before making any definite gesture, find out what's acceptable behavior and what may cause offense. (You can read more about the use of hand signals in different cultures in Chapter 15.)



FIGURE 9-6: While in some countries, this rounded gesture is perceived as positive, in other countries it's considered rude.

vgstudio/Adobe Stock

When you ask a question or feel uncertain about a point you're making or responding to, you may find that your thumb and index finger are almost – but not quite – touching. Funny how that happens, as if the fingers know that the answer isn't quite there. When the fingers do come together in a definite grip, the action is as if they've grabbed the information and are holding on to it.

The power grip

People who want to be perceived as strong, serious, and forceful use their whole fists to make a point. This action is as if they're holding on to a strap on a fast-moving bus or hammering a nail into a block of wood.

You can use this gesture effectively in two ways. If you choose to deliver your message in a mild-mannered way, leave your fingers bent, not fully closed. However, if you mean business and are taking no prisoners, close your fingers into a fist and punch the air. You might also air punch when your favorite team scores, your proposal is accepted, or you win the lottery. (See the section above about the clenched fist.)



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Former U.S. president Donald J. Trump, when on the campaign trail, appearing at rallies, or drumming up the troops, frequently clenched his right fist, raised his hand, and punched the air in a sign of strength, conviction, and determination.

The power chop

Sometimes when you speak, you may feel so passionate that you use your hand like a jabbing, punching, or chopping weapon. Hopefully, you're just hitting empty air rather than a person or an object. This gesture signals that you are committed to what you're saying, conveying clarity and conviction.



TRY THIS

To demonstrate real forcefulness when speaking and underline your determination to swashbuckle your way through the obstacle course, turn your hand into a symbolic axe blade by positioning it sideways with your fingers held closely together. Now make strong downward and diagonal chopping movements. Your hand and arm start acting like a meat cleaver chopping its way through the beef.

The scissors or double-chop motion is great when you're rejecting or disagreeing with what someone else is saying. Cross both your forearms in front of your body and make outward cutting motions with your hands. By cutting off the conversation, you're indicating that you don't want to hear anymore.



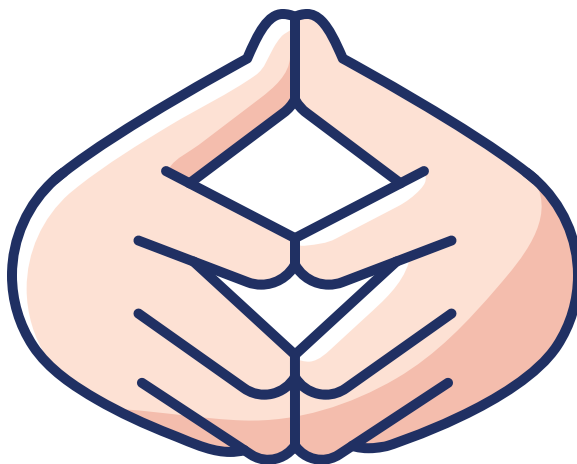
ANECDOTE

When my then-teenage son Max was doing his best to convince me why he should be allowed to travel the world on his own, I wasn't about to be swayed. His passionate arguments were countered with my motherly wisdom. Not only did my words say, "No," everything I was doing was rejecting his proposal. When I combined the double-chop motion with the finger wag, my daughter Kristina came in with the conciliatory palms down and gently beating gesture that reduced the tension and created a moment of calm.

The steeple

In his studies of body movements, Ray Birdwhistell noted that confident people and those in positions of superiority tend to minimize and restrict their gestures. In addition, one of their go-to gestures is the steeple, which demonstrates a confident attitude (see Figure 9-7).

FIGURE 9-7: When you touch your fingertips in a steeple position, you demonstrate confidence and thoughtfulness. Also, this hand position represents unity and harmony.



bsd studio/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

Bend your elbows 90 degrees and bring your hands in front of you at waist level. Slightly raise your hands, letting your fingertips lightly touch, forming the shape of a steeple on a building.

» **The raised steeple:** When the fingers are raised in front of the chest, the speaker is voicing thoughts or opinions.



WARNING

Use the raised steeple position judiciously. Taken to extremes, it can convey an arrogant “know-it-all” attitude. If you tilt your head backward when taking this position, don’t be surprised if you’re perceived as smug or supercilious. (Have a look at Chapter 3 for more about how head positions impact communication.)

» **The lowered steeple:** When you’re listening, you may find your fingers in the lowered-steeple position. You look interested and ready to respond when you put your hands together like this. Women tend to use this position more often than the raised steeple.

Gesturing with your thumbs

Gestures associated with the thumb convey dominance, superiority, and in some cases, aggression, so you won’t find it surprising that in palmistry, the thumb denotes strength of character and ego. If you’ve ever heard the expression “under the thumb” you that know the implication is that the person with the thumb is the one in control. Woe betide the person under the thumb, as according to ancient

Roman history the thumb turned down served as a sign of imminent death. Here are some other interpretations of thumb positions:

- » **Thumbs-up:** This position generally denotes agreement. But be careful using it because, in some cultures, doing so is perceived as rude and highly offensive. (See Chapter 15 for more on cultural norms.)
- » **Thumbs protruding from a person's pockets:** This gesture demonstrates dominance and self-assuredness. Although both men and women use this gesture, rare is the woman who adopts the position of holding her jacket lapel with the thumb exposed, whereas men don't shy from doing so.
- » **Gesturing toward another person with your thumb:** When you use your thumb to point toward someone else, you're being dismissive, disrespectful, or ridiculing the other person, especially if the gesture is accompanied by a sneer, a downward glance, and a toss of your head (see Figure 9-9 a bit later in this chapter).



ANECDOTE

Christopher had the unfortunate habit of ridiculing Philippa, his wife, in front of their friends. When they were with others, he'd often refer to her as "the little woman" or "the ball and chain" while gesturing in her direction with a closed fist, using his thumb as a pointer. Although Philippa told him how irritating she found this gesture and the accompanying remarks, Christopher took no notice. He did notice, however, when after several years of rude and disrespectful behavior, his wife divorced him.

Analyzing Handshakes

Shaking hands upon meeting is a tradition that creates a bond of solidarity. Our ancient ancestors in their caves greeted one another with outstretched arms and exposed palms to show they were free of clubs and other life-threatening weapons. Scuttle along to the Roman period, where it was common to carry concealed daggers up one's sleeve. No surprise, then, that two men would grab each other's lower arms to greet and check out the other's intentions.

As the handshake evolved, it became a gesture to cement agreements, offer a welcome, and bid someone a fond farewell. Therefore, make sure that when you shake hands, the gesture is open, congenial, and positive.

Deciding who reaches out first

Although shaking hands when meeting another person for the first time is customary, sometimes making the first move is inappropriate. For example, if you're

being introduced to someone more senior than you, such as someone older or higher up the corporate ladder, you wait for them to extend their hand. On the other hand, if you consider the person you're meeting to be your equal, you simultaneously extend your hand in greeting. If neither of you puts out your hand, give a small nod of your head instead.



TIP

Because some people aren't sure whether to shake a woman's hand in a business context, the woman should extend her hand first to show that she's comfortable with this greeting.

Conveying attitude

While some people shake hands with a firm palm-to-palm grip, demonstrating strength and commitment, others may offer you a fingertip or two or let their hand lie limp in yours, showing little, if any, interest in the interaction.

The bone cruncher

Before you can stuff your hand in your pocket, the bone cruncher is there, turning your knuckles into a pulverized paste. These people seem to have an overly aggressive attitude. The bone cruncher is to be avoided when it comes to shaking hands because you can do little to counter the action.

To avoid a potentially painful handshake, both men and women should avoid wearing rings on their right hands when they know they will be making a lot of hand-to-hand contacts.



TIP

If you think your hand has been purposely crunched, say, "Wow! That's one strong grip." Doing so lets the bone cruncher know you're onto their game. This has even more impact if other people are present observing the interaction. They're unlikely to play that trick again.

FIRM HANDSHAKES AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

University of Alabama professor William Chaplin and his students examined the relationship between personality and handshake styles. They found that extroverted and emotionally expressive people are inclined to shake hands firmly, whereas neurotic and shy people don't. They also found that women open to new experiences use a firm handshake.



ANECDOTE

Emilio lacks social skills and is unaware of how much pressure he puts into his handshakes. He unconsciously makes up for his social naiveté by putting an extra-hard squeeze into his grasp. Women find it especially uncomfortable to shake hands with Emilio and have been known to sport red welts after he releases his grip. One friend mused, “If he does that when shaking hands, I wonder what happens when he kisses you?”

The wet fish

If you’ve ever been presented with a totally limp hand to shake, you know how unconnected it feels when your palms meet. People who refuse to commit to a handshake tend to be self-important, shy, or aloof. Granted, surgeons and concert pianists need to guard their fingers and are known for their soft handshakes. Also, people who do a lot of handshaking also offer a relaxed hand to protect their fingers.



REMEMBER

A person lacking confidence may shrink from making a firm physical connection.

The power shake

Sometimes, you may want to show that you have the upper hand, meaning you’re strong and in control. You can do this by ensuring that your hand faces down in the handshake (see Figure 9–8). Although your palm doesn’t have to be completely turned over to face directly downward, the slight turning still shows you’re the top dog.

FIGURE 9-8: You can see that the man on the left of the picture is in a powerful position by the downward-facing position of his hand.



cherryandbees/Adobe Stock



REMEMBER

You have the automatic advantage even if you're unaware of having placed your hand in the top position. Why? Because the hand-down position is associated with dominance and control, whereas the upward-facing palm conveys compliance and passivity. Even if you and the receiver are unaware of what your hands are doing, one position feels more dominant while the other feels submissive.

The double-hander

The double-hander is a favorite in the corporate and political arena. Through this handshake, the initiator aims to portray sincerity, honesty, and a deep feeling for the receiver. By using it, you increase the amount of physical contact, and by restricting the receiver's right hand, you gain control of the interaction. Because the double-hander is like a mini-hug, choose your receiver carefully. Ideally, this handshake should only be used where a personal relationship already exists.



TIP

What do you do if someone thrusts their hand toward you, palm facing downward, and grabs your hand in theirs, putting you in a submissive position with little chance of balancing the equation? Allow the power player to take your hand with your palm facing upward. Then, before they know what you're up to, put your left hand on top of their right to create a double-hander. You can straighten the handshake and gain control subtly and effectively from this position.

» **The action conveys the level of intimacy between you and the receiver.**

The higher up the arm your left hand goes, the more intimate the feeling. The meaning behind this gesture is complex. In addition to showing the degree of connection that you want to demonstrate toward your receiver, the action also reveals the amount of control you exert.

» **By invading the receiver's personal space with your left hand, you're staking rights on their territory.** Unless the receiver has positive feelings for you, this gesture can lead to feelings of suspicion and mistrust. If in doubt, don't use it – especially not on your boss.

Taking Things in Hand

In the double-fisted handshake, the left hand is responsible for the following two points:

The leach

Some people just don't know when to let go. They grab your hand, shake it, and then hang on until you want to pry their fingers off. This is a subtle way of

demonstrating control. They're engaging you for longer than you may want by prolonging the contact. Interestingly, you'll probably allow the contact to remain until you can think of a good reason to pull away, such as Excuse me, I'm about to sneeze!

The space invader

Whether you're pulling someone into your territory when shaking hands or invading their space by plunging your arm into their terrain, a power play takes place, and you hold the power.

In the first instance, you propel your arm forward, forcefully grip the receiver's extended hand and simultaneously go into a quick reverse thrust. As you yank them into your space, you huddle over the handshake until you're ready to let it go. If you pull someone into your personal space, you create a handshake on your terms.



WARNING

Be aware of how much force you apply, or you may find the other person falling on top of you as you pull them in. That's what you call getting the relationship off on the wrong foot!

If you invade the other person's territory, you extend your arm fully, forcing them to retreat. Their arm ends up in a cramped position while your extended arm fills their space.

The firm shake

If you want to create a sense of mutual respect and equality, make sure that when you shake hands with another person both your palms are in the vertical position, your fingers are wrapped around one another's hands and that you apply the same amount of pressure. The webbing between your thumb and index fingers should touch and your hands should meet in no-man's land, halfway between your space and the other person's.

Displacing Your Energy

If you ever notice yourself drumming your fingers, pulling your earlobe, touching your face, or scratching your head when you haven't got an itch, you're experiencing displacement activities. These are easy to spot because they're the small, inconsequential gestures you make when feeling stressed.

Drumming for relief

Pay attention if you're in a meeting and someone's drumming their fingers on the table. Those digits are speaking. Bored, frustrated, or even irritated – the percussionist is impatient.



ANECDOTE

Stephen works for an international law firm. He recently discovered that his colleagues call him “Thumper” because of his constant finger drumming during meetings. Stephen reveals his state of mind by the tempo of his finger tapping. When he's bored, he drums the four fingers of his right hand in quick succession. When he's thoughtfully considering a suggestion, he quietly taps his middle finger. He knocks his knuckles on the table when he's prepared to conclude the meeting. Without his saying a word, his colleagues know what Thumper's thinking.

Fiddling for comfort

Notice what you do the next time you feel anxious. Chances are that you'll fiddle with an object. You may jangle your keys, twist a ring on your finger, or adjust your clothes. You may also touch yourself by picking at your nails, tugging your earlobe, rubbing your cheek, or running your fingers through your hair. The purpose of these actions is to ease nervous tension.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When people are anxious, they focus their excess energy on themselves to provide temporary relief. These actions are sometimes called “adaptors” because they help you adapt to your internal tension. Adaptive behaviors are mainly focused on the head and face. Unconsciously, you may find yourself stroking your face, running your fingers over your lips, or rubbing the back of your neck when you're upset. These hand gestures are reminiscent of those that your mother may have used to comfort you as a child. See Chapter 8 for more about adaptive behaviors.

Hand to nose

Unless you have a runny nose, you may harbor a fear or falsehood if your hand goes to your proboscis. If your hand goes to your nose, you are signaling discomfort, regardless of whether you're telling a deliberate lie (as if), having a dishonest thought, pretending to be brave when you're totally terrified, or simply feeling a moment of self-doubt.

Self-touching signals a need for reassurance. Rubbing the nose, giving it a quick wipe, or a simple scratch are responses to the tingling sensation caused by heightened blood flow to the front of your face when you feel stressed.

FEELING THE HEAT

In a 2012 study of the effect of mental states on body temperature, researchers at the University of Granada, Spain, concluded that body temperatures adjust according to a person's physical, mental, and emotional status. Lying increases the temperature in the nose and the area around the eye's inner corner. The tingling feeling that comes with the temperature change makes the liar want to wipe it away.



TIP

To identify if someone's feeling under pressure, observe their hand-to-face gestures.

Hand to cheek

The hand-to-cheek gesture indicates boredom, disinterest, and fatigue. Resting your hand on your cheek is like resting your hand on your pillow. Before you know it, you may be nodding off into dreamland. In meetings, lectures, and restaurants, you see people resting their heads on their hands as negative feelings creep in.



TIP

If you're speaking in a public forum and you notice that heads are resting in hands, change what you're doing. The change catches your listeners' attention and saves you the humiliation of heads and hands collapsing into an embarrassing heap.

Hand to chin

The chin resting on the top of the hand is a sign of thinking: The person is concentrating on something. The thumb under the chin with the index finger pointing up the side of the face signals that an evaluation is being made.

When you scan papers and magazines, observe the postures that public figures adopt. Politicians, business people, and others who want to be seen as thoughtful are frequently photographed in the evaluation posture, with their hands resting on their thumbs and their index fingers pointing up their cheeks. The pose indicates that the person is weighing up the merits of the argument and considering their options (see Figure 9-9).

FIGURE 9-9:
You send out
different
messages
depending on
where and how
you place your
hand to your
face. What
messages do you
recognize here?



Dariia/Adobe Stock

RUBBING YOUR TROUBLES AWAY

More nerve connections exist between your hands and your brain than any other body part. While they both atrophy with time, keeping your hands and brain flexible through regular exercise and massage can help relieve pain, reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and increase strength.

The health benefits of massage, including acupressure, are well documented and include clearing inflammation, promoting blood circulation, and relieving fatigue. Rubbing your hands together helps keep your joints flexible, staves off atrophy of the hand muscles, and speeds up your metabolism. People who have suffered a stroke or live with hemiplegia often unconsciously rub their hands, increasing blood flow in that area.

Conditions such as arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and neuropathy are painful and can be debilitating. While it's not advised to massage a joint flaring up because of arthritis, rubbing your thumb in a firm, gentle, and circular motion over your hand's muscles and knuckles can soothe pain and reduce tension.

- » Standing tall and confident
- » Showing subservience
- » Demonstrating dominance

Chapter **10**

Standing Your Ground

At times in your life, you've had to take a stand and make a firm decision. You probably planted your feet on the ground and got on with what you had to do. At other times, as you considered your next steps, you may have wandered in thought from pillar to post.

You've stamped your foot in anger – or known someone who has – you've rubbed your ankle up against another's as well as your own, and you've stood with your weight on one leg in boredom and bounced on your toes in excitement.

In this chapter, I look at the different types of stances that you adopt depending on your mood and circumstances. You also discover what the swinging foot and the pointed toe are saying.

Taking a Stance

Through your stance, you reflect the effects of your life experiences and your social position. People who feel good about themselves or are socially elevated tend to stand with their feet evenly spaced under their ankles, knees, and hips and their weight equally distributed. They create a firm foundation from which they move with purpose and ease. You won't see kings of countries, masters of industry, or military officers slouching or slumping – at least, not in public.

People who aren't feeling on top of their game or in subservient positions adopt a less-balanced stance than their confident cousins. The servant stands with their feet close together, taking up little space and narrowing their foundation. Someone else slouches and slumps, withdrawing into their hips with their weight unevenly distributed, showing withdrawal and a lack of commitment.



TIP

If you want to look balanced, confident, and self-assured, stand with your weight placed evenly between your legs, with your feet hip-width apart. When standing in this position, don't be surprised if you find yourself holding your head high, shoulders back and down, chest open, and stomach in (see Figure 10-1). Presto! You're standing like a winner.



FIGURE 10-1: Hands on hips and a wide stance project dominance and power.

be free/Adobe Stock

Straddle stance

The straddle stance is a stable position most favored by dominant or high-status people. Your legs are straight and your feet are placed hip-width apart, with your weight equally distributed between them. Both men and women adopt this stance as they demonstrate their confidence and power.



TRY THIS

If you want to show that you're the boss and resolute in your position, put your hands on your hips when standing in the straddle position. By using this gesture, you fill more space and come across as looking big and strong. Just be careful not to put your legs too wide apart to avoid looking arrogant.

BODY LANGUAGE AND YOUR BEST YOU

Amy Cuddy is a social psychologist, author, and speaker whose TED Talk, “Your body language shapes who you are,” has garnered more than 22.5 million views. Cuddy’s research proves that adopting a confident posture – even when a person isn’t feeling confident – affects testosterone and cortisol levels in the brain and, as a result, improves their likelihood of success. The message is simple and powerful: Change your body position if you want to change other people’s perceptions of you and even your own body chemistry. For further information about Cuddy’s research and how its findings can positively impact your life, go to www.dummies.com/extras/bodylanguage.



ANECDOTE

During his last year at junior school, 12-year-old Tommy was on the school’s winning rugby team. A group of boys stood in a circle at the party after the match, talking among themselves. As proud winners, each had adopted the straddle stance, demonstrating his machismo. Even at such a young age, the boys were strutting their stuff.

SIGNS OF DOMINANCE

Throughout history and across cultures, phallic displays have been considered signs of dominance. By standing with his legs apart, a man unashamedly shows his crotch to anyone who’s looking, declaring himself to be The Man to Beat. Exposing himself in this way, even though he may be fully covered, demonstrates that, as far as he’s concerned, he’s the boss.

You can tell if two people are ready to fight or are merely figuring each other out in a friendly manner. If they stand face to face with their feet apart, their hands on their hips, or fingers and thumbs tucked into their belt loops or the tops of their pockets, they probably don’t like one another very much and could be cruising for a bruising. However, if their bodies are turned slightly away from one another, they’re simply sizing each other up in a friendly interchange.

A dominant male baboon exposes and flaunts his erect penis to signal to other male baboons his power and status. Men in New Guinea proclaim their position in the community via the size and decorative features of their penis sheaths. European men in the 15th and 16th centuries wore codpieces as a sign of virility and social status.

In the James Bond film *Casino Royale*, Daniel Craig strides out of the ocean wearing a swimsuit that unashamedly draws the eye to his crotch. The light-blue color of the swimwear, combined with Craig’s ice-blue eyes and well-endowed and highly toned body, highlights the character’s strength and power.



TIP

If you're feeling defeated and want to change your mood, adopt the straddle stance – also known as the Wonder Woman pose – with your head held high and your shoulders down and back. Adopting this powerful position can create feelings of strength and power.

Parallel stance

The parallel stance is a subordinate position where the legs are straight and the feet are placed closely together (see Figure 10-2). You might take this position if you're called up in front of the principal, commanding officer, or judge.

Placing your feet closely together reduces the foundation for standing and makes the stance more precarious. You can easily push someone over from this position if you were to catch them off-guard. People who aren't sure about their position on a subject adopt the parallel stance unconsciously. By standing your legs close together, you're indicating that you feel hesitant or tentative. A wider stance provides a broader and firmer foundation. Unbalancing a person who's standing with their legs separated is much harder (see the preceding section).



FIGURE 10-2: The stance on the right conveys tentativeness, while the stance on the left is a more relaxed position.

dimakp/Adobe Stock

Buttress stance

Buttresses are architectural structures that are built against or projected from a wall to reinforce the wall to which they're attached. The word suggests "support," such as when one person buttresses another's argument.

In the buttress stance, you place most of your weight on a straight supporting leg, allowing your other leg to serve as a buttress. This non-weight-bearing leg can be straight or bent. Whichever it is, the foot most likely points away from where the rest of the body is facing.

Although people adopting the buttress stance say they're just resting comfortably, the position signals that the person wants to move. The stance bears a close resemblance to the act of walking. Just before moving, you shift your weight to one leg so that the other is free to take a step. Although you may not choose to move from the buttress stance, your legs are positioned so that they easily can. This position conveys a cleverly disguised message: You're prepared to go.



TIP

If you see someone repeatedly shifting their weight from one foot to the other while engaging with you, they either need to urinate or are signaling they've had enough of your company.

PREENING AND POSING

From the Middle Ages to the middle of the 19th century, men of elevated positions and high social status adopted a stance that conveniently displayed the inner part of the leg – one of the body's erotic zones. Gentlemen and posers would bear their weight on one leg, presenting the other with the inner thigh facing. The fashion designs that saw men's dress move from hose to tight breeches accessorized with fine shoes permitted and encouraged men to indulge their desire to preen and pose, showing off their legs and masculinity. Today, celebrities know how to position their legs to display them to their best advantage, turning their feet outward to reveal their inner thighs, the softer and most erogenous part of their legs. On the red carpet at the 2012 Oscars ceremony, Angelina Jolie created a media frenzy when she exposed her inner right thigh, all the way up to the top. This celebrity move earned her a Twitter feed (Angie's Right Leg) accruing more than 12,000 followers within hours and numerous hashtags.

Scissors stance

Think of your legs as the two blades of a pair of scissors. Cross one over the other, keeping your knees straight, and you're in the classic scissors stance. (For physiological reasons, women find it easier to adopt the tightly closed scissors position than men.) You frequently see celebrities at red carpet events and hopeful young women adopting this pose, crossing one leg over the other, projecting their bosoms forward, and thrusting their bottoms behind, making them appear sexy. People also adopt this position when their bladder is about to burst.

Because the scissors stance is closed, it can indicate negativity, defensiveness, and insecurity. Before deciding what mood someone is conveying by their stance, consider the context and what the rest of the body is doing (see Figure 10-3).

FIGURE 10-3:
This woman's crossed arms and legs and buttoned-up uniform convey an image of strength, seriousness, and intractability.



LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/Adobe Stock



If someone tells you they're standing with their legs and arms crossed because they're cold, see how their hands and legs are positioned. Someone who really is cold might tuck their hands into their armpits or hug themselves. Their legs are stiff, straight, and pushed tightly against each other.

MOVING WITH YOUR MIND

Your body's movements reflect your state of mind. For example, people meeting in a group for the first time usually stand with their arms and legs crossed. As rapport develops and they become more comfortable with one another, they release the closed pose and open up their bodies in a predictable pattern. First, they uncross their legs and place their feet in a parallel pose. Then they unfold their arms and hands, allowing them to become animate. As their comfort levels rise, they move from the parallel stance to an open position where the feet are slightly apart and facing the other person. Similarly, indicators of someone who has withdrawn from the conversation are crossed arms and legs. A person standing or sitting in this position is unlikely to be convinced by anything you may say or do.

Entwining your legs

Some gestures are particular to men and others are particular to women. Women, more than men, twine their legs, locking the toes of one foot around the ankle of the other. The purpose of the position is to offer security – think of how good it feels to be wrapped up in a warm blanket. This pose highlights insecurity.



ANECDOTE

Reva, a new marketing team member, was making her first customer presentation. Feeling excited and scared, she stood in front of her boss, colleagues, and clients in her pencil skirt and three-inch heels. Without realizing what she was doing, she tucked her right foot behind her left ankle, creating a pole-like position. Although she sought security, the position was precarious and did nothing to steady her nerves. When she noticed how she was standing, she placed both feet firmly under her and found that she felt more confident and could speak with greater clarity, credibility, and conviction.

Reflecting Your Feelings in How You Position Your Feet

Because your feet are the farthest point from your brain, your gray matter has less control over them than it does, say, over your hands or facial expressions. You're less aware of where your feet are facing and what they're doing than you are of your eyes, which are about as close to your brain as they can get.

Pointing toward the desired place

Humans evolved with two legs, the purpose of which is to move forward toward what you want and away from what you don't want. The direction in which your feet point tells the observer where you want to go. At some point in your life, you will have experienced talking to someone who'd rather be somewhere else. Don't take offense. It happens to us all. While his face is smiling and his head nodding, his feet are pointing away from you (see Figure 10-4).

FIGURE 10-4: Although the man on the right is smiling as he looks at his colleague, his feet are pointed in the other direction, indicating he wants to keep moving.



bernardbodo/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Mike and Susan were at a party. It was late, and Mike was tired, bored, and wanted to be in his own bed watching television. While he and Susan were saying their goodbyes, Mike couldn't understand why he had so much difficulty getting his wife to leave. Had he looked, he would have seen that while they were saying goodbye to their hostess, Susan's feet remained pointed toward her, whereas Mike's feet were heading toward the door.

Fidgeting feet

Fidgeting feet are a good indicator that someone is feeling impatient. The feet say they want to flee, so they are forced to fidget until the time comes to walk or run. While standing, you might repeatedly tap your foot to indicate your impatience. If you sit with your legs crossed, you might twitch the hanging foot up and down or back and forth.



TIP

To appear calm on the outside when everything inside is in a panic, breathe deeply from your diaphragm, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.

Knotted ankles

Whether you're sitting or standing, if you've knotted or twisted your ankles together, the signal you're sending is, "I'm holding back." Locked ankles reflect a closed, insecure, or negative attitude and suggest ambiguity. They're not a sign of someone feeling confident and in command.

SIGNS OF HOLDING BACK

Studies of body language by Gerard Nierenberg and Henry Calero, in which they pay particular attention to the participant's ankles, show that people very often lock their ankles when holding back information.

Trained in-flight airline personnel are told to look at passengers' feet to spot those feeling shy, reserved, and apprehensive. Someone sitting with their ankles locked at takeoff is feeling anxious. When the cabin staff offers that person a refreshment, they tend to unlock their ankles and move forward to the edge of their seat. However, if their ankles remain locked, the crew knows the passenger wants something and is holding back asking for it.

Studies into the behavior of dental patients show that more men than women immediately lock their ankles when sitting in the dentist's chair. Men also grip the chair's armrests or clench their hands together around their groin area. Women, too, clench their hands, leaving them to rest on their midsections.

Research with law enforcement and government bodies reveals that most people being interviewed knot their ankles at the start of the questioning. The reason for this is as likely to be based on fear as on guilt. Defendants sitting outside a courtroom waiting for their hearing are three times more likely than the plaintiffs to have their ankles tightly crossed and tucked under their chairs in an attempt to control their emotions. Nierenberg and Calero's research into the human resources profession reveals that most interviewees lock their ankles at some point during an interview, indicating that the person being interviewed is holding back an emotion or thought. Using appropriate questioning techniques, the questioner can get the other to open up and reveal valuable information.

Finally, Nierenberg and Calero's research shows that patients being wheeled into an operating room with their ankles crossed and their hands clenched tend to be unreconciled with what's coming next.



Observe the differences in how men and women sit in the crossed ankle position. Men often clench their fists, resting them on their knees, or grip the arms of the chair. Their legs are splayed, exposing their open crotch. Women tend to hold their knees together, with their feet often placed to one side, their hands resting in their laps side by side or one placed atop the other.

Twitching, flicking, or going in circles

If you suspect someone of lying or holding back information, look at their feet. Feet that are twitching, flicking, or going around in circles are leaking information about their state of mind.

While research on deception reveals that someone telling a lie shows more signs of fraud below the waist than above, twitching and flicking feet aren't restricted to fibbing. For example, people showing interest in another person point their feet toward that individual. Say that a man is speaking to a woman he finds particularly attractive. He's likely to stand with one foot pointing toward her with his legs apart, exposing his groin area while holding his hands on his hips to make himself look larger and fill more space. If the woman doesn't find him attractive and wants to give him the brush-off, she pulls her legs together, faces her body away from him, folds her arms, and makes herself appear as small as possible. On the other hand, if she likes what she sees, her feet zero in on her target with a pointed toe and a flick of an ankle.

LETTING YOUR FEET DO THE TALKING

Research by Paul Ekman and William Friesen on deception behaviors shows that when a person lies, they produce more ruse signals below the waist than above. Because people are more aware of what their hands and eyes are doing, they can consciously control their actions. Although the legs and feet are also under conscious control, they are mostly ignored and often out of sight. Therefore, the legs and feet are a more accurate source of information. A focus group watched recordings of people who were lying unbeknownst to the group. The group was then asked to determine whether the people on the tape were lying or telling the truth. The evaluators answered more correctly when they could see the lower part of the body. The findings showed that liars pay more attention to what their hands, arms, and faces are doing because they know that that's where people look. Because their lower extremities are out of the way, liars forget about them and are betrayed by miniature muscle movements in their legs and feet.

Walking Styles

Some people stumble and shuffle. Others sway and swagger. Whether or not you're aware of how you're walking, you reveal your physical and mental state through your gait.

Because young people tend to have more muscle flexibility than older people, they can move faster, giving the appearance of energy and excitement, while people who are depressed or suffer from sore muscles and stiff joints move more slowly and hesitantly.

While both men and women rely on their core muscles to drive their walking, some men walk in a feminine manner, and some women adopt a more masculine walk, most men tend to direct their energy from their upper core, while women lead from their lower core. This simple difference makes a big difference when it comes to the notable differences in masculine and feminine strides (see Figure 10-5).

FIGURE 10-5:
When walking, men lead with their upper body, with little hip movement, whereas women lead with their pelvis, creating a swaying motion.



shock/Adobe Stock

Table 10-1 shows some of the contrasts that you can observe between masculine and feminine walks.

TABLE 10-1:

Masculine and Feminine Walks

	Masculine	Feminine
Arm swing	Drives forward from the upper core. Purposeful. The arm moves forward in sync with opposite leg. Palms face the sides of thighs.	Leads from hips, so there is little forward arm motion. Hand slightly flared outward. Can sometimes swing behind the body.
Hip movement	Little movement. The lumbar spine and pelvis stay neutral.	Active lateral pelvic movement is like a pendulum. The swing foot may cross over the standing foot.
Speed	Strong forward drive. Quick and purposeful. or Wide, based gait. Slow with feet turned out.	Slow paced. Little forward drive.
Foot position	Feet forward.	Feet forward.

In addition to propelling you from point A to point B, walking is one of the best exercises you can do. Not only is it cost-effective – no monthly gym bills or expensive equipment required – the health benefits are worth the effort of putting on your sensible shoes and going for a stroll in the great outdoors. No matter your age, physical state, or mental attitude, a walk can do you good.



TIP

If you feel depressed and drag your feet as you walk along, increase your tempo. A quicker pace can increase your energy and lift your spirits.

- » Projecting an image
- » Putting glasses to good use
- » Dressing up and making up

Chapter **11**

Playing with Props

How you choose to present yourself to your world of colleagues, friends, strangers, and acquaintances determines how they perceive you. People use a plethora of props, such as hats, handbags, shoes, scarves, pens, jewelry, glasses, and makeup, to project their persona. Props – and how you use them – help reveal your character.

The number and types of props you include in your life speak to who you are. Some individuals limit themselves to a minimum of accouterments, while others swathe their bodies with ornaments. By paying attention to how you and others choose and use personal props, you can gain insight into people's personalities.

In this chapter, I look at how you reveal yourself through your choice of props and how you handle them. I also consider the impact of clothes and makeup on interpersonal relationships.

Using Accessories to Reflect Mental States

Whether you're conscious of your behavior or not, when you prop your sunglasses on your head, you're showing a bit of coyness, and when you wear your baseball cap backward – as if you would – you're demonstrating a bit of defiance. When your mother perches her reading glasses at the end of her nose and looks at you over the rim, she's probably demonstrating disapproval. And when your boss repeatedly clicks their pen during your presentation, they are agitated.

Regardless of the purpose for which props are designed (glasses for reading and protecting your eyes from the sun, briefcases and handbags for holding personal and work items, and pens and pencils for writing), how you handle them reflects your internal state. You put things near and in your mouth when you need reassurance – chewing on fingers, pencils, and the stems of your glasses, for example. You check your briefcase and handbag repeatedly to set your mind at rest. You throw things in annoyance. Your moods are revealed by how you handle your props.

Showing inner turmoil

According to psychologist Sigmund Freud, putting objects in or near the mouth is reminiscent of a baby seeking comfort at its mother's breast.

Any gesture – no matter how small – in which you place an object against your lips or mouth is an attempt to relive the sense of security you felt as a suckling babe and is a sign that you need comfort or reassurance (see Figure 11-1). In other words, chewing on the stems of your glasses and chomping on a pencil indicates that all is not at peace in your world. You can gain more information about anxiety-alleviating behaviors in Chapter 6.



FIGURE 11-1:
Sucking on an
object is a
calming gesture
and provides
reassurance.

Daria Rosen/Adobe Stock

Some tension-relieving activities you may observe include

- » **Adjusting clothes:** This action indicates that the person is feeling uncomfortable. If you see someone adjusting their clothes when none are needed, you're correct in thinking they feel tense.
- » **Biting fingernails and cuticles:** This action is similar to the sucking behavior of infants and provides reassurance. The action is also related to putting your hand in front of your mouth to prevent you from expressing a thought or emotion.
- » **Playing with objects:** Jangling change in pockets, clicking a pen, or fiddling with jewelry are deflecting signals indicating nervousness. Touching the objects provides sensory comfort, similar to holding a favorite toy as a child.
- » **Running fingers through hair:** When you're feeling tense and agitated, you may find that your hand goes to your head and your fingers run along your scalp. This is a comforting gesture reminiscent of the hair ruffles or strokes you may have received as a child.
- » **Shaking a shoe:** Nervous energy building up like a pressure cooker has to come out somewhere. Although you may look calm in your upper torso, if you're nervous, anxious, or excited, a jiggling foot gives your game away.

Check out the *Body Language For Dummies* app for some examples of these tension-relieving activities in action.

Pausing for thought

When you need to take time to think something through, you may find yourself rolling a pen between your fingers, taking a sip from your coffee cup, or doodling in your notebook. These behaviors provide comforting sensory stimulation. Sipping and chewing actions provide the reassurance you found as a suckling baby. Behaviors that involve a form of stroking are calming.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Research conducted by Gerard I. Nierenberg and Henry H. Calero, pioneers in the study of nonverbal behavior, show that some people deliberately remove and clean their glasses as many as five times an hour. Video-recordings of intense negotiation sessions show this gesture happening frequently. The people performing this action usually wanted to stall for time while considering whether they'd ask a question, request clarification, or raise more opposition. Nierenberg and Calero also discovered that a person sucking on the earpiece of their glasses during negotiations subconsciously implies that some form of nourishment, probably in the form of more information, is required.



TIP

If you tend to speak first and listen later, put something into your mouth to keep you quiet. This can be the earpiece of the frame of your glasses, pencil, or glass of water. This action gives you time to think about what you want to say before blurting out something you may regret later.

Through the Looking Glasses

As well as improving your vision, glasses can enhance and draw attention to your eyes. They can hide the eyes when the lenses are tinted. As well as helping you to see clearly, they provide a window for others to see into your soul. They can project images of wisdom, intelligence, sexiness, and other personae according to your chosen style. Some people wear glasses with nonprescription lenses for these reasons. They don't need them to improve their vision; they wear them to project an image.

Because of the number of people who wear glasses, this section focuses on the signs to watch for to help you see things more clearly.

Stalling for time

Someone who wants to stall a decision might take off their glasses, clean the lenses, and put them back on again before speaking. Others take their glasses off and suck on the earpiece. This latter gesture frequently appears at the close of a negotiating session when someone's been asked for a decision. When the person puts their glasses back on, they're indicating that they need or want more information.

Scrutinizing the situation

If someone peers over the top of their glasses at you, don't be surprised if you feel scrutinized. Peering down on another person conveys a critical or judgmental attitude. The glasses underscore or highlight the action.

Looking down on another person is intimidating, aggressive, and indicates intense feelings. The person being looked at is put in a lower, subservient position to the person doing the looking.



TIP

If you wear glasses and want to pin someone down without climbing on top of them, drop them to the lower bridge of your nose and peer over them long and hard (see Figure 11-2). This is guaranteed to make the person you're looking at feel put on the spot.

FIGURE 11-2:
Peering over the
top of your
glasses is a sign
of criticism or
judgment.



kellyoptra/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Sunil recently joined a well-established team and was working outside of his comfort zone. At his performance review, he was surprised to receive feedback from peers and subordinates indicating that he was perceived as condescending and confrontational. Exploring his behavior patterns, we noticed several habits that confirmed the feedback. One, in particular, was rather than removing his reading glasses and looking his colleagues straight in the eye, he looks down on them over the top of his glasses. This intimidating behavior was winning him no friends. Recognizing the negative impact of this action and needing his glasses only for reading, he now takes them off whenever he's speaking and listening to his colleagues. While he initially felt vulnerable and exposed without his "glass-fronted barrier," he now understands that he connects better with others when he removes such obstacles.

Controlling the conversation

You can use your glasses to control a conversation. Think of yourself as a conductor. When you want the attention to be on what you're saying, put your glasses on. When you want to demonstrate that you're listening, take them off. To indicate the conversation is over, fold your glasses and put them away.

Showing resistance

Some people take their glasses off quickly in a flash of annoyance or slowly with much deliberation. Both gestures are sure signs of resistance to what's occurring. Someone rejecting a proposal may throw their glasses onto their desk, which might not be the most sensible way to treat an expensive piece of eyewear.

Appearing cool

In the age of Instagram and influencers, sunglasses are ubiquitous. In sunshine and rain, in nightclubs and meetings, these eye protectors block light from the sun and strobes. Because your eyes are one of your primary means of communication, speaking to someone wearing sunglasses is a bit like speaking to the Wizard of Oz. You can hear the person, but you can't see them – which could be just what the wearer wanted.

Perching your sunglasses on your head makes you feel cool and youthful. When you park your shades above your hair line you give the appearance of having a huge pair of doe-like eyes with enticingly enlarged pupils, mimicking the positive effect that big-eyed babies and cuddly toys have on a person (see Figure 11-3). See Chapter 5 for more about the power behind the eyes.



FIGURE 11-3:
One is never too
old to look cool
and youthful.

curto/Adobe Stock

Wearing spectacles in the office

Studies show that people wearing glasses in a business context, whether male or female, are perceived as intelligent, knowledgeable, conservative, and genuine. The heavier the frames of the glasses, the more frequently these descriptions were reported. Business leaders who wear glasses tend to choose heavy frames, which may be why glasses can be seen as power props in a business context.

Unless you work in the fashion industry, highly decorated frames that scream style over substance are not taken seriously in a business environment. Ornate glasses, such as those favored by Elton John in his early days – overly adorned, neon-colored frames – or any frames with rhinestone-encrusted branding could indicate that you're more interested in the latest craze than business. In an office environment, such glasses can quickly and drastically reduce your credibility.

If you wear glasses, consider the shape and size of your face and the look you want to achieve. Optical shops are filled with different styles, silhouettes, sizes, and colors from which you can choose. Your choice of eyewear is endless: round, square, tinted, rimless, aviator, or geometric.



ANECDOTE

Because Maggie has an eye condition known as ophthalmoplegia that causes one of her eyes to droop, she wears large, heavily framed glasses to divert attention from her bad eye and to draw attention instead to her entire face.

Contact lenses make the pupils of your eyes appear large and appealing, moist and dilated. Your eyes look soft and sensual, which although appropriate for a social situation may not always be suitable in your average business context. I'm not saying that you shouldn't wear contact lenses at work. I'm just saying, "beware." In Chapter 19, I look at the benefits of self-awareness.

The perception of women who wear both glasses and makeup (discussed in the following section) is that they're smart, self-assured, urbane, and outgoing – all the more reason for wearing glasses and makeup!

MERYL STREEP'S USE OF GLASSES

Undoubtedly the most versatile and lauded actor of her generation, Meryl Streep knows how to rock a prop to reveal her character's personality. Her use of eyewear to build a character is legendary. For years, actors have resorted to pulling their glasses from their faces to communicate surprise – so much so that audiences expect and relish this action. Streep goes a step further by adding elements of camp and delicacy to take the gesture from cliché to extraordinary.

Playing Katherine Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*, in the 2017 film *The Post*, Streep's use of eyeglasses provided an in-depth glimpse into her character's state of mind. On and off they go with agitation and dismay as Graham starts reading the paper, stops, and unconsciously twirls her glasses in her lap. And as the troubled publisher dozes at her desk, her glasses drape over her arm as if in despair.

In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Streep plays exacting magazine editor Miranda Priestly. Based on Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *Vogue* magazine, whose iconic wearing of sunglasses “. . .to avoid people knowing what you're thinking about. . .,” Streep's use of various spectacles is mesmerizing. While Wintour uses glasses to keep people at bay, Streep uses them to accentuate Miranda's power. Whether she's fondling her ombré sunglasses with a look of contempt as she lowers herself into her limousine or inspecting her unsophisticated new hire, Andy Sachs, over a pair of angular reading glasses, her gestures are clever and commanding. One of the most powerful scenes in the film is when Andy finds Miranda in her hotel room, bare of her glasses and bleary-eyed, as she absorbs the news that her husband has filed for divorce.

Besides using eyeglasses to reveal her character's temperament in the HBO television drama series *Big Little Lies*, Streep exploits additional props to take the viewer deeper into the character's personality. Playing Mary Louise, the hard-done-by mother-in-law of Celeste (Nicole Kidman), Streep confronts Celeste's friend (Reese Witherspoon). With her eyes bulging behind a pair of golden, cat-eyed frames, Streep lifts her necklace from her chest, placing it tightly against her chin, and flicks at its little cross with her finger. A savage display of sanctimony if ever I saw one.

Making It Up as You Go Along

These days, both men and women have the freedom to enhance their image through the use of lotions and potions and by applying subtle makeup without drawing too much attention to themselves.

NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY

Archaeological finds in Iran have revealed that approximately 10,000 years ago, both men and women were avid wearers of makeup. Early examples of facial cosmetics were made from colorful stones, animal skin, shells, bones, and teeth. Men and women of the Kermani tribe used white powder made from lead or silver as a foundation, highlighting their cheeks with a red powder made from hematite stone.

Both men and women wore makeup with enthusiasm. Men applied their cosmetics with such care that it was often difficult to tell them apart from the women. Surena, the fifth-century BCE Iranian chieftain known for his bravery and fearlessness, used to decorate his face for battle with such finesse that even his enemies were surprised.

Although it is well documented that men regularly wore makeup, little proof existed that the same was true for women until masks and statues were discovered in Khuzestan. These masks had eyebrows that were elongated and painted black. The lips and cheeks had a rose tint, and a painted line extended from below the eyes to the eyebrows.

As personal adornment became more important, water, which the early cave-dwellers used for viewing themselves, was no longer a satisfactory solution. The Iranians discovered a material that accurately reflected a person's likeness when melted, shaped, polished, and formed into sheets. These early mirrors were also highly decorated, often with beautiful mythological images.

Makeup at the office

Studies consistently show that businesswomen who wear makeup advance further and faster in their careers than women who don't. This isn't to say that a woman should apply her makeup with a trowel for the office environment. Save that for clubbing and hot nights out. Office makeup is meant to enhance a woman's image and to be applied so that the wearer looks healthy, not overdone (see Figure 11-4).

Cosmetics for play

At times, a guy and a gal want to put on the Ritz, strut their stuff, and show the world what they're made of. Most women – and some men – apply makeup to enhance what they've already got. They exaggerate their leisure-time look by making their lips more prominent, emphasizing their eyes, and gearing their clothes and accessories toward fun and frivolity (see Figure 11-5).

FIGURE 11-4:
Natural-looking
makeup
enhances a
woman's
professional
appearance.



Nicholas Felix/peopleimages.com/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 11-5:
Glamorous
makeup
enhances a
woman's
sensuality which
is inappropriate
for a corporate
environment.



Charlie Octavia/Wirestock Creators/Adobe Stock

Dressing the Part

You can't ignore the importance of your appearance and personal presentation if you want to succeed. Dressing appropriately for your shape and size, hair, skin and eye coloring, and the role you're playing or for which you're auditioning demonstrates that you recognize the value of presenting yourself as you wish to be perceived. You feel confident when you're dressed for success. You look credible. People are drawn to the positive energy that you exude when your clean clothes fit and the colors flatter.

Your choice of accessories and how you put them together reveal how you perceive yourself and how you want to be perceived (see Figure 11-6). If you can afford to invest in high-quality items, do. Cost and quality often go hand in hand. Even on a tight budget, you can find pieces that have your name all over them. Charity and secondhand shops are gold mines for finding just the right piece, as are online stores like Amazon, eBay, and Etsy.

FIGURE 11-6:
Wearing simple, tailored clothes in an office environment creates a professional appearance.



Africa Studio/Adobe Stock

Women's accessories

Forget about fashion and follow the styles that work best for you. Although leggings and smocked tops can look great on women at play or working in creative industries, they're out of place in a corporate environment. While tailored suits and high-heeled pumps are appropriate office attire, leave the open-toed, sling-back heels, short skirts and crop tops, and flip-flops at home. These provocative items are fine for a date but not the office.

Excessive jewelry is also out of place in the legal and corporate worlds. Dangly earrings are distracting, as are a wrist full of bracelets and fingers covered in rings. Stick to a few classic pieces if you want to be seen as professional. However, if you adhere to the advice of fashion guru Iris Apfel, forget that advice and pile it on!



ANECDOTE

One of my first clients was a woman in her mid-twenties working as a designer for an international chemical company in the north of England. Being a creative type, she went to work wearing dangly earrings, long skirts, and boho blouses. She was excellent at her job and couldn't understand why she wasn't getting the promotions she believed she deserved. Together, we explored her dress choice's impact on her career. Her clothes and accessories were out of place in a male-dominated, industrial environment. Recognizing how her lack of awareness was holding her back, she agreed to save her comfortable clothes for out-of-office hours and wear more simple and tailored clothes to work. Although she fought this change in principle, she discovered that she had several different styles of dress that she felt comfortable wearing and that reflected her at her personal and professional best.

Men's accessories

Your work and play environment determines what's appropriate to wear. Gold chains hanging around your neck are fine if you're a DJ, bartender, or musician. On the other hand, if you work in politics, professional services, or the corporate world, leave the jewelry at home, except for a classic watch and wedding or signet ring.

Accessories need to be simple, clean, and in good repair. Too much pattern on a tie confuses the eye and may draw negative responses. Choose a plain color or simple stripe instead. A frayed belt, scuffed shoes, and stain-splattered jacket look unkempt as if you can't be bothered to look after them. This is not a look that reflects you at your best.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin dress to highlight their positions in relation to the conflicts between their two countries. Putin wears sharp blue suits, crisp white shirts, and solid-colored ties, presenting an image of a businessperson. Zelensky dons an army-green T-shirt and combat-style trousers, showing that he's a warrior, ready for battle.



REMEMBER

If you want to advance in your career, dress appropriately for your body shape and coloring. Making an effort with your appearance and dressing appropriately for your environment is a vital career skill. Whether you're working in advertising, the music industry, or investment banking, if you want to advance your career, look at the people who have the jobs above you and note how they dress. If you're serious about sharpening your image, work with an image consultant to help you find the shapes and colors that suit you best. The money you spend could make a big difference in how you feel about yourself, which is an investment worth making.

4

Putting the Body into Social and Business Context

IN THIS PART . . .

Using space and distance to your advantage.

The body language of love.

Let your body help you land your dream job.

Take your body language on the road.

- » Fitting into your space
- » Staking your claim
- » Positioning yourself to your best advantage

Chapter **12**

Being Aware of Space and Distance

If you've ever bumped into a stranger on the street, been squashed on a rush hour bus, or been kissed by someone you rather hadn't kissed you, you've experienced space invasion. Unless invited, it feels a bit creepy when the wrong person gets too close, whereas it feels more comfortable when the distance is right.

In this chapter, you look at the different areas of space around you. You discover why what feels comfortable at ten paces feels different at one. You discover why cohorts sit side by side and adversaries sit face to face. Finally, you see how you position yourself, whether upright, supine, or simply off-kilter, impacts how you feel and the impression you make.

Understanding the Effect of Space

How you fill and move within space impacts your thoughts, feelings, and how others perceive you. People who know where to position themselves in relation to someone else control the interaction. They sense when to get up close and personal and when to back off. They recognize the different implications between

standing so close to an individual that you can smell their breath and standing so far away that you have to squint to see one another. By knowing where and how to place yourself in relation to someone else, you can consciously control the interaction.

Territorial perimeters aren't just a matter of manners. Foreign invaders, rival gangs, trespassers, burglars, pushy bullies, and aggressive drivers all know that their invasion into another's territory can be met with varying degrees of resistance. Zoologist Desmond Morris sees humans as competitive as well as cooperative creatures. As humans strive for dominance, systems must be established to avoid chaos. Territorial perimeters represent a cooperative system whereby everyone knows and respects one another's space.

Figure 12-1 shows an example of personal space that has been invaded.

FIGURE 12-1:
By placing her left hand on the man's shoulder, her hand on his desk, looking at his computer screen, and leaning forward, this woman is invading his personal space.



FOTOGRIIN/Shutterstock

A man is said to be the king of their castle. As a reigning sovereign, whether your castle is a flat in the heart of the city, a country farmhouse, or a caravan, you know you have the right to dominate your territory. When someone enters your space without being invited, you may feel a little edgy. Whether someone is subject to fighter planes attacking from above or their mother bursting into their room, the person whose space has been invaded will probably fight back.

Although you may feel perfectly calm, confident, and comfortable in one environment, your feelings may change in another. Say that you work in your own office. You feel comfortable and in control of your environment because you're in familiar surroundings. Then you're called into your boss's office. Suddenly, the comfort level changes. You're now entering someone else's territory, and the control shifts from you to the person whose space you've penetrated. Your body language changes from dominant to submissive without you even realizing it.

Knowing Your Space

Humans have circles around them, ranging from no space at all (touching) to too far away to touch. As with animals, humans protect their territory by following accepted codes of behavior. Whereas birds sing to proclaim their dominance over a particular part of a hedgerow, and dogs lift their legs to stake claim to a lamp-post, humans indicate through their body movements what they perceive to be their territory and to what degree others may penetrate it.

The five zones

In his book, *The Hidden Dimension*, American anthropologist Edward T. Hall, defines *proxemics* as the study of the human use of space within the context of culture. Understanding that cultural influences affect how people move within their space and how much space a person is comfortable with, Hall divides space into five distinct areas (see Figure 12-2). Your relationship with another person determines how near you allow that person to come to you. (You can find out more about culture and space in Chapter 15.)

Hall demarcates five concentric spatial zones that affect behavior:

- » **Close intimate (0–15 centimeters/0–6 inches):** This space is saved for lovers, close friends, and family members. Close intimate is a position for the most intimate behaviors, including touching, embracing, and kissing.
- » **Intimate (15–45 centimeters/6–18 inches):** Lovers, friends, and relatives are welcome in this space. The distance is comfortable and secure. If a stranger, someone you don't know well, or someone you don't like enters this space, you feel uncomfortable, and your body reacts protectively.
- » **Personal (45 centimeters–1.2 meters/18 inches–4 feet):** For most Westerners, this distance is the most comfortable for personal conversations. If you step too far into the space, the other person may feel threatened. If you stand outside the space, the other person can feel rebuffed.

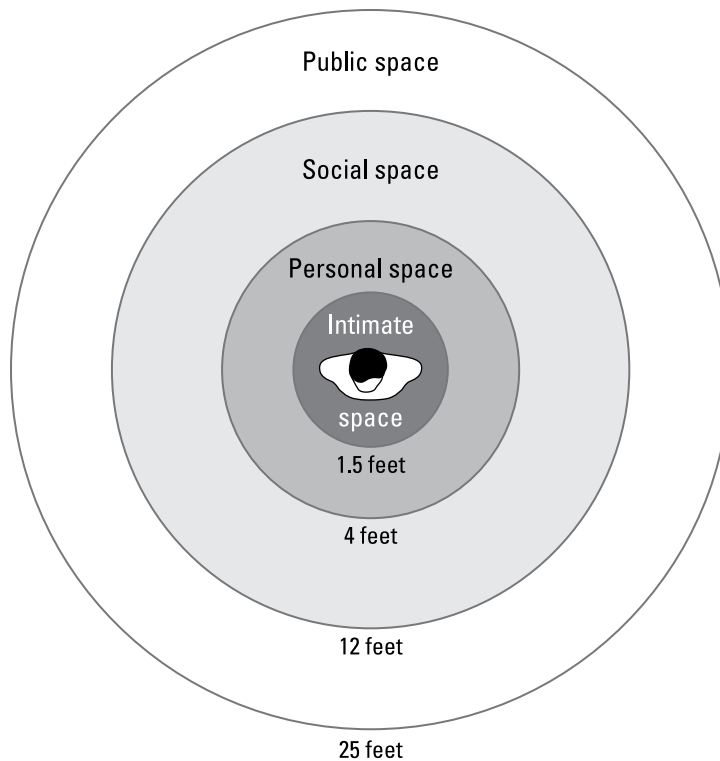


FIGURE 12-2:
Spatial zones
impact how
people engage
with one another.

- » **Social (1.2–3.6 meters/4–12 feet):** When you're in a business-based interaction with shop assistants and tradespeople, you feel most comfortable in this area. You're perceived as being too familiar if you stand within the inner ring. You're perceived as rude and standoffish if you stand outside the outer ring.
- » **Public (3.6 meters +/12 feet +):** If you're speaking to an audience in a formal setting, the distance between yourself and the first row is in the public space. Any closer and you feel intruded upon, and your communication feels cramped. Any farther away and you feel distanced from your listeners, making it harder to connect with them.



How you manage your space determines how others respond. Being clear about how far a person may come into your territory makes it easier for others to recognize your boundaries and behave accordingly.

Other territorial positions

In addition to your space bubble's five concentric circles, you have another set of territorial positions that are private and personal to you:

- » **Inner space:** Your internal thoughts and feelings
- » **Immediate outer space:** Friends, family, close colleagues
- » **Public arena:** The larger world in which you interact with an assortment of people

Space and status work proportionally. Presidents, senior partners, and chief executives require numerous resources, including space. Lower-status individuals require less. If in doubt, consider the CEO's office with its mahogany desk and comfortable seating arrangement around a fireplace, and compare it to the workspace afforded to an IT assistant. Or, consider the space the Pope requires as opposed to what a small-town priest needs.

Someone who has many people taking up much of their time occasionally draws into their inner space for quiet contemplation. Executives, politicians, busy parents, professionals, and the ubiquitous celebrity need time alone to recharge their batteries.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Big personalities fill their space with their movements. For example, they hold their arms farther from their bodies than quieter people. Their gestures are frequent and definite, and they move with purpose. People whose personalities are more internally directed use fewer and smaller gestures.



REMEMBER

You can spot a person's status by how much personal space they require. The more space expected and offered, the higher the status.

REALITY TV?

The media has brought strangers into our lives to such an extent that some people believe they know or have a personal relationship with actors, reporters, and performers. Actors frequently tell stories of being treated as if they were the characters they portray rather than themselves and are frequently asked for legal or medical advice. The fans infiltrate these actors' private space based on their perceptions of them garnered from their public persona.

Because television comes directly into a person's private space and brings its characters with it, some viewers believe they have a relationship with an actor or reporter because they've spent time together at home.

Using Space

Whether protecting your property, demonstrating dominance, or showing submission, how you move in your space indicates your attitude. Touch an object and you're saying, "This is mine." Turn away from it and you're saying, "No, thanks."

Demonstrating ownership

When you use your hands to lead and guide another person, you're taking control. Your behavior becomes dominant and protective as you touch what is yours and what you value. When you lead another person by the hand, guide someone by placing your hand on their back, or stand close to your partner and put your hand on their upper arm, you're demonstrating that you own or are in control of that piece of property.



ANECDOTE

Mary and Hank are masters of self-branding and have perfected the proprietorial pose. Whether they are walking, standing, or sitting side by side, they are often spotted touching and holding hands – signs of belonging together. Mary demonstrates her dominant role in their relationship by how she guides her husband, placing her hand on the small of his back or pulling him by the arm when she wants him to head in a particular direction.



TRY THIS

If someone you don't know comes to your home or office, you can demonstrate ownership and dominance by leaning against your door frame in a proprietorial manner (see Figure 12-3).

Showing submission

Entering a foreign environment frequently causes most people to feel uncomfortable and to act in a submissive way. They wait to be invited to sit, refrain from touching objects in the space, and contain their gestures. As soon as they feel at ease, their body language opens up.



ANECDOTE

Aiko's boss, Nick, suggested that Aiko and I work together to develop her influencing skills. A potential high flyer, Aiko's body language was letting her down. Rather than projecting confidence and credibility by owning her space, she ducked her head, hunched her shoulders, and pulled into herself, adopting a submissive pose and coming across as doubtful and insecure. When Aiko recognized the impact of her body language, she took the necessary steps toward change and now enjoys sharing the best version of herself with clients and colleagues.

FIGURE 12-3: By standing in the doorway and leaning against the frame with his arms crossed, this man is indicating that the space belongs to him.



Svitlana/Adobe Stock



TIP

If you purposely want to show submission, close your body by pulling your arms in close and keeping your hands to yourself. If, on the other hand, you want to convey dominance, use expansive gestures. The way you fill your space demonstrates your sense of self (see Figure 12-4).

FIGURE 12-4: Standing agitatedly demonstrates dominance.



alfa27/Adobe Stock

Guarding your space

In addition to clarifying ownership of people and possessions, people jealously guard the space immediately surrounding them. Humans create an invisible bubble around themselves within which they function. Placing objects between yourself and others, spreading your arms across your desk, and wrapping your arms around yourself are all ways of guarding your personal space.

In normal circumstances, most people respect one another's personal territory. And there are times when they don't. You might understandably feel uncomfortable when someone invades your territory without your permission. Fortunately, even when your personal space is invaded, you can still find ways to limit the intrusion. Consider these examples:

- » Turning your head away
- » Avoiding eye contact
- » Pulling into yourself



ANECDOTE

At the end of the first day of the conference, Liz and Ben were discussing business over dinner. Nguyễn, a larger-than-life character and conference attendee, saw Liz and Ben and tried to gain their attention. The closer he came to their table, gesturing grandly in recognition, the more the pair kept to themselves. They turned their bodies toward one another, leaned closer, and continued their conversation without ever making eye contact with their colleague. Later, they saw Nguyễn sitting by himself, by which time they were ready to invite him to enter their space and invited him to join them for coffee and a chat.

Revealing your comfort level

How near, how far, and at what angle you position yourself in relation to someone else indicates how relaxed you feel with that person. Sitting comfortably among friends, you probably sit close to one another. Your body leans toward them and your eyes are engaged. Among people you'd rather avoid, your body angles away. You avoid eye contact and pull back. You're making it clear that you don't want to connect.

Putting distance and objects between yourself and another person can make for an awkward conversation. Stand too far away and you may come across as standoffish. Get too close and you may be perceived as intrusive. Some people like to put objects and distance between themselves and others as a protective barrier. Others like to burrow in and connect.



ANECDOTE

When Mary arrived at the conference center where she was scheduled to speak, she was surprised to discover that her session had been moved to the large auditorium rather than a small meeting room as she'd expected. As the delegates entered the room, they sat at the back and slumped in their seats, leaving rows of empty chairs between the speaker and themselves. When Mary encouraged them to come to the front of the room, they declined, stating that only directors and senior managers sit in the front rows. Mary stepped down from the stage, walked to the middle of the auditorium, and spoke from there. By meeting them on their territory, she built trust with the delegates and soon got them to come to the front of the room. When she got them to pretend to be directors, they laughed and sat up with a sense of pride. For more about building trust and creating rapport, pick up a copy of *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).



TIP

Your personal space is bound to be infiltrated at times, such as on a crowded bus, in a packed elevator, or at a busy bar. Except for those who enjoy pressing the flesh, most people make an effort to pull apart in crowded conditions. If there's no way out, you must endure the discomfort as long as only your shoulders and upper arms make contact. If someone goes further, feel free to scream!

Maintaining your personal space

The next time you're at the doctor or hairdresser or are waiting at the boarding gate for a flight, observe where people sit. Normally, you find a row or more of chairs. The first person usually plops down at one end or the other. The next person to enter sits halfway down the row. Both are a socially comfortable distance from one another – neither too close to appear invasive nor too far away to seem standoffish. The third person sits at the free end, the fourth between the middle and end position, and so on, until eventually, someone is forced to sit next to another person.

STANDING IN A BUBBLE

When British people queue – or stand in a line – they envelop themselves in an invisible space bubble. Each person has their own bubble, and on a good day, everyone respects each other's territory. Interestingly, crowded conditions, such as those found on a rush-hour bus, subway, or train, lead people to ignore one another. According to the late psychologist and author Robert Sommer, in crowded conditions, people imagine that someone invading their personal space is inanimate. Therefore, no need exists to relay any social signals. The larger the crowd, the less individual body movement. People's faces reflect blank and expressionless, indicating that communication is not being sought. They avoid eye contact by staring at the ceiling or the floor (see Figure 12-5).

FIGURE 12-5:
When people
are in crowded
conditions, they
tend to ignore
the people
around them.



moodboard/Adobe Stock

Considering Seating Arrangements

Seating positions should never happen by chance. When planning a dinner party or a special event, good hosts spend a great deal of energy deciding where their guests should sit. The position in which you're placed reflects your status and impacts people's perception of you.

If you're at an event where no seating arrangement has been determined, notice who's drawn to whom. Where people place themselves in relation to you signals how they view your relationship and how much cooperation you can expect from them.



TIP

Before you seat yourself or direct others where you want them to sit, think about the individual interactions you want to facilitate.

Speaking in a relaxed setting

Sitting with the corner of a rectangular table between you and another person encourages relaxed, friendly conversation. You can clearly see one another, and

there's plenty of room for gesturing. This position also denotes an even space division with both people on an equal footing.

Cooperating

When you work on a task with another person, or if you find that you and someone else think along the same lines, you're more than likely to find yourselves sitting side by side. Most people intuitively sit in this configuration when they're working on a joint project with someone else. This position enables you to look easily at your partner and get a revealing close-up of their facial expressions and body movements.



REMEMBER

Whenever you're influencing people, always aim to see their point of view, make them feel at ease in your company, and ensure that they feel good about working with you. You gain more cooperation by sitting in the corner – the cooperative position – than by placing yourself in the combative position, in which conversations are shorter and sharper. (You can find out more about strategic positioning in *Communication Skills For Dummies*.)

Combating and defending

Placing yourself across a table from another person sets up a barrier and a potentially hostile or defensive atmosphere. If you find yourself in this position, don't be surprised if you fold your hands at chest level. You're just preparing yourself for what could be coming next.



TIP

In a business scenario, if you want to set up a challenging or competitive atmosphere, sit people directly across the table from one another. On the other hand, this is a positive position in a social situation, such as a dinner party or in a restaurant, because it enables conversation.

LAYING IT ON THE TABLE

Different table shapes and sizes affect mood, intention, and outcomes. If you want to create an informal, relaxed atmosphere where people feel equally powerful and prominent, place them at a round table. Square tables are usually found in the company cafeteria and are good for having short, direct conversations. A rectangular desk is effectively used for business activities, short conversations, and reprimands. If you want to offer a dominant position to a favored few, seat them at the ends of a rectangular table. Whichever table you pick, make sure that the high-status individuals sit facing the door, not with their backs to it.

Keeping to yourself

If two people don't want to interact with one another, they sit at the farthest ends of the table, diagonally across from one another. This position is typical in a library when two people share a reading table.

The expression “diametrically opposed” comes from this seating position and implies lack of interest, indifference, or hostility. If you want to keep the discussions open between you and others, mind the gap and come a little bit closer.

Creating equality

King Arthur's Round Table empowered his knights with equal authority and status. No one was in a lesser, weaker, or more dominant position than anyone else. Each knight could claim the same amount of table territory as his compatriot, and everyone could be seen easily. The circle symbolizes unity and strength, and sitting in a circle promotes this effect (see Figure 12-6).



FIGURE 12-6:
A round table
promotes
discussion and
collegiality.

ASDF/Adobe Stock

Although the model of King Arthur's Round Table promotes equality, who sits where in relation to the perceived leader denotes positions of status and power, affecting the dynamics within the group. People sitting on either side of the highest-status and most-powerful person in the room hold the next level of power. The person on the right of the high-status person is granted more power than the

person on the left. The farther away from the high-status person, the more diminished the power. The person sitting directly across from the highest-status person is placed in the competitive position and is most likely to challenge the leader.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

You can identify the power distribution within a family by its dining table. Strange, but true. Families that encourage their members to share their opinions and points of view prefer round tables. Families with an authoritarian at the helm opt for the hard corners of rectangular tables.

Orientating Yourself

Stand up, and you think one way. Lie down, and you think another. Whether you're standing at attention or slouching in your chair, you feel, think, and behave differently.

Horizontally

People in a supine position find that their thinking process is expansive. Their thoughts are free and fluid. In an upright position, thoughts are sharper, clearer, and more coherent. You need both styles of thinking to fully explore all possibilities.

Vertically

A person positioning themselves lower than you – whether bowing, curtseying, or laying prostrate at your feet – is demonstrating their subordination. Someone standing above you is demonstrating their dominance. Whether you position yourself high or low, you're telling people where you belong in the pecking order. Kings and queens are referred to as “Your Highness.” Crooks, robbers, and other unsavory characters are labeled “low lives.” People talk about the “upper classes” and the “lower classes.” The higher up you go in the pecking order, the more perceived status and authority you have. The lower down the scale, the less influence you wield.



TRY THIS

To carry out this exercise, you need a partner. Ask your colleague to lie on the floor, giving you a height advantage while you stand over them, looking down into their face. Tell-off the person lying on the floor as loudly and powerfully as you can. Reverse positions and repeat the reprimand. While commanding from a subservient position, don't be surprised if your formerly forceful voice lacks muscle and clout.

Lowering yourself

In order to demonstrate deference, a man removes his hat or tips his head when meeting someone in a position of higher authority. Women curtsy as a sign of respect when meeting royalty. Men and women genuflect or bow their heads upon entering a church and kneel for prayer. Beggars sit on the ground. When their eyes look downward, they're at their lowest.

Short people suffer the indignity of being looked down upon. Because of their lack of height, their credibility is often overlooked. Women are particularly susceptible to interruption and being talked over in meetings. In order to make up for their lack of height, these people must behave with strength, command authority, and demonstrate gravitas. Filling their space by standing up, holding their arms slightly away from their bodies, and gesturing with clear intention creates an image of confidence, control, and commitment. For some, high heels and lipstick help, too. (See Chapter 11 for makeup tips.)



REMEMBER

The more subordinate a person feels, the lower they position their body. That being said, when a student or employee enters your office, and you sit while they stand, you're demonstrating your power over them, even though you're in a lower vertical position. Think about it. The commanding officer doesn't rise when the junior lieutenant enters the officers' mess.

Sometimes, lowering yourself can raise your status. When you ease yourself into a chair in front of the neighborhood bully, you're demonstrating that you're at ease in that person's territory. By touching their belongings and settling into their space, you're indicating that although they may claim the territory, you're comfortable settling in. This behavior can be perceived as dominant or even aggressive, so have a plan B before entering the lair.

Japanese businesses instruct staff members to bow at different angles, depending on the status of the customer. A browsing customer receives a 15-degree bow, whereas the buying customer is awarded up to a 45-degree bow. (See more about cultural influences on body language in Chapter 15.)

Elevating yourself

An Olympic gold medalist stands on a podium above the other medal winners, and the judge sits above his court. To live in the penthouse is to live above and look down upon the crowd. People in high places are looked up to and seen as superior. Finding the senior partner's or chief executive's office in the basement would be most unusual.

Clients frequently ask me how to project an elevated image when they're not tall. One female client who is barely 5 feet in her stocking feet tells me that she pretends she's tall. Instead of straining and struggling to gain attention, she puts her efforts into visualising herself as a towering figure who fills her space and commands attention. By acting the part, she radiates the appearance (see Figure 12-7). And she always wears high heels at work.

FIGURE 12-7:
High heels project more power and authority than flat shoes and slippers.



Pixel-Shot/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Because of the nature of their careers, many of my clients appear on television. One of my shorter male clients consistently received feedback that although he was knowledgeable, he lacked credibility and gravitas on camera. Reviewing his tapes, I devised a strategy for future public appearances to ensure increased authority and presence. If he had to stand behind a lectern, it was to be low enough for his chest to show. Cameras were to be angled to give him the appearance of greater height. I coached him to look directly to the camera so that his viewing public felt that he was speaking to them individually, and he wore dark, single-breasted suits that elongated his body. His television performances have improved dramatically, and he demonstrates increased comfort and gravitas.

THINK TALL

Except for movie stars – who tend to be small although the screen makes them look big – tall people experience more success, better health, and longer lives than short people. Research teams led by University of Florida professor Timothy A. Judge and professor Daniel M. Cable of the University of North Carolina analyzed data from four independent U.S. and U.K. projects, following approximately 8,500 participants from their teens through adulthood. These and other related research projects show that tall people have greater self-esteem and social confidence than shorter people. Tall people are perceived to be more authoritative and in command. The physical action of looking up toward someone elicits feelings of respect. The person in the limelight responds with feelings of confidence. Looking down on another person instills a sense of superiority on the viewer's part and submission on the person being looked at. These findings show that women who opt for high heels and short men who slide lifts in their shoes understand the power and impact of height.

Asymmetrically

If you're sitting at your desk and your left elbow is resting on your tabletop while your right hand is placed on your hip, you're sitting in an *asymmetrical pose*. Unlike a symmetrical pose in which corresponding body parts mirror one another, the asymmetrical position is two different poses indicating two different mindsets. A straight, symmetrical posture is clear in its intent. Asymmetrical positions hold intrigue. Because of its complexity, asymmetrical posture reveals more about a person than symmetrical posture.

Someone standing or sitting upright with their mouth closed and eyes staring straight ahead gives little away. Someone whose facial expressions and body movements are frequent and fluid reveals more. When your torso and limbs are in contrasting positions, your body is more expressive and effusive than when in a poker-like position.

BALANCING THE ASYMMETRICAL BODY

Studies of neuromuscular therapy and yoga provide insights into how humans stand, sit, and gesture. The bottom line is that your body movements impact your ability to live a healthy and balanced life. Yoga practitioners aim to create harmony by synchronizing their body's outer shell with their inner soul. They call this synchronization "the dawning of the light of the spirit." The diagonal pull of gravity resulting from carrying heavy bags, sitting on one buttock, lifting heavy boxes, and hoisting children onto a shoulder puts your body into asymmetrical positions. Some sets of muscles work overtime while others slacken, leading to discomfort, misalignment, and a body all akimbo.

In his poem "Boy and Top," Mexican poet and Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz writes, "Each time he spins it / It lands, precisely / At the centre of the world."

Like a top, your body has a center of gravity that it continuously seeks as your body's muscles work to keep you aligned. Because no one is perfectly symmetrical, your muscles pull in one direction or the other, side to side, front to back, away from or toward your center. Any misalignment in the body causes one part to overstretch while another part underperforms. As the muscles pull and contract, they create an illusion of symmetry to create balance.

Back pain is common for couch potatoes and marathon runners alike. When the upper-right thoracic muscles contract because of a slight curvature of the spine, the lower-left lumbar muscles also contract because they're pulled in a counter direction. So that's what's happening! Pilates, ballet, and yoga are safe forms of exercise for stretching and strengthening the muscles. As the practitioners say, "First you lengthen, then you strengthen." No matter what your age, marital status, or financial worth, a fit, firm, and flexible body can be yours.

- » Catching a person's eye
- » Indicating your interest
- » Following the rules

Chapter **13**

Rating, Dating, and Mating: Sensual and Sexual Body Language

Try flirting without using body language. Go on, give it a go. Surprise, surprise! It can't be done. Whether you're straight, lesbian, gay, bi, trans, or other, you simply can't convey carnal interest without the body getting into the act. If your facial expressions and physical gestures fail to participate in the process, you'll never experience a satisfying flirt.

When you're feeling good about yourself, your body becomes alert. Your posture straightens, your eyes twinkle, your mouth muscles engage, and your shoulders, hips, and hands move freely. When you spot someone you want to snag, you turn your powerhouse of sensuality toward them. Once you've caught their attention, you shift gears to maintain interest and increase attraction. Your body movements are focused and fluid throughout the process, demonstrating comfort, ease, and interest.

In this chapter, I explore the wide, wild world of seduction and explain how flirting and putting yourself out there can put a big smile on a person's face.

Attracting Someone's Attention

I'm willing to bet that when you're in the company of someone you find appealing, you engage all your muscles – consciously or not – thereby conveying health, vitality, and a lively interest in them.

Regardless of sexual preferences, men, for the most part, tend to stand taller, lift their chins, and expand their chests, making them look strong and powerful, whereas women tend to tilt their heads, self-preen, and expose their wrists and necks, demonstrating vulnerability and submissiveness.



TIP

To avoid stereotyping men and women, consider the behaviors being described throughout this chapter as masculine/feminine. Some men demonstrate feminine behaviors. Some women demonstrate masculine behaviors. If you want to understand what's going on, pay attention to the behaviors, regardless of the participant's gender.

When you find another person attractive, your eyes dilate, and other than shining a bright light in your eyes, you can do nothing to stop it from happening. (For details, check out “Recognizing dilated pupils: A universal sign of attraction” later in this chapter.) If things go as planned, the recipient of your gaze responds similarly. See Figure 13-1.

FIGURE 13-1: This couple's similar behavior – eye contact, head tilts, and smiles – are signs of flirtation. His left hand touching her right cheek confirms what's going on.



NDABCREATIVITY/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Richard went for a walk one day after work. Feeling a bit down and out, he walked slowly, looking at the ground in front of him with his arms across his chest, hunched shoulders, and bent head. At one point, he looked up and noticed an attractive woman coming toward him with a smile on her face and a bounce in her step. Without thinking, he adjusted his posture to reflect hers by lifting his chest, squaring his shoulders, and establishing eye contact. His energy heightened, and he began feeling lighter and more positive as he noticed the woman continuing to look and smile at him. Before he knew it, he was smiling back. Although tempted to stop and engage her in a flirtatious conversation, he thought of his wife and young family at home and walked on by with a hint of a grin, feeling uplifted as he reflected on his and the mystery woman's brief encounter.



TIP

You don't have to look like Tom Ford, Ryan Gosling, Portia de Rossi, or Kate Winslet to project attractiveness. A willingness of spirit, a spring in your step, a twinkle in your eye, and a smile on your face are all you need to come across as both desirable and available.



REMEMBER

When you're rating someone's attractiveness, and in turn, are being rated, messages that convey interest, keenness, and compatibility are relayed through posture, gestures, and facial expressions. Regardless of age, ability, fitness, or sexual preference, no one's immune to checking out other people.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you go courting:

» **When a man and a woman are flirting, the woman usually takes the lead:**

Research shows that 90 percent of the time, women initiate the first move in the mating game. To this day, I can hear my parents: "Nice girls wait for the man to make the first move." Well, apparently not. Women go for it. Men simply respond. Through a series of subtle expressions and movements (including covert smiles, eye contact, and gestures that accentuate their femininity), women send out signals of interest. If a woman's a good flirt, the man in her sights thinks that he's taking the lead, although in fact, he's merely dancing to her tune

» **The rating, dating, and mating ritual is a complicated process.** The process is rather like ballroom dancing in which you follow a series of steps, moving in time with your partner. To succeed in the ritual, both parties must decode the other person's signals and either accept or reject them.

» **Men aren't as good at reading the signals as women:** Both straight and gay men tend to misinterpret simple, ordinary friendly behavior for sexual interest. Filled with *testosterone*, a hormone that encourages dominant behavior, increases sexual interest, and rises in the face of a challenge, a man might hunger for an evening of hot sex when all a woman has in mind is dinner and a movie.

- » **Availability counts more than beauty:** Some people pursue others who may not be the most attractive as long as they convey availability. A beautiful person with all the right physical attributes is left on the shelf if they don't appear to be interested. In a contest between looks and signals, signals win, hands down.
- » **Flirting is the same, regardless of sexual preference:** Regardless of your sexuality, there are no significant gender differences in flirting behaviors. The differences exist primarily in detection, interpretation, and motivations.

The stages of seduction

When you see someone who captures your interest, you go through a predictable pattern of behaviors intended to present yourself at your most appealing and to capture the other person's attention. These autoerotic behaviors, also known as flirting, are open and inviting. They include the following:

- » **Alert posture.** Regardless of gender, culture, or sexual preferences, when a person sees someone they find attractive, the first thing they do is to pull in their stomachs, drop their shoulders back, put their chests out, hold their heads up, and depending on whether they're feeling dominant or submissive, lift or lower their chins.
- » **Eye contact.** While all people rely on eye contact to demonstrate interest, men and women use eye contact differently. A woman spots someone she finds attractive and waits for that person to notice her. Once that happens, she looks the person directly in the eye for 3–5 seconds and then looks away. The object of her interest watches to see what she does next. She re-establishes eye contact and then at least one more time. When a man sees someone who catches his eye, he glances at their body first. After he makes eye contact with the object of his pursuit, he slightly narrows his eyes and holds the gaze somewhat longer than he normally would, indicating his interest. Eye contact is the most utilized nonverbal behavior. It requires little effort, is less risky than other behaviors, and communicates effectively. Coy behavior – a conservative approach to flirting in which a person dips their head and looks away – is mostly associated with women and serves as a solution to expressing a woman's feelings without sully her reputation.
- » **Preen.** Both men and women self-groom in the presence of someone they find desirable. They display their sexuality through open body positions, including tilted heads, expanded chests, and a forward lean. Signals of sexual interest include licking their lips, running their hands through their hair, adjusting their clothing, and shifting their bodies to face one another and close the physical gap between them.

- » **Mirror.** When you fancy someone, you tend to establish rapport with them by mirroring their behaviors. This includes (and is not limited to) laughing when they do, using similar gestures and facial expressions, and moving in rhythm with each other. Throughout this book, I share techniques for establishing rapport, a skill that serves you well both in the boardroom and the bedroom.
- » **Touch.** A light brush of a hand, a palm placed on the small of your back, or a bumping of shoulders as you lean toward one another are all autoerotic signals. When you're ready to touch, begin slowly, touching them on the arm, which is less intimate than touching someone on the hand. If they don't pull away, you can progress to their hand. If they continue to allow you to touch them, you may place your hand on their back or around their waist. If a woman – or a man, for that matter – pulls away from your touch, back off. If they return your touch, you can count yourself lucky. (In Chapter 8, you will find more tips about touching).



WARNING

For a straight man, initiating a conversation with a woman you find attractive can be a minefield. Cute, flippant, and direct pick-up lines like, “Is it hot in here, or is it just you?” can win you a sneer and a deaf ear, while an innocuous line like, “What did you think of the concert?” is better. Men chatting up other men tend to be more direct in expressing their interest.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Because gay men sometimes have more sexual motivations underlying flirting than women, they tend to use verbal and physical signals during the process. Therefore, flirtatious interactions between homosexual men tend to be quite brief and verbally direct. Women – both straight and lesbian – tend to rely primarily on their bodies to convey their messages.

BEING SEXUALLY APPEALING AND AVAILABLE

Research consistently shows that regardless of sexual preference, you don't have to be a natural beauty to attract someone's attention as long as you display signs of willingness and availability. People are attracted to healthy-looking individuals who demonstrate sexual appetite and availability. In heterosexual couples, men see a woman's fit, firm body as a sign of good health, an ability to make them feel excited and filled with a sense of mystery, and providing them with heirs. Heterosexual women see a man's lithe and muscular body as a sign of power, signaling his ability to provide for and protect her and her children. In same-sex relationships, men often view a fit body as a vehicle for sex, while women are more interested in having fun and developing a relationship.



TIP

You may not have thought that so much choreography exists in the initial stages of courtship and that these steps seem inconsequential. They're not. Without going through these five stages, which take only a few moments at most, flirting stops before it begins.

Highlighting gender differences

People who want to attract attention emphasize their physical attributes to make themselves sexually attractive and appealing (see Figure 13-2). It's not unusual for women to pout, arch their backs, and lean forward, frequently bringing their arms close to their bodies, pushing their breasts together, and creating an alluring and tempting cleavage. Men stand tall, expand their chests, and tend to spread their legs. (Check out "Showing that You're Available" later in this chapter for more on male and female courting gestures.)



FIGURE 13-2:
This woman is calling attention to her body, highlighting her attributes and indicating her availability.

strekozza77/Adobe Stock



TIP

Men and women have different motivations for flirting, which can lead to conflict. Because men tend to flirt primarily for sex, they frequently overestimate a woman's flirting behaviors, believing them to indicate sexual interest when the woman is looking for fun and exploring the possibility of a relationship.

FLIRTING STYLES AND MOTIVATIONS

Studies from the straight, gay, and bisexual communities indicate that people flirt for five different reasons:

- To facilitate sexual contact
- To have fun
- To explore the potential for a relationship
- To maintain an existing relationship
- To raise self-esteem

Five different styles of flirting have been identified:

- » **Traditional.** This style, in which the man takes the lead, demonstrating dominance and assertiveness, adheres to gender roles and is not prevalent in the LGBTQ community.
- » **Physical.** When people get physical, they're communicating sexual interest. Physical flirtation tends to lead to the development of relationships more quickly than other forms of flirting and produces a greater emotional connection.
- » **Playful.** When someone is flirting playfully, they're looking to engage in a friendly manner and enjoy the interaction rather than initiate sex or romance. Playful flirtation is also a way to boost a person's self-esteem.
- » **Sincere.** Whatever someone's sexual preference in partners, when they want to establish an emotional bond and encourage self-disclosure, they indicate their desire for intimacy in a relationship through their sincere approach toward another person.
- » **Polite.** Social convention and unspoken dating scripts can lead to suppressing sexual desires with proper manners, all but throwing water on the flames of a potential relationship or a simple one-night stand.

Walking, wiggling, and swaggering

Women naturally roll their hips and expose their lower arms' soft and supple flesh when they walk. Because women have wider hips than men – as well as a wider crotch gap between their legs – they can walk with a rolling motion that draws attention to the pelvic area. Men, being built differently, usually can't emulate this walk and find other ways of demonstrating their sex appeal. If you've seen the

film *Some Like It Hot*, you may recall the scene where Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe) walks down the railway platform while Jerry, the double bass player (Jack Lemmon), stares at her undulating bottom in awe, describing this remarkable movement as, “Jell-O on springs.” Legend has it that Monroe cut off three-quarters of an inch from one of her shoes to enhance her hip swing.

Women in advertisements and commercials – especially those advertising fashion and beauty products – are encouraged to roll their hips and lead with their pelvis to draw attention to the products they’re promoting. The sensuous movements from the lower body create increased product awareness, leading to increased sales, which is the bottom line.

Some men swagger to appear strong and domineering. They lead from their shoulders, swinging their arms across their bodies with elbows bent and turning their hands and arms inward. Making up for what he lacks in height, Tom Cruise has made an art of the swagger in franchise films like the *Mission Impossible* and *Top Gun* franchises. (You can discover how to swagger, strut, and sway in Chapter 10.)



WARNING

For those of you who want to give a swagger a go, be aware that when taken to its extreme, this way of walking can come across as boastful and arrogant.



ANECDOTE

When Igor, a personal trainer and bodyguard, enters a room, no one doubts his ability to assert himself and protect others. A solid piece of power, this former world champion extreme fighter, who knows how to shoot guns, inflict pain, and clean up the mess, leads from his shoulders, resulting in an unintentional swagger. Quiet in speech and manner, with a dry sense of humor and a no-nonsense attitude, Igor silently commands attention. The women at his gym openly flirt with this middle-aged muscled man – behavior that confuses him. Unconsciously cracking his knuckles and flexing his pecs, he doesn’t understand why women half his age find him attractive. I wonder what he’d do if he knew that women twice his age find him attractive, too. A fit and firm body is a sure sign of strength and stamina. Sigh.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

The next time you watch an awards ceremony, notice how women on the red carpet move. They tend to lead from their hips, open their upper chests, and lower their sensuous shoulders, drawing attention to their breasts. They cross their legs, one in front of the other, to give them a slimmer silhouette than if they were to stand with their legs hip-width apart, a pose more associated with men making themselves look big.

Other clues to watch for

How much of your body you show and which parts you display advertises your sensuality and possible sexual availability (see Figure 13-3):

- » **Clothing:** In addition to protecting you from the elements, your choice of clothing signals what you want to reveal about yourself. In response, people make assumptions about you based on what you wear. Clothes that draw attention to your sexuality indicate that you're prepared to be noticed. Low-slung and tight jeans pull the eye to the wearer's genitalia, and form-fitting T-shirts highlight the chest. Short skirts, crop tops, and high heels are sexual attention grabbers, feeding the imagination.
- » **Facial expressions:** Women use lively and animated facial expressions, demonstrating interest, vitality, and energy, whereas men tend to be more controlled, reflecting dominance, restraint, and power.

FIGURE 13-3:
This man's well-toned body, open shirt, low-slung shorts, and penetrating facial expression are signs of his sensuality and sexual availability.



kiuikson/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Sofia knows the power of her body. She recently rocked a fancy dress party wearing a thigh-skimming, shoulder-bearing, skin-tight dress and strappy high heels that would make Kim Kardashian gasp in admiration. Sofia's fit, firm, and curvaceous figure encased in passionate pink spandex, her full red lips, glowing skin, tousled hair, and brightly painted nails exuded sexuality. "Sex on a stick" is how one guest described her.

Showing that You're Available

Having established that you're interested in the other person (as I describe earlier in "Attracting Someone's Attention"), you need to show that you're available. Some of your gestures are studied and deliberate; others are completely unconscious. Whichever, they all have the effect of showing that you're ready and raring to go.

Although men and women use the same basic preening gestures – such as touching their hair, smoothing their clothes, pointing their bodies in the other's direction, and increasing eye contact – a few subtle differences are worth noting.

Peeping at the many feminine courting gestures

The list of feminine sexual behaviors is long and moves right down the body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. The behaviors listed below are not limited to women only; gay men may demonstrate similar actions.

Head tossing and hair flicking

A particularly feminine gesture is the head toss or running fingers through one's hair. Whether your tresses are long or short, the gesture subtly draws attention to the person and exposes the soft underarm, a highly sensual part of a person's body that most people – straight, gay, or otherwise – find irresistible.

Head canting

Exposing your neck is a simple technique for heightening your sex appeal. You can either raise your chin slightly or tilt and turn your head away. Both movements offer a clear view of soft and vulnerable skin, making the head cant an ideal courtship signal because it implies that the person doing the canting trusts the receiver so much that they're prepared to display a defenseless part of their body.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The origins of the head cant can be traced to infancy and is a stylized version of a baby's pose when seeking comfort. When confronted with this posture, men frequently express surges of compassion, possibly because the look of vulnerability appeals to their masculinity.

Head dipping

Women can increase their sexual appeal by lowering their heads and looking upward, making their eyes appear bigger and their bodies appear smaller. This coy pose of vulnerability, also referred to as the "Shy Di" look after the late Princess

Diana, is performed by women across the globe because they recognize the (paradoxical) power of submission.

Pouting and wetting lips

Full lips are seen as a female characteristic and are considered to be packed with sexual promise. When a person pouts, the lips increase in size, as does the observer's interest. Lip licking is an indication that things are heating up. The number of derma fillers on the market for enhancing thin lips and creating the Scarlett Johansson effect is proof-positive of the power of the pout.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The facial bone structure of men and women is vastly different. During the teen years, as testosterone increases in men, their features become stronger, larger, and more pronounced. Women's facial features change only slightly. Owing to more subcutaneous fat, their faces seem full and childlike, particularly their lips.

Self-touching

Women have many more nerve sensors than men, making them particularly sensitive to touch. A woman may leisurely stroke her neck, throat, and thighs, drawing attention to those parts of her body and signaling that if you play your cards right, she just may let you similarly caress her. By touching herself, a woman can fantasize about how it would feel if the person she fancies were the one doing the touching.

Often you're not aware that you're touching or stroking yourself. The gesture is an unconscious action in response to your interest in the other person. Women who *are* aware of the effect this behavior elicits become adept at performing self-touching actions to call attention to themselves (see Figure 13-4).



ANECDOTE

Susan had been dating Dennis for several weeks when she invited him to her house for dinner. This occasion was the first time Dennis had visited her house, and from the moment Susan opened the door to him, she began to feel a tingling sensation throughout her body. She found him powerful, sexy, and exciting and was determined that he'd be stroking her body by the time dessert was served. During the meal, Susan leaned in toward Dennis, stroking her bare shoulder with her middle finger and the hollow at the base of her neck with her thumb, unconsciously indicating what she hoped would happen.

Wrist exposure

The underside of the wrist is considered to be one of the most erotic places on a woman's body because of its highly delicate skin. A woman showing interest and availability reveals this smooth, soft skin, increasing the frequency rate as her interest grows.

FIGURE 13-4: Signs of flirtatious behavior include self-touching, neck exposure, hair flick, open body language, prolonged eye contact, and close proximity.



Antonioguillen/Adobe Stock

PUTTING ON A CLARA BOW

A fiery-haired legendary silent film star of the 1920s and 1930s with a free-spirit encapsulating charm, charisma, and sex appeal, Clara Bow was the original “It” girl, having starred in the 1927 film *It*. One of the most duplicated features of all time is the actress’s cupid bow–style lips, always enhanced with a splash of bright red lipstick.

LIPS, LABIA, AND LIPSTICK

A woman’s labia are in proportion to the thickness of her facial lips. According to zoologist Desmond Morris, women “self-mimic” their outer genital lips by licking their facial lips or using lip gloss to make them moist, creating a sexual invitation.

When a woman is sexually aroused, her lips, breasts, and genitals enlarge and become redder as blood flows into them. The use of lipstick dates back 4,000 years to ancient Egypt when women painted their lips to mimic their sexually aroused and reddened genitalia. Modern research shows that when men look at photographs of women wearing different lipstick colors, they’re consistently drawn to the bright reds, which they describe as the most attractive and sensual.

Fondling cylindrical objects

Whether you're male or female, if you find yourself fondling any object that resembles a phallus, you're acting out what's happening inside your head. The same is true for someone else if you notice them stroking a firm, upright object. The scene in *Ghost*, in which Demi Moore and the late Patrick Swayze work a mound of wet clay on a potter's wheel, is an erotic, emotive, and classically graphic example of the sexual arousal that can be ignited by fondling a phallic object.



TIP

One inference of sliding a ring on and off your finger while speaking with someone you find attractive is that sex is on your mind.

Sideways glance

Women tend to raise their shoulders as an act of self-mimicry. This smooth and rounded body part emulates her curved breasts and hips. By turning her shoulder toward the object of her desire, holding their gaze with slightly lowered eyelids just long enough to get their attention, and then quickly looking away, a woman can drive a person to distraction. This gesture is tantalizing and suggestive of a peep show, which most people find hard to resist.

Shoe dangle

If a woman is sitting with a man or a woman whom she finds attractive, she just may dangle her shoe off the end of her foot, sending out the message that she's relaxed and comfortable. Because the foot acts like a phallus thrusting itself in and out of her shoe, an interested observer may become unsettled by this gesture without knowing why.

Leg twine

Men consistently rank the leg twine as the most appealing sitting position a woman can take. Women consciously use this gesture to draw attention to their legs. When one leg is pressed up against the other, it gives the appearance of a lithe body and highly toned muscles, which are helpful to have if you're going to get physical (see Figure 13-5).

Women who want to snare their bait slowly cross and uncross their legs like an angler pulling in a fish. They might also gently stroke their thighs to further indicate their desire to be caressed.

Dakota Johnson, Jennifer Lawrence, Madonna, and Beyoncé rank among the great female thigh rubbers. The image of them stroking their inner legs is enough to make grown men whimper and women stare in wonder.

FIGURE 13-5:
Entwined legs
indicate a lithe
body and highly
toned muscles
which many
people find sexy.



boomeart/Adobe Stock

Examining the few male courting gestures

Compared with the vast number of feminine sexual signals, masculine sexual behaviors are fairly few. In their effort to attract a mate, men often rely on their power, money, and status as a means of flexing their muscles. For many men, their idea of a sexual invitation is to rev their engines, flaunt their wealth, or challenge other men.

However, this isn't to say that men don't preen when a potential partner comes into view. In addition to pulling in his stomach, expanding his chest, and lifting his head like a conquering hero, a man smooths his hair, straightens his tie, adjusts his clothes, and flicks real or imaginary dust from his lapel.

The most sexually aggressive posture a man can display is to hook his thumbs over his waistband, into his belt, or into the top of his trouser pockets. With their arms in the ready position and fingers pointing toward their genitals, men take this stance to stake their claim or show their power. This masculine pose implies dominance and virility.

Recognizing dilated pupils: A universal sign of attraction

If you've gazed longingly into another person's eyes, you know how powerfully the eyes convey the message, "I find you incredibly attractive." What you may not realize is that your pupils dilate when something arouses and stimulates you, and there's nothing you can do to stop this reaction. Anyone paying close attention sees your pupils enlarge and knows that they're in with a chance. (See Chapter 5 for more about eye power.)

PENILE ENHANCEMENTS

In the fifteenth century, the male codpiece came into being (see Chapter 10). The purpose of this not-so-subtle item of clothing was to display the purported size of the man's penis, which determined his social status. Indigenous New Guinea males still display their penises, while Western men do so more subtly by wearing tight-fitting jeans or pocket-size swimsuits or by dangling a bunch of keys in their nether regions.

STUDYING PUPILS

University of Chicago bio-psychologist Eckhard Hess developed *pupillometrics* to assess the size of the eye's pupil as a means of gauging emotion or interest. Hess discovered that the pupil enlarges when people look at something stimulating. When someone looks at unpleasant or uninteresting things, the pupils contract. In one of Hess's studies, heterosexual men were shown retouched photographs of women. In half the photographs, the women's pupils were made to look larger; in the other half, the pupils were made to look smaller. With few exceptions, the men perceived the women with larger pupils as more attractive and friendlier than the same women whose pupils appeared smaller. When asked why they found one set of women more attractive than the other, the men could not answer. None of the men remarked on the pupils' size difference.

Despite controversy regarding the negative effect of air-brushed photos on people's perceptions of themselves, retouching photographs of male and female models are still common in the advertising industry. The pupils are enlarged and muscles are enhanced to make the models more attractive and alluring. Sales of manufactured goods, especially fashion, cosmetics, and hair products, measurably increase when close-ups of their faces and well-toned bodies are used to promote them.



TRY THIS

If you want to kick-start a romance, arrange to meet your person of choice in a dimly lit place. Both your and your partner's pupils dilate because of the lack of light, creating the impression that you're interested in one another. What happens next is up to you. Just to be safe, make sure that someone knows whom you're meeting, plus when and where. Arrange a time to call that person to report on your progress. For more information on which messages you can send with a gaze alone, go to Chapter 5.

Progressing through the Romance

As I described earlier in “The stages of seduction,” a successful flirtation comprises a series of steps. Depending on how each person reacts to the other's signals, the courtship progresses or comes to a screeching halt. If you find yourself giggling, wiggling, and generally engaging in playful behavior when you're with Cute Guy or Gorgeous Gal, you know you're at least “in like” if not yet “in love.” Goofing around and acting like puppies in a basket is harmless, unthreatening behavior that allows you to show one another your carefree and fun-loving sides.

Matching each other's behaviors

People who establish a physical closeness give the impression that they're emotionally connected. The closer two people are emotionally, the more similar their postures become; their movements coordinate, and their postures match. When two people adopt the same physical positions, you can bet that they're experiencing similar feelings.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Take a look at photos or videos of William and Catherine, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and you may notice how their bodies move in sync with one another. An easy energy exists between them, and while they're not known for their PDAs, their bodies fit naturally and comfortably together. They walk in time with each other, with William often guiding his wife by placing a gentle hand on the small of her back while Princess Catherine effortlessly stands aside to let the prince take the front position.

Displaying that you belong together

A lover may remove a piece of fluff from their mate's jacket or straighten their tie, conveying that this person is spoken for.

Other signs of togetherness are linking arms or holding hands while walking with your partner. People holding onto one another in these ways demonstrate their emotional and physical connection and keep each other upright (see Figure 13-6).



FIGURE 13-6: Similar postures and facial expressions indicate this couple's strong emotional connection.

Teodor Lazarev/Adobe Stock



**PEOPLE
WATCHING**

Meghan Markle, Amal Clooney, and Victoria Beckham are often photographed touching their husbands. Whether they're stroking his upper arm or resting a hand on his chest, these women are sending out clear signals that while others may look at and fancy her man from afar, he belongs to her.

When two people hold hands, the position of the hands indicates who's in charge. The dominant person's hand is in front, with the palm facing toward the back. This position is more comfortable for taller people, which is why you often see men taking the lead in this way. (For more about the meaning of hand movements and positions, go to Chapter 9.)



REMEMBER

Consciously or not, both men and women take on youthful characteristics when demonstrating sensual and sexual behaviors. Their muscles engage, their eyes sparkle, and they radiate interest and energy. Energy is sexy because it holds the promise of possibility.

- » Creating a positive impression
- » Conveying confidence
- » Weighing up your best position
- » Discovering effective negotiating behavior

Chapter **14**

Interviewing, Influencing, and Playing Politics

Here's a circular thought: How you behave influences how people perceive you, and how you perceive yourself determines your behavior. Whatever image you have of yourself, whether conscious or not, will reveal itself in your movements, gestures, and facial expressions.

Without meaning to sound like Big Brother, be advised that from the moment you enter the work environment to your last day on the job, people are watching you. If you care about furthering your career, emulate the behaviors of people you admire. You might notice that the higher up the hierarchy you go, and the more authority you garner, the more deliberate and contained are your gestures. You never see the CEO flapping their hands or running down the hall.

In this chapter, I look at how you can make a positive impression from the moment you walk through the door until you depart. You discover the impact of your attitude on your behavior, see how your relationships with others are influenced by how you angle yourself toward them, and gain skills for displaying respect, confidence, and credibility.

Making a Great First Impression: The Interview

I know, I know, you've heard it a hundred times or more but here it is again: You never have a second chance to make a first impression. Make a good one at your interview and you're a winner. Make a poor one and don't expect to be invited back.

Interviewing involves being on show. People begin making evaluations from the moment they see you. From top to toe, you signal who you are and the message you want to convey – consciously or not – through your grooming, clothing, and accessories. Add to those ingredients your body language, manners, and demeanor, and within moments, you've revealed a lot about yourself. Although some people may find you appealing, others won't. Tough luck. That's life.

This section provides tips and techniques to help you be your best self at an interview.

Perfecting your interview behavior

Getting yourself ready for a successful interview requires preparation and practice. In order to go in feeling good about yourself and in control, follow the following suggestions:

» **Warming up:** Do your homework. Gather as much information as you can about the organization, the position, and who'll be interviewing you. Remind yourself of the purpose of the interview and what you want to achieve. Review your strengths and special qualities that make you valuable to the organization – your unique selling points, if you will. Before setting off for your interview, visualize yourself at your best, entering the interview room looking, sounding, and feeling on top of your game. If you're feeling a bit nervous, that's a good thing. It shows that you care. Use those nerves to your advantage.



TRY THIS

To release stress, visualize unzipping your torso and freeing the nervous butterflies in your stomach. See them fly out of you in a forward-facing, straight formation, light and free, guiding you to where you want to be. Notice how relaxed and energized you feel. Do some vocal warm-ups such as humming and repeating your favorite tongue twisters. Shake out your arms and legs and breathe deep into your lower core.



REMEMBER

Simple physical, vocal, and mental exercises help reduce tension.

» **Claiming your space:** Wherever you are, own the space. (Check out “Claiming your space” later in this chapter for loads more about this concept.) Remind yourself that you wouldn’t be where you are if you hadn’t earned the right to be there. To send out the message that you’re a serious player, follow these tips:

- Travel light. Carry only what you need. Too much mess conveys a muddled mind.
- Enter the reception area with a purposeful stride and greet the receptionist with a smile and a friendly word. Avoid familiarity. Give your name and that of the person you’ve come to see. A good receptionist will store your coat for you.

» **Making your entrance:** When invited to the interview room, do so with purpose and a respectful attitude. And smile. As well as making you appear approachable, smiling reduces tension. Wait for the interviewer to initiate a handshake, and only take a seat if you’re invited to do so.



TIP

Unless you don’t have the use of your feet, pick them up when you walk. People who shuffle appear lethargic and uncertain.

» **Shaking hands:** Hold your palm straight and return the same amount of pressure as the interviewer (see Figure 14-1). Let the recipient decide when to end the handshake. (For more about handshakes, turn to Chapter 9).

Use the interviewer’s name: Include the person’s name in your remarks twice within the first 30 seconds of having introduced yourself, including when you first meet. Speak for no longer than 20–30 seconds at one time.

» **Positioning yourself:** When you’re invited to sit, position yourself at a 45-degree angle from the interviewer. If necessary, move the chair to this angle if you can. If you can’t, shift your body. (The later section, “Creating a relaxed attitude with the 45-degree angle,” contains info on the importance of this position.) Facing your interviewer directly, especially if you’re seated across the desk from one another and your chair is lower than his, can make you feel and appear subservient. If you’re invited to sit away from the desk in a more informal area, silently rejoice. Few rejections are made from this position.

FIGURE 14-1:
A firm handshake
and a friendly
smile contribute
to making a
positive
impression.



fizkes/Adobe Stock



TIP

If your seat is soft and low, sit on the edge, leaning slightly forward to avoid sinking into the seat. You'll look like a mini head perched on two sticks if you don't.

» **Making your exit:** When the time comes to leave, move calmly and focus on what you're doing. Stand, smile, shake hands, thank your interviewer for their time, turn, and head toward the door. Even if your bottom puts Pippa Middleton's to shame, the final impression you want to leave with your interviewer is your face, not your buttocks. Slowly turn, look your interviewer in the eye, and smile again when you reach the door. Finally, when you exit the room, leave the door in the same position as when you entered.

Using minimal gestures for maximum effect

The gestures you see at the top of the hierarchy tend to be minimal and measured. Less experienced and more insecure people fiddle with their fingers, toss their heads, and jiggle their feet, whereas people in positions of power control their gestures and movements.

MORE WORDS, FEWER MOVEMENTS

Research shows a direct link between people's vocabulary and their status, power, and position. The higher up the corporate ladder someone rises, the greater that person's facility with words and phrases. Further research shows a connection between people's fluency with language and the number of gestures they use when communicating. People at the top don't rely on gestures to make their point because they're verbally adept. Lower down the pecking order, people rely on their gestures to convey their meaning because they haven't the words to do the job.



TIP

During an interview, contain your gestures. While I encourage you to support your message with appropriate facial expressions and hand movements, I suggest maintaining control. When gesturing with your hands, keep them between waist and shoulder level. If your hands go higher, you appear excitable, and if they burrow into your lap, you come off as pervy. When appropriate, match the other person's gestures and expressions. (I discuss matching later in "Establishing rapport.") Hold your hands away from your face and mouth and avoid any nervous-looking behavior, such as bouncing your legs, clicking a pen, or fiddling with your hair. (Check out "Avoiding nervous gestures" later in this chapter for more details.)

Creating a Positive Environment

If you want to get ahead at work, treat people with respect. Shouting, name-calling, and other forms of bullying have no place in the office – or anywhere else, for that matter.

As well as treating people with respect, go a step further and aim to establish rapport. When someone speaks, really listen. Ask questions with a desire to learn. Seek commonalities. When you establish rapport, you can make great things happen. (See Chapter 1 for tips on how to build rapport.)

Demonstrating respect

As I was researching material for this chapter, people repeatedly told me that they wanted to be treated with dignity and respect at work. When I broke down what they said, the following messages came through:

- » Treat people with courtesy and kindness.
- » Encourage colleagues and staff to express their ideas

- » Listen to what others have to say before expressing your opinions.
- » Never insult, bully, or disparage someone or their ideas.
- » Praise more often than you criticize.



Never interrupt or butt in while someone else is speaking. If you struggle to avoid interrupting, consciously keep your mouth closed while others speak. Refrain from clenching your teeth, however, as doing so creates tension in your mouth, mind, and body. Allow your lips to lie lightly together and your tongue to float gently in your mouth. Make sure that your eyes are open and not burrowed in a frown.

Establishing rapport

The word *rapport* derives from the French word *rapporter*, which translates as “to return or bring back.” English dictionaries define rapport as “a sympathetic relationship or understanding,” while Germans identify rapport as *die Beziehung*, and the Italians say *rapporto*. (See Chapter 15 for more about cultural differences.)

Establishing rapport involves *mirroring* and *matching* the other person’s behavior in order to experience that individual’s way of relating to the world. When you’re in rapport, you feel a harmonious – Zen-like, if you will – connection between yourself and others.

Mirroring

From an evolutionary perspective, mirroring body language facilitates interaction between people. When you mirror people in the way they speak or move you’re unconsciously reproducing their state of mind within yourself. The more effectively you can mirror, the more able you are to understand the other person’s perspective.



Avoid mimicry when you’re reflecting other people’s behavior. If you re-create muscle movement for muscle movement and replicate exact gestures and expressions with precision, the other person feels mocked, disparaged, and disinclined to engage in a meaningful conversation.

Matching

Matching someone’s behavior indicates that you’re in tune with that person, experiencing comparable feelings and emotions (see Figure 14-2). Matching behavior creates a similar state to the other individual, which helps you understand their viewpoint.

Try to match the other person's

- » Body postures and gestures
- » Breathing rates
- » Rhythm of movement and energy levels
- » Voice tonality, including pitch, pace, and volume

FIGURE 14-2:
Mirroring and
matching each
other's behaviors
help build a
compatible
environment.



guillefaingold/Stocksy/Adobe Stock

Standing tall and holding your ground

Because of their height, tall people carry an implied authority. You must look up to them while they look down on you.

Some people are uncomfortable with their height and stoop or slouch, which makes them look small in size, stature, and authority. Unless your life depends on making yourself small, don't.

Smart people who are vertically challenged make the most of their height by placing their center of gravity deep in their loins while lifting their upper torsos upward and outward, creating an image of power and stature. Rather than placing all their energy in their upper chests and making themselves top-heavy, they place most of their energy in their pelvic area, giving them a sense of firmness and

control. They lift their heads, expand their chests, and lead with their shoulders. Tom Cruise, Emmanuel Macron, and Al Pacino, for example, are no taller than 5 feet 9 inches on a good day, and yet Cruise's bright smile, Macron's purposeful stride, and Pacino's brooding passion all manage to exude an aura of power led by their shoulders and based in their pelvis.



TRY THIS

To experience the look and feeling of power, try this short exercise, practicing from both the seated and standing positions:

- » Visualize a situation in which someone is challenging you.
- » Place your feet firmly underneath your hips.
- » Keep your knees and ankles flexible to avoid becoming stiff.
- » Hold your head upright and maintain eye contact with the other person.
- » Let your arms and hands be visible.
- » Keep your chest open, feeling as if your shoulder blades are gently melting down your back.
- » Keep your mouth closed while you're listening.
- » Inhale through your nose and deeply from your diaphragm to ground you.
- » Before reacting, pause. Reflect on what you've heard. Remain quiet until you are sure of your response.



ANECDOTE

Cecile stands at just over 6 feet and is not adverse to wearing 3-inch heels. A former Olympic athlete, she was used to being with people of all heights and never judged them on their tallness. When her sports career ended, she obtained her law degree and joined an international firm, a job requiring frequent trips to Far and Middle East countries where she towered over most of her male colleagues and clients. Despite her expertise, she was expected to make herself invisible. After several months, Cecile noticed that she was hunching her shoulders and sinking into her hips, making herself smaller to make others look bigger. After some coaching around confidence, image, and expectations, Cecile regained her confident, credible, and authoritative stance and continues wearing her high heels.

Moving with purpose

Whether you stride into a room with focus and resolve or wander in as though you've forgotten why you're there, you create an impression. Unless you want to be seen as a sandwich short of a picnic or the dullest tool in the shed, put your muscles into your movements.

MATCHING MOOD AND MOVEMENTS FOR RESULTS

I recently attended two training events led by two different trainers, and the contrast was highly informative. At first, the trainer bounded into the room like a puppy. Feeling overwhelmed by their exuberance – it was 6 PM, and I was tired after a long day's work – I struggled to engage with them and left the session feeling frustrated.

The second session took place early in the morning, and again I was tired, this time because I'd had little sleep the night before and a long journey to the venue. Here, the trainer established rapport by matching my mood and movements. Instead of imposing their energy on me, they allowed me to set the tone until I was ready to become more engaged and energized. Because the trainer noticed my movements and purposely matched them to enhance our communication, I left the session singing the trainer's praises, having gained valuable knowledge while enjoying the process. To gain further insights into the power of matching moods, pick up a copy of *Voice and Speaking Skills For Dummies* by Judy Apps (Wiley).

Before entering into other people's territory, test the waters. Moderate your movements to mirror those of the people you're with (see "Establishing rapport" earlier in this chapter). If you come bounding into a room full of silent, contemplative folk, you may be perceived as a bit of a buffoon, if not an outright annoyance. Reflect the energy you observe in the room and adapt your behavior to match what you notice. Whatever your gait, always move with clear intention.



REMEMBER

Slow actions performed with a clear intention project authority and command attention.

Angling Your Body to Convey Attitudes

How you angle your body in relation to other people subtly shows how you feel about them and impacts their perception of you. You could be perceived as threatening if you stand directly in front of a colleague with your hands on hips and jaw jutted forward. Your disdain is clear if you turn your shoulder, cross your arms, and look down your nose. If you turn your back completely on your colleague, you better hope they don't stick anything between your shoulder blades!

On the other hand, if you face your colleague at a comfortable distance with your hands visible and a welcoming expression on your visage, you stand a chance of creating a collaborative relationship. (See Chapter 12 if you're unsure of what a comfortable distance is.)



TRY THIS

To feel and demonstrate a positive attitude, place your feet firmly beneath you, hip-width apart. Lift the back of your neck, keeping your chin parallel to the ground. Think of something that makes you happy. Feel your eyes engage and sparkle. Allow yourself to smile. Free your shoulders and permit your chest to open like a jumbo jet, ready for take-off. Breathe from your diaphragm, inhaling slowly through your nose, exhaling through pursed lips. Imagine a root system emerging from the soles of your feet, creating a solid foundation beneath you. The tap root, in the center of your sole, drives deeply into the ground, providing you with stability and strength. Shallow roots radiate from the bottom of your foot to provide flexibility. The goal is for you to feel strong, positive, and ready to collaborate.

Creating a relaxed attitude with the 45-degree angle

The angle at which you position yourself in relation to another person influences the outcome of your interaction. If you want your collaboration to be cooperative and congenial, sit or stand at a 45-degree angle to the other person. Whereas face-to-face can be considered confrontational, and side by side is intimate, the 45-degree angle creates a comfortable atmosphere.

The 45-degree angle is a cooperative space, a neutral territory that encourages discussion and the flow of ideas. The third angle allows another person to join you in the space, creating an equilateral triangle. If a fourth person enters the group, you can form a square, and if one or two more people join, you can all form a circle or divide yourselves into two triangles.



ANECDOTE

Jamila attended a conference where she knew no one. At the end of the day while participants were milling around having a cocktail and a chat, Jamila observed various groups of individuals standing at different angles to one another. One small group of three women faced each other with their shoulders turned inward toward the center of their sphere, a sure sign that they didn't want their conversation interrupted. Jamila noticed another group of three women standing with their bodies slightly angled outward, a stance inviting others to enter the space. As Jamila approached this small group, the women opened their stances more, allowing her to join in the conversation.

Positioning yourself for cooperation

Say you're the newly appointed head of a well-established and successful team. One by one, you invite your new colleagues into your office for a "getting acquainted" session. They may feel a little wary of you and watch to see how you manage the meeting. You encourage openness and honest discussion by placing yourself in the neutral 45-degree zone (see Figure 14-3). No threatening aspect is associated with this position. Turn 10 degrees in either direction and the dynamics change. If you turn inward, you indicate feelings of intimacy and dominance. If you angle your body away, you're closing yourself off and demonstrating a dismissive attitude.



FIGURE 14-3:
The 45-degree angle helps build a comfortable and collaborative relationship.

Guille Faingold/Stocksy/Adobe Stock

Taking the pressure off

Positioning your body at a 45-degree angle relieves the potential stress of a meeting. When a sensitive issue needs addressing, go for this position. An open position encourages more open answers to your open questions. Unless, of course, you want to put the pressure on; in that case, face the other person directly and stare them down.

Facing directly for serious answers

If someone asks you a direct question, look at the person directly – that is, if you want to be believed. If you drop your head, avert your eyes, and peer over your

shoulder, you're conveying that you're unsure, doubtful, and perhaps even scared; you've lost your power.



TRY THIS

Serious questions require a serious attitude (see Figure 14-4). When you're asked a direct question, whether you're seated or standing, follow these steps:

1. **Close your mouth.**
2. **Breathe deeply from your lower abdomen.**
3. **Hold your head vertically as if your chin is floating on a calm lake.**
4. **Align your hips and shoulders with your knees.**
5. **Place your knees directly over your ankles, firmly planted on the ground.**
6. **Open your chest.**
7. **Look the questioner in the eye.**
8. **Pause.**
9. **Respond only after you have considered your message.**



FIGURE 14-4: Serious conversations require a serious attitude, as demonstrated by few gestures and a calm expression.

Mangostar/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Emma works in the HR department of a telecom company. She's ambitious and wants to progress in her career. During her annual review, she received disturbing feedback: Her superiors weren't taking her seriously because her behavior makes her appear immature and insecure. When I met Emma, she was ablaze with unfocused, nervous energy. She shifted her weight from leg to leg and fidgeted with her hands. She tossed her head, ran her fingers through her hair, and frequently giggled. She had difficulty establishing and maintaining eye contact. Although she is smart, capable, and desires to progress in her career, her body language was letting her down. After working together and seeing the "before and after" videos, I saw that Emma now saves the hair tossing for the weekends and comes across as calm, confident, and credible at the office.

Picking the power seats

At work, stay away from seats that make you look small, awkward, and insignificant. Avoid seats that force you to look upward, lifting your chin and exposing your neck, one of the most vulnerable parts of your body.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The ideal chair height chair is 16–21 inches.

Considering the back of the chair

Kings and queens, popes and prime ministers, and chief executives and oligarchs sit in chairs that reflect their power and status. The higher the back of the chair, the higher the status of the people who park themselves there. The back of the chair frames the face of the seated individual, lending an air of power and authority.

Rolling on casters

Chairs on casters have power and mobility that fixed chairs lack. The person sitting in a chair that swivels has more freedom of movement and can cover more space in a shorter time than someone sitting in a fixed chair. The person who's sitting in the chair on wheels, with armrests and a high, reclining back, tends to be the person in charge.

Gaining height advantage

Because height is associated with status and power, the higher you are, the more perceived authority you hold. Savvy business types know that by adjusting the seat height of their chairs, they gain a competitive advantage.



TIP

Even if it's the Wizard of Oz commanding you to take a seat, if the chair offered puts you at eye level with the top of the other person's desk, politely decline and say that you prefer to stand.

Placing the chair

When you seat yourself directly across the desk or table from another person, the atmosphere can feel confrontational. You create a welcoming environment by simply placing your chair at a 45-degree angle in front of the desk. If you want to reduce a visitor's status, arrange for them to be seated as far away from your desk as possible, into the public zone at least 8 feet away from where you're sitting.

Negotiating Styles

When crunch time arrives and you're at the final stage of a work or business negotiation, you want everyone to feel like a winner, right? And to feel like a winner, you have to look, sound, and behave like one. In other words, you must act the part. If you want to know more about negotiating skills, take a look at *Persuasion & Influence For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).



TIP

Before you go into any meeting where you want to perform well (interview, negotiation, or assessment), find a quiet spot to gather your thoughts in peace. A few minutes should do the trick. Reflect on what you want to accomplish and visualize yourself acting in a way that supports you in achieving your goal. Go through a mental checklist of your strengths. See, hear, and feel yourself performing at your best. By creating your desired image, you can act the part and convince others that you really are like that. Who knows? You may actually be that person.

Claiming your space

When you enter a negotiation, claim your space right from the start. If you don't, the competition will have you for breakfast. *Claiming your space* means taking responsibility for yourself and your actions and acting as though you have a right to be where you are, doing what you're doing. When you walk into a space and make it your own, you tell others that this territory is yours and woe betide anyone who tries to take it away from you. Dogs spend much of their time marking out their territory in order to let the rest of the pack know that they've been there, and the same applies to people (although I'm not encouraging you to urinate on the chair!). Your intention is to let people know that you're comfortable in this space and ready to face any challenge coming your way.

ACTING THE PART

In the early 20th century, Russian director Constantine Stanislavski developed *method acting*. This practice requires actors to base their characterizations on the emotional memory process. They immerse themselves in their roles, experiencing their characters' realities. Actors draw upon memories and incidents from their own lives and incorporate them into their roles, enriching and enhancing the portrayal. Devotees of method acting include Dustin Hoffman, Jane Fonda, and Robert De Niro.

Similarly, by recalling how you felt and behaved when you negotiated a favorable outcome in the past and by emulating the behaviors of negotiators you admire, you, too, can act yourself into the part.

When you claim your space successfully, you act like you belong there. Your gestures appear fluid, your posture is upright, and you easily engage in eye contact. You send out positive signals indicating that you're comfortable and in control.

Getting acquainted with the environment

Let's say you've been invited to speak at an event attended by people you want to impress. You know some, not all, of the attendees. You want to appear confident and in charge of yourself and your material. To do that, follow these suggestions for getting comfortable in the space and making it your own:

- » If possible, visit the space in advance of the event. Become familiar with the room. Visualize the attendees and where they're sitting. Picture yourself engaging with the attendees and feeling ownership of your space. Remind yourself that you have earned the right to be where you are and enjoy sharing your expertise with others.
- » When the time arrives and you enter the room, do so with purpose and authority. Acknowledge the attendees with a smile, nod, and a bit of small talk to warm up your vocal cords and steady your nerves.
- » If you are expected to sit, pull your chair out and sit down without waiting to be invited. (Be advised, though, that if you do take this action at a first interview without being invited to do so, you may be perceived as cocky or rude.)
- » Establish eye contact, and when you speak, do so with clarity and conviction.



ANECDOTE

Tracey is a highly qualified and respected lawyer. At our first practice for her partnership interview, Tracey demonstrated nervous and awkward behavior, including fidgeting and avoiding eye contact. She admitted feeling like an imposter and like she would be called out. Working through issues around self-worth, Tracey

developed techniques to help ground her when her nerves are on full tilt. To this day, when she enters a room feeling under the gun, before taking a seat, she rests her hands on top of the chair as if staking her claim to it. She establishes a sense of ownership with the room by making contact with the chair. Her nerves steady, allowing her to feel confident and credible. She looks and sounds the part, too.

Choosing a good seat

When attending meetings, arrive early so that you can pick your spot. Whoever sits facing the door has the upper hand. Studies show that people seated with their backs to the door experience signs of stress, including increased blood pressure and shallow, rapid breathing.

Filling your space

People who fill their space look more commanding and in control, which can be a challenge for small or slim people, who may become lost in space. The following tips can help people of smaller stature appear more in command of their territory:

- » Hold your elbows slightly out from your sides when standing or sitting. (People who hold their arms close to their bodies look subservient, timid, and fearful.)
- » Lean forward when seated behind a table, letting your hands, elbows, or lower arms rest on the table's surface.
- » Avoid pulling your arms in close by your sides at a meeting; you're reducing your stature and diminishing your influence.

Large people also need to consider the amount of space they fill, because spreading across a desk or table can be perceived as invasive. Be aware that you take up more space than smaller people and may need to adjust your position to allow others in.



TIP

To avoid overwhelming others with your large presence, contain your gestures.

Displaying confidence

The way you stand and sit, your gestures and expressions, the actions you choose – and how you perform them – reveal who you are and what you're about. Captains of industry, masters of the universe, and divas of the theater instinctively know and are well trained in projecting a confident attitude. With eyes clear and focused, posture erect, and facial muscles engaged, they create a look of positive expectancy (see Figure 14-5).

FIGURE 14-5:
This woman enlarges her presence by holding her arms away from her body and leaning forward, projecting a confident attitude.



Blue Jean Images/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

To be perceived as confident, you must demonstrate confident behavior, which requires you to know what confident behavior looks, sounds, and feels like for you. To clarify your concept, try the following exercises:

- 1. Reflect on a time when you felt confident. Describe the feelings you experienced. Be specific: excited, calm, energized, relaxed, or other. What gestures and facial expressions did you incorporate into your behavior? Were they open and spontaneous? Slow and measured? Contained or free-flowing? What was your breathing like (quick, slow, shallow, deep, other)? The more specific you can be in your descriptions, the better you can re-create the sensation.**
- 2. Think of someone who you believe demonstrates confident behavior and describe how that person acts, including specific gestures, movements, and facial expressions. Consider how emulating that behavior could benefit you.**
- 3. List the benefits of demonstrating confidence. What positive impact could feeling confident make on your life?**
- 4. Practice the gestures, postures, and expressions that you associate with your confident self. Before you know it, you're feeling, sounding, and looking like the real deal.**

Avoiding nervous gestures

You aren't doing yourself any favors if you nervously fidget and fiddle, pick at your fingers, and scratch your head, face, neck, or chest during a negotiation. If you carry on like that, others begin to feel nervous, too. To still the waters, keep your mouth shut, eyes open, and hands where people can see them.



TIP

Being aware of your nervous gestures is the first step in freeing yourself of the habit. Observe yourself like a third party, making no judgments, just observations. Seek opportunities to watch yourself on video. Ask a trusted colleague for feedback. When you recognize what you're doing, you can change your behavior. (See Chapter 19 for more about being aware.)

Replace an anxious gesture with a positive action. For example, if you're playing with a pen, take a quick note, put the pen down, and fold your hands in your lap. If you're fiddling with your hair, rest your hands on the arms of your chair or on the desk or table in front of you. If you don't have a surface on which your hands can lie, rest them in your lap. You can also just stop doing what you're doing. If you're picking your cuticles – stop. If you're jiggling your feet – stop. Unless there's a medical reason why you can't, you *can* control your actions.

If you find yourself shifting the way that you're sitting or standing, you could be trying to shift the way that you're thinking and feeling. Repositioning your body from a pose in which you're feeling physically uncomfortable can result in changing your thoughts, feelings, and intentions. After you shift your position, settle in. If you continue bouncing from pillar to post, your nervous energy is controlling you.

Changing behaviors takes time, commitment, and practice. In fact, research shows that habits can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days to form. For example, a relatively simple habit like drinking a cup of hot water and lemon every morning or going for a 10-minute walk every lunchtime can take up to 66 days to take hold. Changing your habitual behaviors in stressful conditions may take longer.

Opening or closing your fingers

Short, sharp gestures hold more authority than open hands waving in the air. By keeping your fingers closed and your hands below chin level when gesturing, you look confident and in control, thus you command attention.



TIP

If you want to appear caring, approachable, or subservient, keep your hands below chin level and gesture with open fingers.

Carrying only what's necessary

Keep your accessories slim and compact. A bulging briefcase indicates that you're the worker bee and not the queen making strategic decisions. If you must be the bag carrier, ensure that all your papers are in order.

Accessories are meant to enhance your image. Decide which image you want to project and choose your accessories accordingly. Also, to make a positive impression, invest in good quality accessories. A leaking pen in your pocket looks messy.

Watching your buttons

Tightly closed jackets indicate a tightly closed point of view. People who button up their jackets while making decisions indicate that they're closed to the idea. They're displaying intense negativity when they fold their arms across their chests with their jackets buttoned. If you notice one or two people unbuttoning their jackets during a meeting, you can safely assume that they're changing their opinions and opening up to what's going on



REMEMBER

In today's highly competitive world, you need simple strategies to provide the extra *oomph* to get you where you want to be. Being good at what you do is no longer enough; you have to be *seen* being good. Take stock and evaluate what you do well and where you see room for improvement. When you're aware of your strengths and weaknesses, you can build on what you do well and change what's holding you back.

- » Appreciating different cultures
- » Exploring status-based conventions
- » Examining problematic gestures
- » Avoiding causing offense

Chapter **15**

Crossing the Cultural Divide

With businesses spanning the globe, journalists reporting from far-flung lands, and international travel more accessible than ever before, people are discovering cultures and customs different from their own. Behaviors as simple as counting on your fingers, shaking hands, and sending a friendly, or not-so-friendly, message vary widely across the globe.

When you know the rules that govern behavior in cultures other than your own, you can avoid making major mistakes that, in addition to insulting your host, may lead to a diplomatic crisis – or at least an awkward situation. A huge number of countries, cultures, and customs exist in the world, and while I don't intend to cover them all here, this chapter gives you a few examples, tips, and techniques to enable you to trek most of the globe as an informed individual.



TIP

When visiting, or preparing to visit, foreign lands and you're unsure of the local customs, ask. Better to know what's right and what's not than to cause an international kerfuffle. Natives are usually delighted to guide you in the ways of their citizenry and appreciate that you want to behave respectfully. A friendly smile is one gesture you can count on to open the door, no matter where your travels take you. Both the sophisticated city slicker and the desert nomad understand this sign of approachability. (See Chapter 6 to discover different types of smiles.)

Recognizing the Different Strokes for Different Folks

As more cultures interact than ever before, knowing the acceptable nonverbal behaviors – and those that are verboten – can help you to make a friend and seal a deal. Although you may not need to become au fait with all the cultural intricacies around the world, discovering the basics – for example, meetings and greetings, handling business cards, managing personal space, and knowing whom to look at and where, how, and when – sets you up for the next promotion or puts you in the driver's seat when building positive relationships with people from races, religions, and creeds different from your own.

Some cultures – such as the Irish and the Italians – are known for their upfront exuberance, while others – including the Japanese and the Swedes – are acknowledged as the keepers of the keys when it comes to revealing emotions. Some encourage openness (such as the Spanish), whereas the Swiss, Scots, and English prefer to protect their privacy. Even within the same country, behaviors differ. For example, Northern Germans tend to be contained in their expressions and movements, whereas their Southern cousins demonstrate more freedom in their gestures and mannerisms.

By accepting differences and adapting your behavior to meet what's expected in cultures dissimilar to yours, you can build respectful relationships and sail confidently through challenging cross-cultural waters.

THE NEW ZEALAND HAKA

The Maori haka, an action chant with hand gestures and foot stamping, is traditionally performed by the New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks, before an international test match. Originally acted out by warriors before battle, the haka proclaimed the soldiers' strength and prowess and served as a verbal challenge to the opposition. The most famous haka, "Ka Mate," tells of the wily ruse that a Maori chief used to outwit his enemies and is interpreted as a celebration of the triumph of life over death.

On August 28, 2005, before a match against South Africa, the All Blacks unexpectedly introduced a new haka, "Kapa o Pango." The climax of this new haka is particularly aggressive as each player, staring at the opposing team, performs a throat-slitting action. In response to allegations that the gesture was offensive, the New Zealanders explained that in Maori culture and haka tradition, the throat-slitting gesture signifies the drawing of vital energy into the heart and lungs. The All Blacks went on to win the match 31 to 27.



TIP

Pay attention to how the natives are behaving. Unless people's behavior goes against your values, emulate their movements and expressions. Treat people's beliefs and customs with respect in order to establish an environment of trust and openness.

Positioning yourself and setting boundaries

One convention that differs between cultures is the issue of personal space. In Latin America, it's natural and expected for people to stand close to each other, whereas in Anglo-Saxon countries, people give one another a wider berth. Watch the Spanish and Italians in conversation. They stand close to one another when they're speaking, and a casual touch on the arm or shoulder during conversation is the norm. Good friends typically greet one another with a hug or a kiss, and seeing people of the same sex walking down the street arm in arm is normal. If you back away when an Italian or Argentine speaks to you, they may think you're shy and move closer to fill the gap. In complete contrast, Australians require a lot of personal space – if you get closer than an arm's length, an Aussie feels hemmed in.

People in Nordic countries are more restrained in their body movements than Southern Europeans, who aren't averse to public displays of physicality. Northerners back away from effusive gestures and consider hugging in public taboo.



TIP

If you want to avoid embarrassing your Nordic friend or acquaintance, refrain from getting up close and personal in public. Save your hugs for home.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

If you were a fly on the wall in an American manufacturing company, you'd see the plant manager walking around, casually dressed and chatting informally with the staff and factory workers. In France, expect to see the plant manager wearing a suit and beginning the day by greeting office and factory workers with a handshake. These practices demonstrate the management structures within the two work environments: The French company is clearly more hierarchical.

In many Western cultures, friends greet each other by offering a kiss toward the sky rather than planting a proper kiss on one another's cheeks. Known as the "air kiss," it avoids overfamiliarity or a messy exchange of lipstick (see Figure 15-1). Like Southern Europeans, and unlike their Korean and Japanese neighbors, the Chinese demonstrate their regard for same-sex people by publicly holding hands or making other forms of physical contact. Opposite sexes, however, don't engage in public displays of affection.

FIGURE 15-1:
Air kissing is a friendly way of greeting without becoming too familiar.



Ivan/Adobe Stock

Getting up close and personal

Whether you kiss, bow, or shake hands when you greet someone and say goodbye, how you do so indicates your culture's attitude toward bodily contact. In some countries – including France, Italy, and Greece – the standard practice is to touch, whereas other cultures – such as those of New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, and the United States – are less keen on anything beyond a handshake.



ANECDOTE

Cultures collided when Bianca, an effusive southern Italian, was introduced to Alice, her soon-to-be-sister-in-law from the English countryside. Bianca hugs when greeting friends and family, while for Alice, more restrained in her manner, a simple “How do you do?” does nicely. When Bianca threw her arms around Alice in an exuberant greeting, Alice stiffened and pulled back. Bianca felt slighted by Alice's reserve, while Alice felt overwhelmed by Bianca's familiarity. Those first impressions set the stage for their relationship not being good. Making a positive first impression is addressed in detail in Chapter 14.

Islamic countries forbid public touching between the sexes, and woe betide you if you get caught. Imprisonment and physical punishments including stoning aren't out of the question. On the other hand, same-sex couples walking down the street hand in hand or with their arms intertwined or draped over one another's shoulders is normal in Arab countries and implies nothing more than friendship or camaraderie.



WARNING

Because homosexuality is forbidden in Islamic countries and is punishable by death, members of the LGBTQ community are advised to avoid demonstrating their affection for one another in public.

In Latin countries – from South America to the Mediterranean – the locals are comfortable with getting up close and personal. Embracing one another with big hugs and pats on the backs while planting kisses on your friends' and family members' cheeks is natural and expected. Even the workplace is filled with bear hugs and friendly smouches.



ANECDOTE

In 2009, when Michelle and Barak Obama attended a G20 dinner, Silvio Berlusconi – Italy's then-president – was desperate to embrace the bare-shouldered, tightly-toned, elegant woman. YouTube recordings of the three show Berlusconi pursing his lips, raising his shoulders, and rubbing his fingers while extending his arms in a "come-to-padre" pose. President Obama keeps a close and steely eye on Berlusconi, with taut lips and not a hint of a smile. His right arm, next to Berlusconi, is tense and tight. The First Lady smiles only with her lips while her eyes remain coldly fixed on the Italian president. Her right arm juts forward like a steel rod, and her fingers are tight, offering a handshake with no welcoming touch. The Obamas' message was, "Don't even think about it!"

NO KISSING, PLEASE; WE'RE GERMAN

The Knigge Society in Germany, an organization that advises on etiquette and social behavior, called for a ban on kissing in the workplace. The society's chairman, Hans-Michael Klein, purported to have received emails from workers expressing concern about this overly familiar practice. His response is to stick to the traditional handshake. Although he admits that banning kissing outright may be impossible, he believes society should protect people who don't want to be kissed. He suggests that if staff and employees don't mind being kissed at work, they announce their feelings by placing a paper message on their desks. Mr. Klein is reported as saying that kissing isn't typical German behavior and that the habit is imported from places such as Italy, France, and South America. He indicates that kissing belongs in a specific cultural context and says he's been told that Germans don't like to kiss while at work.

A survey shows that most German workers feel that kissing contains an erotic element and that the gesture is a way for men to get close to women. Other issues that the Knigge Society addresses include the appropriate way to end a relationship via text message and dealing with a runny nose in public. Interestingly, the Russian custom of men exchanging kisses is not why Germany has cut back on conducting commercial relations with the Big Bear.

Gearing up your greetings

Greetings can be loaded affairs: to kiss or not to kiss; to shake hands or to refrain? The following are a few examples of the types of greetings that you can expect in different areas around the world:



TIP

- » **Brazil:** Upon greeting and departure, the custom is to shake hands with everyone present. After you establish a friendship with someone, expect to embrace.

Brazilian women exchange kisses on alternating cheeks: twice if they're married, three times if they're single. The third kiss ensures good luck in finding a spouse.



TIP

- » **China:** A slight nod or bow from the shoulders is the proper form for greetings and departures. Wait for them to initiate the gesture and follow their lead. The Chinese are also, however, more comfortable greeting another person with a handshake than people from many other Far Eastern countries.

The Chinese don't like being touched by people they don't know. This convention is especially true of older people and individuals in important positions. If in doubt, leave out the double-handed handshake.

- » **France:** If you make friends with French people, expect them to kiss your cheeks three times when you say hello and goodbye.

- » **The Middle East and the Gulf States:** Here, it's common for men to touch upon greeting. Wait for your counterpart to initiate the exchange because several greeting styles are used.

When shaking hands, some people don't seem to want to let go, whereas a mere flutter of fingertips is more than adequate for others. The standard Asian handshake between men is more of a handclasp: It lasts between 10–12 seconds and is rather limp. This long hold contrasts with the North American handshake, which lasts approximately 3–4 seconds and is firm. (For more about handshakes, flip to Chapter 9.)



REMEMBER

Personal distance between male speakers is close in the Middle East, and holding hands is quite common. Unless you want to insult the man, hold and hug him in return (see Figure 15-2).

Elaborate greeting rituals are normal in Saudi Arabia. Although a Westernized Saudi man does shake hands with another man, the customary Saudi greeting between men is a more complicated affair. After saying the traditional "as-salamu alaykum," you shake hands and say, "kaif halak." Then, you and your Saudi counterpart put your left hand on the other's right shoulder, and kiss one another on each cheek. Finally, your new-found friend takes your hand in his. If you're a woman, none of this applies, so don't be offended!

FIGURE 15-2:
Muslim men
frequently
embrace one
another as a sign
of greeting.



Rawpixel.com/Adobe Stock

Traditionally, if a veiled Saudi woman is in the company of a Saudi man, you don't introduce her. Although Westerners may perceive a woman wearing a burka as hiding, she's actually able to observe how others behave while revealing little about herself.

Acknowledging the no-touching rule

Although in many Far Eastern countries people greet one another by shaking hands, the Japanese in particular have an aversion to informal body contact. Japanese conducting business in the West force themselves to shake hands, although they are uncomfortable doing so. In their own country, the usual form of greeting is a long, low bow from the waist and a formal exchange of business cards (see Figure 15-3).



REMEMBER

Although young people are defying the norms of their parents, be aware that male-female touching in public throughout the Middle and Far East is unacceptable.

FIGURE 15-3:
It is customary
for Japanese
business people
to bow as a sign
of greeting,
whereas
Westerners
shake hands.



Rawpixel.com/Adobe Stock



TIP

Even if you feel awkward bowing to Far Eastern colleagues or customers, seeing it as a sign of subservience, do so anyway if you want to make a favorable impression. You're saying that you value their experience and wisdom and respect their culture and customs.



WARNING

In the Far East, never put your hand or hands in your pockets when you're bowing, greeting someone, saying farewell, or giving a speech. Doing so is considered rude, despite being accepted behavior in the U.K. and America.



TIP

Japanese cities are crowded, and sometimes you need to push through the throng, as the locals do. Hold your hand in front of your face, with a bent elbow (rather like a child pretending to be a shark or as if preparing a karate chop), while bowing and saying, "excuse me."

When presenting your business card in the Far East, hold it in both hands with your details facing the other person. When people from the Far East present you with their card, receive it with both hands and study it with respect before looking back, smiling at the individual who presented it to you, and accepting the card with a slight bow. Don't write on it!

Whether you're working in the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, or any country throughout the East, avoid slapping your colleagues on the back, playfully punching them on the arm, or hugging the breath out of your new best friend. Your attempts to demonstrate comradery will be received as rude, disrespectful, and invasive.

Waving farewell

The simple act of waving someone goodbye isn't so simple after all. What you may believe is a straightforward signal saying “*ciao bella*,” “*à bientôt*,” “*sayonara*,” or “see you later” can be interpreted as an offensive gesture or a sign to return. For example, if you give a business presentation in Argentina and wave goodbye to your audience, be prepared to present again. Your gesture of “farewell,” in fact, signals to your audience that you want them to stay.

Europeans tend to face their palms front and wag their fingers up and down with arms stretched forward and held stationary. Americans hold their palms forward with their arms outstretched and wave their hand back and forth from side to side.



TIP

Throughout most of Europe, the American wave would be interpreted as “no,” except in Greece, where the gesture is highly insulting and where you can easily find yourself pleading innocence to the local authorities.

Observing the Conventions of Higher- and Lower-Status Behavior

The concept of status refers to how important a role a person plays in society. People with *high social status* are perceived as valuable and dominant and often fulfill leadership roles. *Low social status* people are regarded as dispensable despite their often playing important supporting roles in society. Across cultures and continents, people of lower status demonstrate deference to people holding higher status. Their body language is closed, and they take up as little space as possible so as to appear non-threatening. People with high status tend to fill the space they occupy. They're confident they can handle whatever comes their way and aren't afraid of looking threatening. Across the globe, the body language of high- and low-status people is similar.



TIP

In Asian countries, subordinates don't look their superiors in the eye, whereas eye contact is the norm in Western cultures. (Check out “Playing by the local rules: Eye contact,” later in this chapter, for more on where to look depending on where you are in the world.)

Bowing, kneeling, and curtseying

Bowing, kneeling, curtseying, and lowering the head are low-status behaviors. Within royal households, staff bow or curtsey when the monarch passes. By curling up and lowering your body, you lessen your status in relation to the other

person. This behavior can be traced to the animal kingdom, where creatures under attack cringe and crouch to protect themselves.

Bowing is particularly important in Japan, where you can spot someone's status in relation to another's by the length and depth of the bow. A low-status individual bows lower and longer. If equals bow to one another, they match one another's bows. If one of the two people wants to show more respect, they add an extra bow. The Japanese also add another bow for someone who's much older and for a customer whose business they're hoping to obtain. The Japanese like their bows.



TIP

When bowing to someone who holds a higher rank than you, make sure you out-bow the person and keep your eyes respectfully lowered. If you're unsure of who holds the higher status, bow slightly less low than the other person. Slide your hands down the front of your legs toward your knees or down the sides of your legs. Maintain stiffness in your back and neck and avert your eyes (see Figure 15-4).



FIGURE 15-4: The deeper the bow or lower the curtsy, the more deference is being demonstrated.

Noel Hendrickson/Blend Images/Adobe Stock

Standing to attention

Standing with a straight back, legs close together with your weight distributed evenly between them, arms by your sides, and hands remaining still is a sign of deference the world over. If you've experienced being called into the head teacher's office, standing up in court, or serving in the military, you know the position. You look straight ahead and don't move a muscle.



In some Western societies, younger people stand up when an adult enters the room. They look people in the eye, shake hands firmly, and say a polite hello, *bonjour*, or *guten Tag*. When dining out and someone stops by to say hello, men are expected to stand while women remain seated – confusing behavior, as we’re all supposed to be equal.

Getting Specific: Common Gestures, Multiple Interpretations

Just when you thought you knew the meaning of laughter, the thumbs-up sign, and giving the okay signal, you find yourself creating the most embarrassing faux pas. All you can plead is ignorance, which is hardly a viable excuse. This section fills you in to keep you out of trouble.

Giving the thumbs-up . . . cautiously

The thumbs-up sign (see Figure 15-5) means different things in different cultures. In North America and the U.K., the sign means “good.” The same gesture in the Arab world, Nigeria, and parts of South America, however, has negative connotations, and in Germany, holding up your thumb indicates the numeral one.



FIGURE 15-5:
In some countries, the thumbs-up gesture is positive, while in other countries, it is rude.

Vector1st/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you're traveling in Japan and want to indicate that everything's just great, stick your thumb up in the air with a clenched fist.

Ensuring that the okay sign really is okay

Travelers, beware. North Americans make a circle with their index finger and thumb, with the other fingers slightly raised, to indicate approval, but you're regarded as vulgar if you make this sign in Brazil. To complicate the issue, when the Japanese make this sign, they're signaling money, whereas, for the French, the gesture stands for zero.



TIP

Ask your host, or read ahead of time, what the okay sign means in a particular country. In America, it's a positive sign signaling success. In Arab countries, it's a rude sexual gesture, as is making the okay sign while shaking your fist in Japan. The okay sign – one of Donald Trump's trademark gestures – can be a blessing or a curse. It may be safest to avoid using the sign at all!

Laughing your way into (and out of) trouble

When people laugh in the Western world, you're safe to assume that they're happy. If you hear the same laughter – with a slightly different accent – in Asia, don't think that everything's fine. Individuals in the Asian world laugh as a means of controlling their displeasure and also to conceal embarrassment, confusion, and shock. A young Japanese, Vietnamese, or Korean woman may reveal her embarrassment by giggling behind her hands, which are held upright slightly away from her mouth with the palm toward her face.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Cultures, like people, have personalities. Some are open, outgoing, and extroverted. Others are closed, contained, and restrained. Sitting in a restaurant in Rome, you see people laughing, interrupting one another, and touching a lot. Take yourself to Stockholm and experience the difference. People are quiet, more contained in their gestures, and demonstrate less emotion. Both groups are friendly and caring; they simply express their feelings and goodwill differently.

Be careful when cracking jokes in different cultures. What tickles your fancy in the Arctic tundra may leave your colleague in the Congo cold. Although humor can translate across borders, you may struggle to grasp the subtleties. If you're in a culture different from your own and you're in doubt about what's funny and what's not, observe how the natives respond and follow their lead.

Avoiding Problems and not Causing Offense

This section zeroes in on avoiding situations that could be embarrassing or offensive, or that could land you in jail.



TIP

While gestures may have different meanings according to country and culture, you can count on one gesture that's universally understood. According to my friend Rick, his airline pilot friend who has flown around the globe countless times for over 25 years says that no matter where you are, when you raise your middle finger, everyone knows what you mean.

Smoothing over difficult situations

Different cultures deal with difficult or embarrassing situations in different ways. Brazilians and Japanese for example, avoid giving bad news and saying no. They may change the subject, stretch the truth, or put such a positive spin on the information that you don't notice the negative aspects. They're not trying to deceive; they simply want to keep things positive and not disappoint.

A POTPOURRI OF LOCAL CUSTOMS

Many conventions and common gestures can prove problematic when traveling. Here are a few to watch out for:

- When visiting Asian and Middle Eastern societies, use only your right hand for greeting and eating. The left hand is considered "unclean," and using it in any greeting is highly insulting, and eating with it is considered vulgar.
- Muslims consider pointing at anyone or anything rude.
- Asians and Arabs consider the feet to be unclean. When visiting Arab and Asian countries, be sure to sit with your feet flat on the floor; showing the soles of your shoes is highly insulting. Never prop your feet up on a piece of furniture, such as a desk or chair, or cross them over your knee.
- In Thailand, never step on a doorsill when entering someone's home. Thais believe that friendly spirits live below.
- Some Asian cultures, including Thailand and India, consider the head to be a sacred area where the soul resides. To touch the head of a Thai or an Indian, even a child or a close friend, is disrespectful and intrusive.



ANECDOTE

On a cold winter's day, Carol, an American living in Tokyo, was traveling in the packed underground during rush hour. No seats were available, and despite being pregnant, no one offered her theirs. She was forced to stand, pressed up against the safety glass of the door dividing her carriage from the next. Her train companions leaned against one another for support rather than holding onto the straps.

With one lurch of the train, the passengers all swayed toward Carol and pressed against her. Her back went through the safety glass, covering her in broken fragments. Despite her condition, people ignored her. However, when the train arrived at the next station, one young man knocked out the rest of the glass to minimize the danger, and another moved away to offer her a seat. These actions took place with no eye contact. Carol realized that she'd inadvertently created a scene and the Japanese, by not overtly paying attention to her, were "saving her face." Their lack of emotional reaction was their way of smoothing over an embarrassing situation for Carol despite the accident. This behavior was their way of keeping the situation harmonious without offending her.

If you find yourself in a similar situation to Carol, follow your personal values and customs. If that means that you'd offer a pregnant woman your seat, do so without making a meal of the gesture. Stand and indicate with your hand that your seat is for them. Make no contact with other people in the carriage, as doing so would cause them to feel uncomfortable and lose face.

Playing by the local rules: Eye contact

In North America and throughout Europe, eye contact is necessary for demonstrating respect and signaling that you're comfortable engaging with others. The opposite is true, however, throughout much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where making eye contact is viewed as rude, personally challenging, or displaying a lack of respect. For example, in Africa, China, and Japan, you show respect to your superiors by avoiding eye contact.

As with many of the issues I discuss in this chapter, things can be even more complicated. For instance, in the Middle East, eye contact is considered a sign of trust or truthfulness, but Muslims consider eye contact between the sexes inappropriate (eye contact with your gender is acceptable).

In some countries, Muslim women may cover their faces and bodies to demonstrate their piety, modesty, and rejection of Western politics and culture (see Figure 15-6). They may also be forced to cover themselves by law. Sikh men and women and those of the Jewish Orthodox faith may also cover their heads. When visiting a country where people are expected to cover their heads, do so as a sign of respect. A backward-turned baseball cap is not what I suggest.



FIGURE 15-6:
Niqab, Burqa,
Chador, and
Hijab.

Dragana Gordic/Adobe Stock



REMEMBER

While your culture may dress and behave one way and someone else's another way, that doesn't mean that you're right and they're wrong. It just means that you're different.



REMEMBER

Wherever you are in the world, as a general rule, avoid staring or fixing your gaze on someone because doing so can be interpreted as confrontational.



TIP

When conversing with someone from the Far East, avoid making eye contact, except for an occasional glance to make sure that they're still present. Then, quickly avert your eyes again.

Eyes play an important role in communication in all cultures. Therefore, always watch for even the smallest eye gestures because they can highlight or undercut the spoken words.



ANECDOTE

Mahinder was working in Japan preparing a client presentation with a Japanese colleague. When she asked him if he was pleased with their work, he said that he was. Several days later, however, Mahinder heard through the grapevine that her colleague wanted to rework the presentation. When she asked him why he'd told her that it was fine when it wasn't, he replied, "But I told you with sad eyes, Mahinder." She left her colleague wondering how she could have spotted his sad eyes when he mostly averted his gaze.

TOASTING THE HOST AND EACH OTHER

Our Norwegian friend Thomas invited us to his home in Oslo for a long weekend. On Saturday night, he hosted a formal dinner party for 16 people. Throughout the meal, toasts were frequently made. Every time our generous and gracious host raised his glass, he looked each guest directly in the eye as we raised our glasses in response. We all engaged in direct eye-to-eye contact with Thomas, as well as with the other guests at the table. Fortunately, we only toasted once during the serving of the hot food!

Although toasting details vary depending on which Nordic country you're visiting, direct and prolonged eye contact throughout the ritual is required.

Eye contact is important for demonstrating sincerity and trust in Nordic countries, Germany, and Great Britain. If you're invited to a Scandinavian's home for dinner, be prepared for some serious eye contact. (See the nearby sidebar, "Toasting the host and each other.")



ANECDOTE

Many of the young Asian women I coach struggle to look their superiors in the eye. For them, doing so suggests arrogance and disrespect. Because most of their clients and colleagues are British, American, Australian, and Western European, establishing and maintaining eye contact is necessary to progress in their careers. In contrast, when coaching Westerners embarking on assignments in African, Asian, and Arab countries, we practice creating relationships with clients, superiors, and colleagues without making eye contact.



REMEMBER

When you engage with people from cultures other than your own, pay attention and take every opportunity to learn about their values and expected behaviors.

Adapting your style for clear communication

Many people can't understand why they should adapt their behavior to communicate successfully with people whose traditions and cultures differ from their own, believing that their way of life is right. Take a moment to consider what that thinking leads to. Although business may be competitive, disrespecting people gets you nowhere; sooner or later, you come unstuck. And on the way down, you have to face all the people you offended on the way up! For example, if you refuse to shake hands with a Western businesswoman when she extends hers in greeting, don't be surprised if she doesn't answer your phone calls or respond to your emails.

Remember that what seems strange to you is perfectly normal for someone else. For example, in North America and Europe, men and women socialize individually and in groups; a friendship between men and women isn't strange or unorthodox. This custom doesn't apply in Muslim countries, however. Men greet other male friends with a handshake, an embrace, and by touching one cheek to the other. When they're among their friends, Muslim women's behavior is warm and affectionate. But never shall the twain meet: The men stick with the boys, and the women hang out with the girls.



REMEMBER

You may be an affectionate type who wants to put your arms around your friends when you meet. This behavior is great in Latin countries and acceptable in China. However, a polite hello suffices unless you want to embarrass your Nordic buddy or German cohort. You're not being unfriendly; you're simply respecting the norms of their culture and making your friend feel good. And isn't that what acting in a friendly manner is all about?

Being friendly means that you respect and conform to the traditions of the other person's culture and are considerate of how your behavior may be perceived in a land very different from yours. For more about communicating across cultures, pick up a copy of *Cross-Cultural Selling For Dummies* by Michael Soon Lee and Ralph R. Roberts (Wiley).

- » Discovering new ways of conveying your message
- » Honing your communication skills

Chapter **16**

Communicating in Challenging Circumstances

Communicating with clarity and conviction can be challenging, even at the best of times. People rely on their voices, facial expressions, and physical gestures to help convey their messages. When any of those means of communication is inhibited, getting your point across and understanding what others are trying to say becomes even trickier.

Although face masks offer protection from the spread of deadly germs, they make communication difficult by muffling sound and hiding much of people's faces, preventing you from seeing and interpreting their expressions. Because bacteria and viruses can be spread through human contact, people have found ways of expressing themselves through means other than handshakes, hugs, and kisses. Bodily contact, while not extinct, is no longer expected in social settings.

In this chapter, I offer ways of communicating when you can't rely on your face to do the talking. In addition, you discover ways of expressing your feelings with limited physical contact. Finally, you can pick up some tips for managing your online meetings like a film star.

Avoiding the Spread of Disease

As people move from one spot to the next, germs go along for the ride. Snot, spittle, and other bodily fluids fly through the air with abandon, sometimes visible, sometimes not. Someone covers their mouth with a hand when they sneeze and then wants to shake mine? Get a mask. And keep your hands to yourself.



TIP

When interpreting a person's body language, consider the context and observe the cluster of gestures.

MANAGING THE MASK

While burglars and trick-or-treaters wear masks to hide their identities, everyday people and medical professionals wear them to ward off illnesses. Bacteria and viruses are ubiquitous, and in today's world of health and safety, one can never be too careful.

In addition to medical masks, face masks come in a variety of fabrics, colors, and styles. Although they muffle sound and cover two-thirds of your face, making communication more challenging than it already is, their purpose is to prevent the transfer of disease. Whether your tastes are fashion-forward or conservative, medical experts advise that a well-fitting mask is more important than the type of mask you wear.

Because masks muffle the voice and hide most of your face, it's no wonder that people struggle to understand themselves and others. Follow the guidelines below to help you overcome some of the obstacles:

- **Face one another.** Because masks cover your facial orifices, they smother the sound. And, because masks are designed to go over the nose and under the chin, they cover two-thirds of your face, limiting the amount of visible facial expressions. That's why facing the other person and establishing eye contact is vital if you want to understand and to be understood.
- **Pay attention.** Because nonverbal cues are limited, paying close attention to the other person's upper facial expressions and body movements is essential for figuring out their state of mind.
- **Exaggerate your facial expressions.** While other people can't see the lower part of your face, they can see your eyes, brows, and forehead and infer meaning from what they observe. A wrinkled forehead, widened eyes, raised brows, and crinkles around the outer edges of your eyes offer clues to your mood and attitude (as does a face devoid of emotion).



TRY THIS

When speaking, exaggerate your mouth and cheek muscle movements. Although hidden behind your mask, they impact how the rest of your facial and vocal muscles engage.



WARNING



TRY THIS

» **Slow down and speak up.** Speak more slowly than you normally would.

Use fewer words. Raise your volume and articulate. If the background noise is disturbing, move to a quieter place. Take turns talking and try not to interrupt or talk over someone else. To avoid excess noise, nod your head rather than verbally confirming your understanding.

If you shout to be heard, you distort your message. Because people may struggle to decipher your words, you must rely on your tone to convey your meaning.

Engage your core muscles and imagine your words resonating through your abdomen, chest, and head chambers, bouncing out of your eyes and the top of your head like ping-pong balls. When you support your voice by engaging your core, you can produce a rich, clear, decipherable sound without shouting, screaming, or yelling (see Figure 16-1).

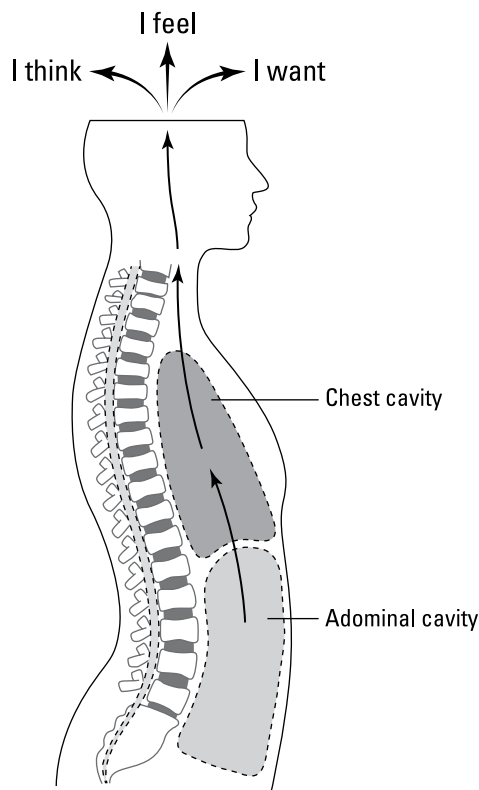


FIGURE 16-1: Sound travels upward through your body cavities. To make the most of your voice, imagine your words releasing through your eyes and out of the top of your head.

- » **Use gestures.** Gestures convey emotions, draw someone's attention, and signal acknowledgment. You point to direct your listener's attention to what you want him to see, such as towards yourself, someone else, a place, or an object. When you wiggle with excitement, bob your head in recognition, or offer an open-palmed sweep of the arm, your body's speaking for you.
- » **Communicate via writing.** If you're in a customer-facing business, you could make a sign addressing recurring questions. For example, if you work as a cashier, you could make a sign with questions, such as, "Do you need bags?" "How would you like to pay – cash or credit card?" "Do you have a loyalty card?" The customer can then point to the question and nod yes or shake their head no. If you have a smartphone and have activated the note-taking app, you can dictate a message, convert it to text, and show it to someone to help clarify your thoughts. This strategy is especially good for people who are hard of hearing.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE MASK?

Because facial expressions signal an individual's internal state, researchers at McGill University's Laboratory for Attention and Social Cognition investigated the impact of masks on an individual's ability to recognize basic emotions from facial expressions, namely happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, and neutral. Not surprisingly, the findings demonstrate that the recognition of all facial expressions is reduced when masks are worn. Interestingly, the reduction of recognition varies according to which emotion is on display.

The emotions most difficult to identify when faces are masked are disgust and anger, followed by sadness and neutral. Fear, surprise, and happiness are impacted the least. These findings indicate that anger and disgust rely on the lower face – the part covered by a mask – to convey the message more than other emotions do.

Further findings indicate that highly agreeable people with attributes like self-sacrifice and philanthropy correctly identify facial expressions more accurately than those who score lower in that trait. The researchers also found that people who score high in extroversion, those who seek out social contact, are not as good at recognizing masked expressions as people who rank lower in that characteristic.

Wearing a mask during social interactions influences communication between people. The doctor-patient relationship, for example, requires a straightforward interpretation of emotional states. Common feelings when dealing with medical issues are anger and sadness, and those emotions are most affected by wearing masks.

The findings confirm that the ability to identify facial expressions, which is fundamental to successful intellectual and social functioning, is negatively impacted by wearing masks (see Figure 16-2).

FIGURE 16-2:
Direct eye
contact,
exaggerated
facial
expressions, and
clear gestures
facilitate
communication
when wearing
a mask.



Dipshri Photography/Adobe Stock

Adopting New Forms of Salutations

Before people became conscious of the spread of disease through physical contact, agreements, greetings, and farewells were accompanied with an obligatory hand-shake, kiss, or hug. This behavior is anathema for people who shy away from physical contact, preferring smiling, waving, and nodding to pressing the flesh.

Knowing that viral infections can spread through physical contact, many people prefer to minimize their amount of corporeal touching and have devised new ways of expressing their feelings.

High-five

The high-five is a sign of solidarity, congratulation, and greeting. The term made its way into the Oxford English Dictionary as a noun in 1980 and was defined as a verb in 1981. To “high-five” someone, you both raise your hands at the same time, around head height, and slap the flat of your palms together, exchanging signs of congratulations.

While the origins of the high-five are disputed – did it first appear on a baseball field or on a basketball court in 1977? – the gesture became popular and is shared between friends and colleagues as a sign of celebration.

Fist bump

The fist bump (see Figure 16-3) most likely developed out of the high-five. Because the knuckles meet at the same level, a fist bump is a gesture between equals, as no one has the upper hand. (See Chapter 9 for more about hand positions and power.)



FIGURE 16-3: The fist bump is a gesture between equals and conveys approval and celebration.

Worawut/Adobe Stock

Elbow bump

The elbow bump (see Figure 16-4) is a derivative of the better-known fist bump, which became a common form of acknowledgment in the 1980s. The elbow bump, in which two people lightly tap elbows rather than shaking hands, offers good hygiene as well as good humor.

Namaste pose

Placing the palms of your hands together at chest level with your fingertips pointed upward is often called the Namaste position, or prayer hands (see Figure 16-5). This gesture derives from the yoga gesture called Anjali mudra, which is a sign of gratitude, devotion, or greeting. This simple gesture crosses cultural and language barriers and is recognized as a gesture of respect, greeting, and thankfulness.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In yoga, the Namaste position is a symbol of gratitude. At the end of a class, students exchange Namastes and bow their heads over their pressed palms as a sign of appreciation, universal connectivity, and equality.

FIGURE 16-4:
The elbow bump
is a way to avoid
the spread of
germs.



LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 16-5:
Hands held with
palms pressed
together and
fingertips
pointing upward
signify respect
and appreciation.



Mongkolchon/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Belinda was trying to cross a busy road with cars streaming along at full throttle. At one point, during a slight break in the traffic, Belinda started to step off the curb and dash across the road when a car came barreling towards her. She quickly put her hand up in the stop position, and when the driver applied their brakes, she put the palms of her hands together, fingers pointing upward, as a sign of her appreciation for the driver's consideration.

Hand on heart

When people put their hands on their hearts, they appear trustworthy and tend to behave morally. They're inclined to speak honestly, and people observing them believe what they say. People expect you to be honest when you speak with your hand on your heart, even if what you say might hurt their feelings. At least they know that you're being straight with them.

In addition to placing your hand on your heart to demonstrate that you're being honest, respectful, or truthful when you pat your heart, you're indicating that you're experiencing sincere and loving thoughts (see Figure 16-6).



fizkes/Adobe Stock

FIGURE 16-6:

By placing both her hands on her heart, this woman is demonstrating deep gratitude, love, and trust.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When people place their right hand over their hearts while singing their national anthems or saying the Pledge of Allegiance in America, they demonstrate respect, dignity, and honor.



REMEMBER

Placing your hand on your heart signifies honesty, respect, and trustworthiness.

KEEPING GERMS AT BAY

While estimates may vary, you shake approximately 15,000 hands throughout a lifetime. Clinical research led by Professor Sally Bloomfield at The London School of Hygiene suggests that handshaking spreads more germs than pecking people on the cheek. So, if someone leans in toward you with lips puckered, they could be doing you a favor.

According to a related study conducted by Aberystwyth University and published in the *American Journal of Infection Control*, fist bumping is a healthier alternative to shaking hands. The study indicates that you transfer up to 10 times more bacteria when shaking hands than when bumping fists.

Former U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, M.D., believes in the elbow bump and suggests it's a better alternative to handshaking and fist bumping.

Experts agree that the best way to prevent germs is to maintain a social distance of 6 feet. While you may feel removed from the people you're speaking with, you can take comfort in knowing that you won't be passing bugs between one another.

EMOJI MY EMOTIONS

In a world where word-based online communication is a way of life, the emoji (see Figure 16-7) fills in emotional clues that are missing in written conversation. Emojis are drawings, symbols, and pictures designed to represent concepts, emotions, and ideas. They are predated by the emoticon, which first appeared in 1982 when the computer scientist, Scott Fahlman, used common text-based symbols to replace language and express emotion. By the late 1990s, pictorial representations of facial expressions were mainstream.

The word emoji is Japanese and comprises two characters, one representing “picture” and the other “character.” In 1997, emojis first appeared on Japanese mobile phones. By 2010, they had gained worldwide popularity. Through single or sets of images, people can clarify and codify their messages.

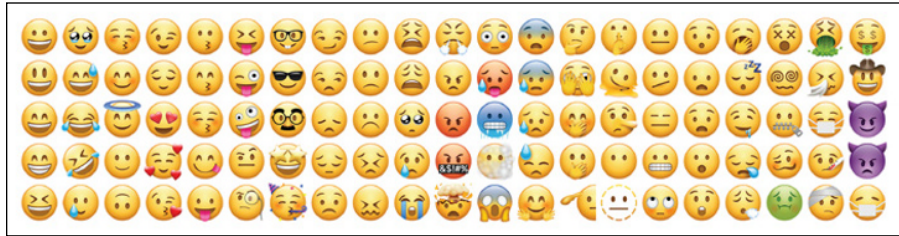
More than 90 percent of the world's online population uses emojis, or emoticons, to convey feelings, moods, and reactions quickly and concisely. As their use spread across the globe, standardization bodies were formed to meet the demands of different cultures. In 2010, a standard set of 722 emojis was released in Japan, the United States, and throughout Europe. By 2022, that number had risen to 3,664.

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In 2015, the *Oxford Dictionaries* named the Face with Tears of Joy emoji the word of the year. To quote *Oxford Dictionaries* president Caspar Grathwohl, "... traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st century communication. It's not surprising that a pictographic script like emoji has stepped in to fill those gaps – it's flexible, immediate, and infuses tone beautifully."

FIGURE 16-7:
A small sampling
of the thousands
of emojis
designed to
express thoughts,
feelings, places,
objects, and
activities.



Sughra/Adobe Stock

Meeting Virtually

With concerns over carbon footprints, the soaring costs of travel, and the freedom that comes from working from home, online meetings are a viable way of engaging with colleagues far and wide. Sure, meeting virtually lacks some of the intimacy of in-person get-togethers. For example, it's harder to read facial expressions when meeting online than when you're in the same room. Because sound may be distorted, you may struggle to understand what's being said and who's speaking. You can't touch people when you're working remotely, losing a valuable tool for building trust. (See Chapter 2 for more about the power of Kinesics.)

One of the problems with virtual meetings is that most people aren't trained on how to present themselves in front of a camera. The moment the spotlight is on you, you may find yourself fidgeting, laughing nervously, or going stone cold like a rabbit in the headlights. Knowing how to play to the camera can turn a blah meeting into a stellar performance.



TRY THIS

Before you sit down for your online meeting, check your appearance and spruce yourself up. Inhale deeply to ground yourself. Lift your chest and lower your shoulders. When the meeting starts, speak to the camera, not to your screen. Use simple gestures to support your points. Speak with vocal variety.

Framing yourself

The good news about virtual meetings is that you can control how much of you is visible to others. Really, all you need to show is your upper body, including your

- » Head
- » Shoulders
- » Upper torso
- » Hands

You need a light source so that the other attendees can see you. Ideally, you want your light source to be natural and in front of you. If that's not possible, angle your desk lamp toward your face. Whatever you do, don't sit with the light behind you. You'll end up looking like a dark shadow.

The ideal distance between you and your camera is roughly two feet. Too much farther away and others struggle to see your facial expressions. Too much closer and you appear overpowering.

When it comes to your background, be intentional. What you show contributes to your image. Some people choose to include plants in their setting to reveal their warm and caring side. Others prefer to sit in front of a bookcase to demonstrate their intellectual prowess. And others prefer to blur the background, eliminating any distractions and putting the focus squarely on them. Virtual backgrounds and video filters can up your game as you create your preferred environment.

Paying attention to posture

It's easy to slouch, slump, and hunch when seated. While this is fine when you're off camera, once the action starts, ensure that you're upright, and stay that way until the meeting ends.

If you typically sit during an online meeting, push your chair slightly away from your desk and sit on the front edge of your seat. This position makes it easier for you to sit upright. If you're able to stand during your meeting, even better. Standing avoids the aches and pains that come from too much sitting and allows you to be more expressive in your movements and gestures.



TIP

Keep your feet flat on the ground with your knees bent at a 90-degree angle to improve your posture. An upright body connotes confidence.

Looking at the camera, not the screen

When speaking, be sure to look at the camera not your screen. While this may feel uncomfortable, you appear relatable by simulating eye contact with your co-workers. When you look at your screen, you lose that human connection and can come across as disengaged and uninterested.

Place your camera just above eye level to look your best on a video call and angle it slightly downward. If you place your camera too high or too low, the resulting angles can play havoc with your facial features, as models and film stars can tell you.



WARNING

Know your audience when you're in an international virtual meeting. While eye contact is expected in the U.S., Spain, and in Arab countries, eye contact is considered rude in Japan. (See Chapter 15 for more cultural differences.)

Remembering to smile

In most countries smiling is a good thing. Smiling can create a positive and constructive atmosphere. When you smile, you're demonstrating interest, warmth, and connection. Because most of your time in meetings is spent in listening mode, it's not uncommon for you to forget to smile as you look up, down, or away from time to time, as you would in face-to-face meetings. That's fine. What's not so fine is when your face slides into "Resting Bitch Face," making you look mean and slightly odd.



TIP

Put something that inspires you next to your camera to remind you to smile with your eyes, raise your posture, and engage with your colleagues.

Paying attention to facial expressions

The good news about virtual meetings is that you don't need to wear a mask. The bad news is that the camera never lies and picks up every little twitch, smirk, and grimace for all to see. If you let hostility or boredom show on your face, you can alienate others in the meeting.



TRY THIS

To keep the mood positive and supportive, smile slightly throughout the meeting and raise your eyebrows to create expressions that show interest in what the speakers are saying.

Avoiding multitasking

There is no such thing as multitasking. Instead, you are switch-tasking, performing individual tasks in rapid succession. When you check your emails or perform other tasks unrelated to the discussion, you're demonstrating a lack of interest and disrespect for the other people in the meeting. That's no way to win friends and influence people.

Gesturing with your hands

Gesture if you want to direct the attention of your listeners. Because hand movements add to your meaning and help you remain lively and engaged, feel free to include some when you're on camera. Just make sure that they don't detract from your message. Too many gestures can be annoying and confuse the listener. Aim to keep your hands between chest and waist level.



ANECDOTE

Aisha is a trained stage actor who is frequently called upon to make presentations during team meetings. When speaking in public, Aisha is most comfortable walking across a stage and making big gestures. She finds being confined to a chair at her desk and speaking to a camera challenging. Aisha's nerves got the better of her at her first virtual meeting. She sat too close to the camera, and her hands took on lives of their own. Her overuse of gestures made her appear unsure of herself and out of control. She consciously controlled her hand movements for future presentations, using only precise gestures to highlight her points.

Reading the room

Pay attention to your colleagues. If they're nodding while you're speaking, you can figure that they've got your point. If they're crinkling their noses or frowning, they're probably trying to figure out what you mean and need clarification.

When someone wants to speak, they send out signals, either consciously or not. Someone might raise their hand, which would be an obvious sign that they'd like to contribute to the conversation. Other, more subtle gestures include

- » Pushing their hair off their faces
- » Adjusting their glasses
- » Shifting in their seats

Any of these movements could signal that the person is trying to catch your attention. If in doubt, ask.

5

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART . . .

Read the bodies of the people around you.

Master the confidence game.

Develop your awareness and insights.

- » Watching facial expressions
- » Looking for body signals
- » Listening for voice patterns

Chapter **17**

Ten Ways to Read Other People

As long as you have eyes, ears, and a nose for gathering information, you don't need to be a mind reader to figure out how someone is feeling or thinking. With a bit of intuition, knowledge, and practice, you can gain insight into a person's inner state by observing and interpreting that individual's body language while they remain oblivious to what you're doing.

As you read other people's physical movements and facial expressions, be aware that the problem with trusting body language as the sole source of information is that human beings are complex creatures. One gesture cannot and does not reveal an entire story any more than a book's message can be contained in one word. For example, identifying the cluster of signals observed in facial expressions, breathing patterns, tone of voice, and hand gestures takes practice. You must know what you're observing before you can begin interpreting.



REMEMBER

When reading someone's body language, take in all the signals.

Distinguishing Between Positive and Negative Body Language

Positive body language can create relationships, while negative body language can destroy them. The simplest way to describe positive and negative body language is to identify the components of positive body language as *open* and those of negative body language as *closed*.

Positive body language tends to be inclusive and outward facing. An open chest, an upright and balanced stance, and engaged eyes are signs of positive body language. Other positive behavior signals include smiling, gesturing with palms facing forward or upward, and leaning toward the other person.



TIP

If you feel at ease with the other person, their body language is probably open, indicating approachability.



WARNING

Negative body language, on the other hand, is inward facing and tends to shut others out. Hunched shoulders, downward-facing eyes, and slack muscles signal a downbeat state of mind. Other types of negative body language include slouching, staring, crossing your arms and legs, and yawning.

Negative body language can lead to a negative attitude.

Pay Attention to the Voice

Because much of the meaning of a message is conveyed through the voice, including the pitch, pace, volume, and emphasis, you can figure out a person's mood and attitude through the way they speak. If their voice is low in volume, dull in tone, slow, and lacks emphasis, they're likely experiencing sadness or depression. If their pitch is high and quick-paced, they're most likely excited.

The person who speaks with barely a pause is demonstrating their dominance, as is the person who insists on having the last word. Someone who adds a high-pitched sound of complaint to their voice, also known as whining, is perceived to be expressing dissatisfaction with something trivial as opposed to the deeper tones that a person uses when complaining about something serious.

Soft tones, few words, and a low-pitched voice can be calming, whereas a high-pitched voice speaking quickly with a barrage of words indicates a person's inner tension and elicits a similar response in the listener. Someone speaking quietly forces you to move closer to them to hear what they're saying, thereby increasing their status within in a group.

However, this is entirely situation dependent. Many people who talk quietly do not increase their status in the group. Often, they are not even heard by the group; if they are, they are not always considered to have said anything of value or importance. Some people who speak quietly are thought to do so because they don't want to rock the boat or be exposed.

Notice Their Breathing Patterns

Breathing patterns signal a person's emotions – both positive and negative. A slow, deep breathing pattern indicates a relaxed or reflective state, whereas short, shallow breaths signal stress, anxiety, or excitement.



TRY THIS

If you want to use breathing to help you focus and demonstrate confidence, rather than taking short, shallow breaths from your upper chest, engage your diaphragm, that dome-shaped muscle lying horizontally between your lungs and abdomen. If you struggle with this deep breathing technique, place one hand across your abdomen and put the other on your upper chest. Inhale to the count of four, expanding your diaphragm while your chest remains still. Exhale to a slightly longer count to stimulate the vagus nerve – which connects the brain and body – enabling your brain to help your body relax.

Look at Their Fingers

Finger-tapping and wandering minds go together like a horse and carriage. Picked cuticles and bitten nails are sure signs of inner turmoil, and fingers that fiddle demonstrate a displacement activity. They'd rather be anywhere other than where they are. (Turn to Chapter 9 to learn more about displacement activities.)

Fingers that remain still during heated discussions show control, while active digits demonstrate feelings of stress, agitation, and anxiety.

Check Where They're Leaning

If someone leans toward you with a friendly look on their face and open body language, chances are they're interested in getting to know you. Through the forward lean coupled with a smile, eye contact, and tilted head, they're demonstrating that they're engaged and paying attention to you. If someone leans toward you over a desk or a table with their hands spread and fingers splayed, they're showing you that they're dominant and in charge.

When someone pulls back or leans away from you, they're indicating that their interests lie elsewhere. If there is a lack of eye contact, a deadpan expression, and their head is upright rather than tilted with interest, you might struggle to engage with them. A person who leans back forces others to connect with them, playing a bit of a cat-and-mouse game, subtly demonstrating their power.

Watch Their Eyes

As the sayings go,

- » "The eyes are the mirror of the soul."
- » "The eyes are the gateway to the soul."
- » "The eyes are the window to the soul."

Whichever saying you prefer, you get the message that a person's eyes can tell you a lot about an individual. While they may be able to contain their hand gestures, control their voice, and even refrain from smiling with their lips, their eyes reflect their feelings, and there's not much they can do about that.

If their pupils are dilated in normal lighting conditions, their eyes tell you they like what they see. If their pupils are contracted, the opposite is true. Squinting eyes indicate anger and intense concentration, and wide-open eyes suggest surprise and fear.

An individual who is comfortable looking into another person's eyes is not afraid to sneak a peak into that person's soul and share their own. Someone feeling subservient lowers their eyes, while people experiencing anxiety tend to avoid looking at you, shifting their gaze from one place to another



TIP

Although different cultures have different rules around establishing and maintaining eye contact, eye contact is a good thing for most Westerners. Chapter 15 is full of examples of different behaviors in different cultures.

Monitor Their Movements

Slow and steady movements are signs of strength and control, while quick and erratic movements send out messages of confusion, agitation, and being in a tizzy. Unless they're covering a sneeze or scratching an itch, someone raising his hand to their face may be trying to hide their thoughts or feelings. The hand-to-mouth gesture is a classic way of holding back what they are tempted to say.

If you notice someone stroking themselves – neck, arms, hands, fingers, or thighs, for example – you can bet that they're experiencing pressure of some sort. A gentle rub can soothe away tension, bringing feelings of relief and providing reassurance.



WARNING

As you age, your flexibility diminishes, and your movements become slow and stiff.

Notice the Nuances of Their Smile

No smiles are fake. They just express different moods, thoughts, and emotions. Smiles can demonstrate pure joy as well as total contempt. A smile is a tool of flirtation, as well as a sign of embarrassment. What differentiates one smile from another depends on which facial muscles are used to create the expression.

- » When the eyes are engaged, the cheeks are raised, and the lips are lifted at the sides, you can figure that you're looking at a genuinely happy face. Known as a Duchenne smile, this smile represents trustworthiness, authenticity, and friendliness.
- » When one side of the mouth is lifted, and the other turns down, you're seeing signs of dominance. This asymmetrical smile denotes superiority, contempt, and derision. This smile, also known as a sneer, can include a lip curl and a raised eyebrow.

- » A polite smile is one in which the lips engage and the eyes don't. While this smile demonstrates trustworthiness and friendliness, it does not invite intimacy.
- » To demonstrate signs of politeness, belonging, and reassurance, the affiliative smile can be identified by the upward pull of the lips, dimpling cheeks with lips frequently pressed together.

Turn to Chapter 6 if you want to know more about smiles.

Look at Their Feet

The funny thing about feet is that they convey information about you without you knowing what they're doing. The direction in which you point your feet shows whether or not you're interested or attracted to the person or object in front of you. When someone points their feet in your direction while looking at you, you're a winner. If their face is pointed in your direction while their feet are pointed somewhere else, they're politely indicating that they're not interested in engaging with you.

When feet wiggle and jiggle, they're releasing pent-up energy. Someone feeling excited or full of anticipation may bounce on the balls of their feet or jiggle them if they're seated.

If you're chatting up a woman and her foot slides out of her shoe, dangling from her toes, she's flirting with you. This action is not one that men tend to use when they're attracted to someone. Instead, they may quietly play footsie under the table.

Someone who's wrapped their feet in a knot is containing himself. People who are asked difficult questions they don't want to answer can be seen kicking a foot forward as if batting away a negative intruder. If someone steps toward you to close the distance between the two of you, they're showing their interest. If they step backward, they're telling you that they're either disgusted or just not captivated.

A person who shuffles their feet tends to lack confidence. The concrete connection between the feet and floor helps ground the person and provides tactile reassurance.

Go to Chapter 10 if you want to know more about the signals feet can send.

Take in the Whole Picture

Never – as in *never* – count on one gesture or facial expression to interpret a person's mood, attitude, or general state of mind. Instead, look for clusters of gestures, postures, and movements to decipher the message being conveyed.

For example, if you want to assess someone's integrity and evaluate their intent, look for a specific cluster of nonverbal cues that is remarkably revealing. The nonverbal signals associated with lying include

- » Hand touching
- » Face touching
- » Crossed arms
- » Leaning away

While none of these cues individually predict a lie, together, they form a reliable signal of deception.

- » Acting the part
- » Giving yourself positive messages

Chapter **18**

Ten Ways to Demonstrate Confidence

The word “confidence” derives from the Latin “fidere,” which means “to trust.” Confident people have trust in themselves. Most people aren’t born confident. Confidence is a learned skill that anyone with the desire can acquire.

Confident individuals appreciate their own abilities and are self-assured about their character and accomplishments. They don’t need approval from external sources because they approve of themselves.

While the skills required to demonstrate confidence are simple, they may not come easily to you at first. That’s not uncommon. Stick with it. The outcome is worth the effort. With regular practice, achievable skills can be learned and refined, leading you to be the best version of yourself.



TIP

When you demonstrate confidence, other people view you highly and feel secure in your company.

Claim Your Space

If you've ever had a little voice in your head telling you that you don't belong, that you're not worthy, or any other confidence-knocking, off-putting, self-destructive messages, change the record to one that celebrates the wonder of you. Claim your space in the world by reminding yourself of your strengths and accomplishments to nourish a positive sense of who you are and all you bring to the party.

The way people move reflects their mental states. Confident people move with purpose and the certainty that they have earned the right to be where they are. They don't hold back, drop their heads, or hug the wall. Their stance is strong and upright. Rather than shrinking and apologizing for their presence, they figuratively embrace the space, enjoying the feeling of engagement.

Confident people avoid sloppy movements like shuffling, slumping, and slurring their words. These behaviors are signs of detachment. Confident individuals use firm and decisive movements and speak with clarity and conviction, indicating a mind that is engaged, interested, and raring to go.



REMEMBER

When confident people move, they move with purpose.

Act Decisively

People who trust themselves can view a portfolio of relatively similar options – they evaluate the potential risks and possible opportunities, and decide based on what they think is the best option. Confident people don't overthink or second-guess their choices. They trust themselves to make the most appropriate decisions based on their experience, knowledge, and expertise.

Confident people make the best of whatever comes their way and don't worry about things they can't control. They're comfortable letting things run their course without trying to control something they can't.

Be Consistent

Someone who changes their position to accommodate others isn't doing themselves any favors. Before you know it, they're being overlooked in favor of others who know what they want and express their points clearly, concisely, and consistently.

A confident person sticks to their guns, maintaining their position, even when challenged. They hold firm without becoming defensive or aggressive. They play back the other points of view being expressed so that everyone knows they've been heard. Then, they repeat their facts and the rationale behind their stance. They are willing to agree to disagree.

Acknowledge Mistakes

Show me a person who's never made a mistake, and I'll show you someone who's never lived. Mistakes are a normal part of life. Confident people understand this concept and aren't afraid to admit when they're wrong. Someone who can own up to their lapse in judgment, misstep, or faults comes across as authentic, straightforward, and self-assured. And when they promise to rectify what they've done to the best of their ability, you trust them to do the right thing.

In addition to acknowledging when they've been wrong, confident people aren't afraid to ask for help. They know where their strengths lie and recognize that seeking assistance is a sign of strength. They have enough faith in themselves to appreciate that by asking for help, they gain new insights and different perspectives.



REMEMBER

Making mistakes is an opportunity to re-evaluate what happened, learn, and make improvements so that this mistake doesn't happen again.

Persevere

While confident people are not Pollyannaish, they don't give into negative thoughts. If they find themselves staring down that rabbit hole, they remind themselves of their strengths and accomplishments and the value of what they have to offer.

Someone who is confident holds the positive belief that anyone can accomplish what they set out to do if they trust in their ability to achieve a goal. When striving to reach a goal, a confident person remains determined, focused, and in control – even under pressure.

Model Excellence

If you want to develop confidence, turn to your role models and observe how they behave. You might notice that they express their feelings, beliefs, and expectations without insulting, denigrating, or stepping over the line. They are assertive without being aggressive, and their positive and optimistic outlook is energizing. They don't shy away from eye contact or engaging in difficult conversations and recognize everyone's right to be heard. People who are confident within themselves are good listeners.



TRY THIS

When someone is speaking, don't interrupt. Let them speak even when you disagree with what they are saying. Nod your head to demonstrate you heard the message. Keep your face neutral. Look at the person speaking to you. When they have finished, pause before responding. To pick up more tips on listening skills, treat yourself to a copy of *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).

Putting other people down to make yourself appear better is not the behavior of a confident person. Instead, people who feel good about themselves seek to engage positively with others, always supportive and encouraging. They seek to understand rather than to be understood.

When you model excellence, you may notice that your posture becomes upright, you establish and maintain eye contact with other people, lean toward them as you speak and listen, and your movements are contained as you express interest in what the other people want to say.

Demonstrate Comfort

People who are confident within themselves project a calm exterior. They are at ease with who they are and demonstrate their comfort in the following ways:

- » Maintain frequent eye contact
- » Engage in little or no fidgeting
- » Seldom use self-comforting gestures
- » Establish upright posture
- » Use natural facial expressions
- » Emphasize points with physical gestures
- » Breathe deeply and slowly, rather than taking short, shallow breaths

Speak Clearly, Concisely, and with Cadence

Someone lacking in confidence tends to mumble, babble, or burble, meaning their voice is either a low-pitched, unfocused drone of a monotone or is bubbling forth with nervous energy, leaving the listener questioning the speaker's state of mind. A confident person is clear about their message. They know what they want to communicate and aren't afraid to speak up.

A confident person isn't afraid of silence. They add pauses to conversations and presentations to allow the listener to absorb what they have said. They take time to breathe deeply before speaking to strengthen and support their voices. They add variety to their speaking pattern by pausing and changing the pitch, volume, and speed so that their way of speaking reflects their message. Rather than rattling on at breakneck speed, confident people tend to speak slowly and in measured tones.



TRY THIS

When you're unsure of what you want to say, stay still. Keep your lips closed until you're sure about your message. Before you say a word, breathe deeply. Then make use of your lips, tongue, and teeth to articulate so that your words come out clearly. Keep your points to no more than three, speak for 20 seconds at a time, and add vocal variety to emphasize your points and maintain your listener's attention.

Practice Public Speaking

One of the best ways to build your confidence is to put yourself in scary situations. While I am not encouraging you to do anything dangerous, forbidden, or harmful, I am encouraging you to challenge your self-beliefs and put yourself out there. Speaking in public about a subject you feel passionate about is a perfect arena to develop and demonstrate confidence.

Standing up in front of a group of friends, family, or strangers can feel daunting. The same experience can also feel energizing. The difference is in your attitude. Tell yourself – “I can do this! I *want* to do this!” – and you're off to a powerful start. From there, practice your presentation so you can wow your listeners with your confident self when the time comes.

Below are a few tips to help you demonstrate confidence when you speak:

- » **Know your audience.** Who they are, why they're there, and what they want to gain from listening to you.

- » **Be clear about your message.** Keep it to three main points. Any more than that, and your audience will get lost.
- » **Practice.** Out loud. In front of friends, family, or anyone who can listen and offer feedback. Proper preparation prevents poor performance.
- » **Speak with conviction and passion.** Vary your pace, volume, and vocal pitch to maintain your audience's interest and highlight your points. Use gestures to underscore your meaning. Always include pauses to show that you're comfortable with silence and give your audience time to absorb your words.



WARNING

Control your gestures and vocal intonations. You want them to support your message, not detract from what you're saying.

- » **Before you speak, breathe from your core, establish eye contact with your listeners, and smile.** Tell yourself – “Yes, I can!” – and then go do the job.

Act “As If”

You may have days when your confidence levels are low. Even the most celebrated and accomplished individuals are known to experience a bit of ennui occasionally. When that happens, you can pretend you're feeling confident, even if you're not. A few techniques for boosting your morale include

- » **Own your accomplishments.** Remind yourself of your successes. Praise yourself as you would praise a friend.
- » **When someone compliments you, respond with a simple, “Thank you.”** Brushing off praise insults the person extending the compliment and makes you appear unworthy.
- » **Put effort into your appearance.** Clean, well-fitting clothes that suit your style show the outside world that you care about how you present yourself. Someone who shows up wearing baggy sweatpants, a dirty T-shirt, and worn-out shoes indicates a sloppy attitude and a poor self-image.
- » **Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and pause to collect your thoughts.** Avoid filler words, such as “just,” “like,” “um,” and “you know what I mean?”
- » **Keep it simple.** Demonstrating confidence is easier if you don't overthink and over-complicate things. Breathe. Look. Smile. Speak.

- » Creating impressions
- » Modelling excellence
- » Being willing to adapt

Chapter **19**

Ten Ways to Improve Your Nonverbal Communication

If you want to improve your nonverbal communication, you've come to the right spot. Being comfortable when asking for what you want, dressing in a way that reflects who you are, and making people feel good about themselves are stepping stones to effective communication.

While the suggestions here are simple in theory, you may find putting them into practice a challenge. Stick with it. Building new habits takes time and is worth the effort.

Take an Interest

The best communicators demonstrate an interest in other people. They look at you when you're speaking, smile appropriately, and nod their heads in empathy. They feel your pain, share your joy, and when you're with them you feel good about yourself.

If you think that you demonstrate an interest in other people but no one else agrees, consider your nonverbal behavior. The problem could be that you're so focused on yourself that you're failing to notice what's important to the people around you.



ANECDOTE

Anne is tops when it comes to demonstrating interest in other people. She asks them questions, establishes eye contact, smiles appropriately, nods in agreement, tilts her head in sympathy, leans forward, and stays focused on the individual she is speaking with. People frequently comment that they feel she's really interested in what they say. Her brother, Rick, is the opposite. Rather than engaging in dialogue, he talks at a person, not with them. He tends to thrust his chest forward and pull his head back, lifting his chin and wearing a smile of dominance. He doesn't tend to ask questions and has a reputation for being interested only in himself. (See Chapter 4 to discover different types of smiles.)

Know What You Want to Express

Expressing your feelings, thoughts, or intentions through your *nonverbal* behavior requires knowing the right moves. Don't be surprised if your message is muddled if

- » You want to express compassion and your body is stiff and unyielding.
- » You want to express a sense of calm and you're fidgeting with your clothing.
- » You want to express annoyance and you're laughing.

People who know what they want to express speak clearly, concisely, and with conviction. Their gestures, movements, and facial expressions reflect the mood of the spoken message. For example, if you want to express abundance, you might throw your head back with a smile on your face while opening your arms wide, palms facing upward with your fingertips spread. If you want to communicate scarcity, you might hunch your neck into your shoulders, keeping your arms close by your sides, your facial expression pinched, and your fingertips pressed close together.



TRY THIS

Make up a list of emotions, including happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and contempt. Look at photographs and watch for examples. Use a mirror, or even better have someone video you so you can see yourself. Adopt the appropriate body language for expressing different feelings. You can find suitable examples throughout this book if you're unsure what the right gestures and expressions are.

Model Excellence

Modeling excellence requires observing and reflecting on how you act and concentrating on the individual you admire. Notice how your behavior is similar and how it is different. You might observe that the gestures and movements of people you venerate are distinct and unambiguous. These people command your attention through their gestures and facial expressions.

Models of excellence demonstrate comfort in their space and move with purpose. Their nonverbal behavior supports the image they want to present. They appreciate that what's appropriate nonverbal behavior in one situation may be inappropriate in another and adjust accordingly. (See Chap 15 for nonverbal behaviors in different cultures).



ANECDOTE

When Nicky moved from the middle of Manhattan to the English countryside, she knew her forceful personality and exaggerated gestures might be perceived as brash and brazen. Because she wanted to fit into her new community without causing offense, she turned to someone whose behavior she admired. When she doubted how to behave, she asked herself, "What would the Queen do?"

Mirror Others

Mirroring – that is, the unconscious reflection of another person's nonverbal behavior – is a pathway to rapport. (See Chapter 14 to discover the benefits of establishing rapport.) Mirroring is different than imitating, which is a conscious and overt action.

Mirroring is common in business and social settings as individuals unconsciously copy one another's behavior, including their facial expressions, breathing patterns, and gestures. Mirroring forms a connection between people, eliciting feelings of empathy, acceptance, and belonging. While you may not know how the connection is forming, your senses tell you it's all good.



ANECDOTE

Kate and Debbie sat next to one another at an all-day conference. Between speakers and during the breaks, the women talked about various subjects. As they engaged, they unconsciously mirrored one another's body language. Similarities of their nonverbal behavior included

- » Head position
- » Facial expressions

- » Vocal pace and volume
- » Posture
- » Hand movements
- » Speech patterns
- » Breathing rates

By mirroring one another's nonverbal behaviors, the women built rapport, leading to a productive professional relationship and a personal friendship that has lasted many years. (See Chapter 14 for more about mirroring.)

Practice Gestures

If you know your message and the words you want to say, adding the appropriate gestures and expressions illustrates your points. Some people intuit which gestures are appropriate for the situation while others haven't a clue.



ANECDOTE

One client, who's a thoroughly pleasant fellow, was unaware that he habitually frowns, making him look angry and out of sorts. His genuine interest in other people means that he concentrates on what they do and say, causing his brow to furrow. When he saw himself on video, he realized that he looked more disapproving than interested. With time and practice, he broke that habit and now listens with a smooth forehead and open facial expressions.

If you don't know where to begin, observe other people. Watch films, flip through magazines, observe people in various encounters, and note their gestures. Their gestures are open if they express positive emotions, thoughts, or intentions. Closed gestures and facial expressions indicate a negative state. Depending on the attitude you want to convey, pick your gestures and practice.



REMEMBER

Practice makes perfect.

Develop Timing and Synchronization

You can improve your timing and synchronization by paying attention to your surroundings and anticipating what could happen based on your observations. As part of their job, people who work with the public, including waitstaff, airline

personnel, teachers, nurses, and law enforcement, observe how people move so that they can anticipate and respond to the individual's needs and intentions.

Timing and synchronization can make or break relationships. Consider these scenarios:

- » You lean forward to kiss someone just as they turn their head away from you.
- » You turn to speak to the person on your right at the same time as they turn to the person on their right.
- » You put out your hand as a greeting sign as the other person leans forward to hug you.
- » You move to your right while the person coming toward you moves to their left.
- » Someone walks into you, spilling red wine down your front.

Sportspeople, doctors, and performers are just some of the individuals who rely on precise timing and synchronization of their movements to do their jobs well. If you want to have successful encounters and conversations, pay attention to other people's speed and direction of movement so that your movements mesh rather than clash.

Dress the Part

The way you dress reflects your beliefs about yourself, your attitudes, and what matters to you. Because your outward appearance sends clear messages about you, make sure that you send the message you intend.

Think of your clothes as a costume through which you create impressions. You might want to wear a suit if you work in a formal environment, like the law or banking. Starting up your own IT business? Jeans and a hoodie are fine.

If you want your clients, colleagues, and your children's teachers to feel safe and comfortable in your company, consider adapting your dress to fit your role and the situation. While you want to be comfortable and true to yourself, if your way of dressing negatively impacts communication, you may want to review your choices. Your clothes needn't be expensive. They *do* need to be clean, in good repair, and suited to your shape and style.



REMEMBER

People feel comfortable when others dress and behave similarly to them.



WARNING

If you work for a conservative organization where tailored clothing is the norm, you're tempting fate to show up in tracksuit bottoms and a T-shirt. To do so would make other people uncomfortable, and they'd question your credibility.

Act How You Want to Be Perceived

By acting how you want to be perceived, you can influence how people respond to you. Figuring out how you want to be identified may take a bit of soul-searching. Once you discover what's important to you, you can reflect that information in your nonverbal behavior.

If you want people to think you're kind, caring, and considerate, you might lean toward them, reach out your hand, smile in empathy, take time to listen, and give them their space. If you want to come across as a mean machine, move with force and deliberation, contain your gestures, and tighten your facial muscles. The trick is to show who you are through your movements, gestures, and expressions.



ANECDOTE

Despite holding a PhD in psychology, Nancy was better known for being a wild and crazy lady. Her exuberance was frequently overwhelming, and people struggled to take her seriously. Wanting to show the world that she was more than a pretty face, Nancy consciously adjusted her behavior. She may still let loose on a Saturday night, but at work she contains her movements and calms her facial expressions. Through conscious choices, Nancy influences how others identify and react to her.



REMEMBER

How you behave determines how you're perceived.

Demonstrate Awareness

When you're mindful of how people act and react, you develop an awareness of what works well, when, and where. Check out *Mindfulness For Dummies* by Shamash Alidina (Wiley) to learn more about mindfulness. By being aware of nonverbal behavior's impact on relationships, you can make conscious choices about how you act and react.

Without awareness, there's no improvement. Before you can work on your nonverbal behavior, you need to know what you're doing and the impression your actions leave.



ANECDOTE

The company's CEO Gavin wanted his team to attend a two-day presentation skills workshop. He joined the group, a cross-section of supervisors, managers, IT specialists, and support staff, to show goodwill. On the first day of the workshop, Gavin rushed into the training room just as the program was to begin. He flicked his written presentation to Alexandra, the trainer saying, "Here, honey, copy this for me," as he strode to a chair up front and on the aisle, sat down, leaned back, and spread his legs wide. With a calm demeanor, Alexandra explained that she was running the program and that if he were to ask one of the assistants in the office, she was sure they would help. Gavin hoisted himself out of his seat, scowled, grabbed his papers, and went in search of the office. Later that day, the participants presented to the group while being videotaped. Unbeknownst to Gavin, during his presentation he rocked back and forth from heel to toe, holding his left hand – fist clenched – in front of his abdomen. He put his right hand in his pocket, where it remained throughout the presentation as he fiddled his fingers. The audience was fixated on his actions and paid little attention to what he was saying. During the feedback session, Alexandra asked Gavin if he was aware of his non-verbal behavior when he arrived and during his presentation. He wasn't. Gavin was mortified when Alexandra and the course participants described his actions, and he saw himself on tape. For the remainder of the course, he demonstrated more deference and less defiance.

Ask for Feedback

Asking for feedback on your nonverbal behavior can feel uncomfortable. Big deal. If you're serious about improving, take the bad with the good.

Choose your feedback givers carefully. Turn to people that you trust and respect. Include individuals who champion you. Ask them how your behavior impacts the way you come across. If they can give you detailed examples, terrific. If their view and yours match, great. However, resist arguing if they perceive you acting in a way that conflicts with your self-perception. Listen to what they say without interrupting, thank them for their input, and reflect on their observations.



TIP

If you're giving feedback, clarify what the other person wants feedback on. Comment on observable facts and avoid making assumptions about personality or motives.

By asking for and receiving specific and honest feedback about your behavior, you can continue what's working well and adjust what's not. Make sure you're open and receptive to the feedback coming your way and listen attentively. If you don't, the person offering insights may become exasperated and walk away, leaving you

none the wiser. If you don't understand, ask for clarification. Respect and acknowledge the other person's point of view. This doesn't mean that you have to agree with what they are saying; doing so just means that you value their input. Finally, thank them for their opinions. After all, you asked for them.

To learn more about giving and receiving feedback, pick up a copy of *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).



WARNING

Make sure that you ask for specific feedback. Otherwise, you may receive comments that are neither pertinent nor helpful.

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About the Author

Elizabeth Kuhnke is frequently asked, “What made you become interested in body language?” Her reply is always the same, “My mother’s mental illness, my parents’ violent marriage and ugly divorce, and becoming part of a blended family with six competitive children all vying for attention and an early onset of puberty.” She adds that theater and dance – ballet, jazz, tap, you name it – and supporters and mentors whose open and welcoming body language contributed to her fascination with the power of nonverbal behavior.

Elizabeth’s eclectic working life includes acting on stage and in commercials, teaching, waiting tables, coaching, serving as a hostess on cruise ships, and writing promotional material for the fragrance industry. These experiences further stirred her interest in nonverbal behavior and provided her with truckloads of anecdotes. When her husband suggested that she turn that material into a sellable commodity, she was off.

Elizabeth is a highly entertaining and insightful conference speaker, addressing topics that focus on communication – specifically, on being yourself at your best. She is lauded for helping teams and individuals in corporate, professional services, and academic environments communicate with clarity, confidence, and commitment. She’s been compared to a radiator because she generates warmth. She’s also been compared to an Olympic athlete because she never gives up. In addition to *Body Language For Dummies*, she has written three other books for Wiley, including *Communication Skills For Dummies* and *Body Language: Learn How to Read Others and Communicate with Confidence*. She is frequently quoted in the media about the body language of public figures.

Family and supporting abused women and children head up Elizabeth’s “My Purpose in Life” list.

She relishes a competitive game of backgammon, needlepoint, a walk on the beach, a sweat-inducing workout, spending time with friends, and traveling. She believes in demonstrating respect, establishing rapport, and producing outstanding results. Most of all, Elizabeth loves to learn and laugh and gives thanks every day for all the blessings in her life. If you want to know more, you may reach her at elk@ekuhnke.com.

Author's Acknowledgments

Shortly before my mother died, I asked her, “What do you want me to do about your illness, Mom? And I’m not talking about the cancer.” She replied, “Write about it. Tell people about it. Maybe you can show that it’s not so scary.” I’m not sure I can do that – my mother was schizophrenic, and her breakdowns were frequently very scary. That being said, she was a talented, strong, caring, fun, and funny woman whom I love, admire, and respect. This one’s for you, Mom.

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Finally, to you, my readers. My wish for you is that you enjoy this book, further your knowledge, and use your nonverbal behavior in ways that lead to clear, congruent communication. You’ve got this!

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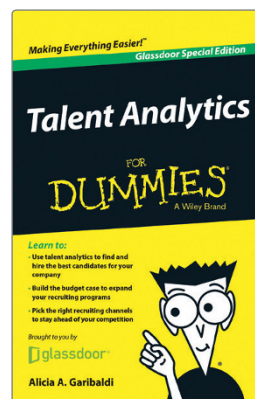
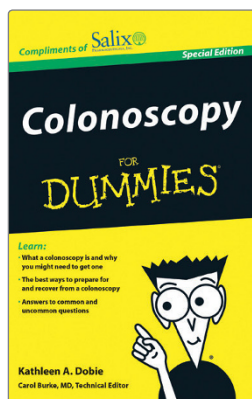
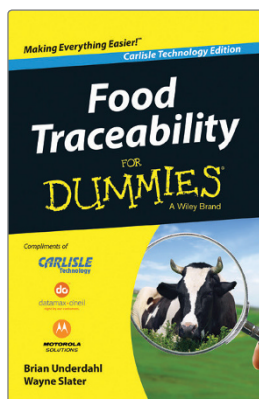
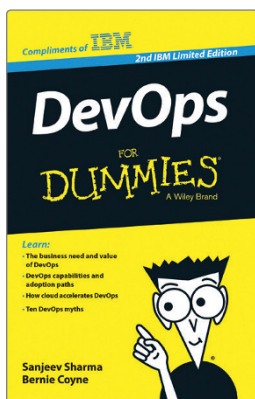
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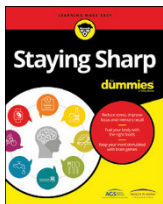
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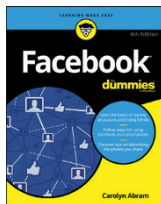
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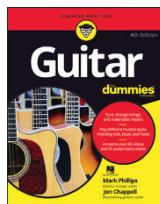
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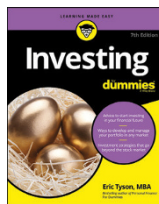
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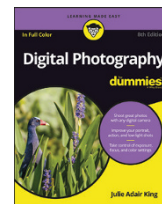
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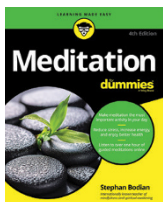
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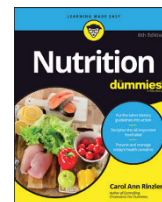
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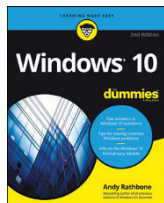


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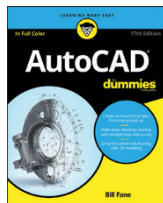


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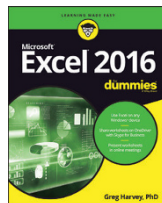
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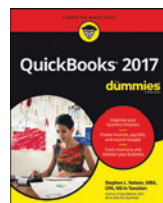
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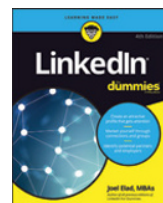
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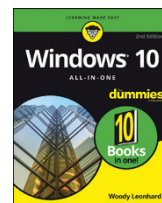
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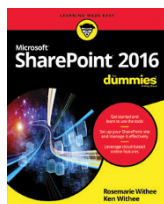
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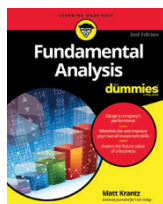
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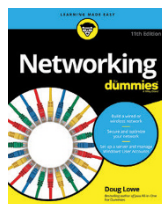
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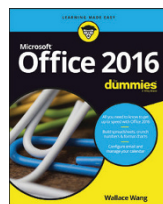
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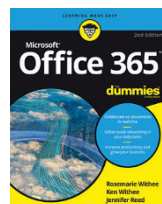
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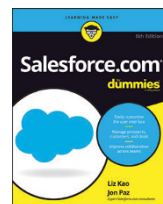
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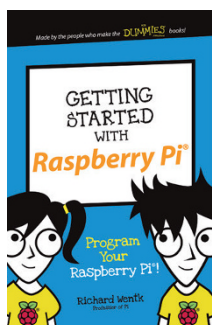
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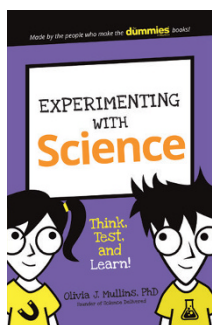
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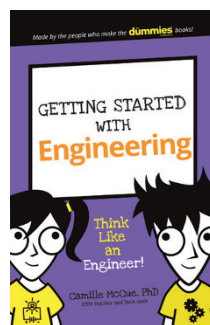
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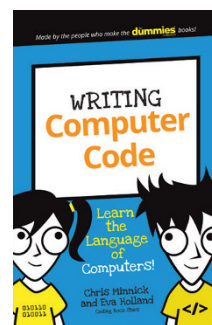
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