

PART IV

## CHAPTER 4: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION



## 22. Introduction

### Chapter 4 Learning Outcomes

1. Give examples of nonverbal communication and describe its role in the communication process.
2. Explain the principles of nonverbal communication.
3. Describe the similarities and differences among eight general types of nonverbal communication.
4. Demonstrate how to use movement to increase the effectiveness of your message.
5. Demonstrate three ways to improve nonverbal communication.



Dhavit is getting some feedback from his team that facilitation participants think he is angry or upset during question and answer sessions. One of his colleagues has noticed that Dhavit's arms are often crossed when concerns are being raised, and his facial expression sometimes indicates that he feels threatened by criticisms of organizational systems. As you read through this chapter, consider what might be happening and how Dhavit might adjust his facial expressions and body language as part of dialogue with staff members.

Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate evolutionary functions from verbal communication. For example, nonverbal communication is primarily biologically based while verbal communication is primarily culturally based. This is evidenced by the fact that some nonverbal communication has the same meaning across cultures while no verbal communication systems share that same universal recognizability (Andersen, 1999). Nonverbal communication also evolved earlier than verbal communication and served an early and important survival function that helped humans later develop verbal communication. While some of our nonverbal communication abilities, like our sense of smell, lost strength as our verbal capacities increased, other abilities like paralanguage and movement have grown alongside verbal complexity. The fact that nonverbal communication is processed by an older part of our brain makes it more instinctual and involuntary than verbal communication.

## Chapter Preview

- Principles of Nonverbal Communication
- Types of Nonverbal Communication
- Movements in your Speech
- Nonverbal Strategies for Success with Your Audience
- Conclusion

# 23. Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Begin this chapter by watching the following 3 minute video from body language expert Mark Bowden to extend your learning about nonverbal communication.

## Body Language



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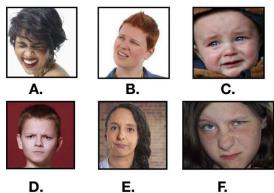
## Nonverbal Communication Is Fluid

Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, meaning is even harder to discern. You can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages.

Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder the clear understanding of your message, but it doesn’t reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking. Nonverbal communication is far from simple, and its complexity makes your study and your understanding a worthy but challenging goal.

Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Consider one element, facial expressions. What do they mean without the extra context of chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one movement to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element, or even a series of elements. How well can you correctly identify the feelings behind facial expressions?

The following series of images show people with a variety of facial expressions, what does each one represent?



Images source: Pixabay, Public Domain – the answer key is at the end of this section.

You may perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. You do one task, you're doing another task now, and you are planning on doing something else all the time. Sometimes you place more emphasis on the future, or the past, forgetting that you are actually living in

the present moment whether you focus on “the now” or not. Nonverbal communication is always in motion, as long as you are, and is never the same twice.

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication, you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction. Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow “do-overs” on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. In your experience, you've likely said something you would give anything to take back, and you've learned the hard way that you can't. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still doesn't erase the original message or its impact. Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You can't separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you can't take it back.

In a speech, nonverbal communication is continuous in the sense that it is always occurring, and because it is so fluid, it can be hard to determine where one nonverbal message starts and another stops. Words can be easily identified and isolated, but if you try to single out a speaker's gestures, smile, or stance without looking at how they all come together in context, you may miss the point and draw the wrong conclusion. You need to be conscious of this aspect of public speaking because, to quote an old saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” This is true in the sense that people often pay more attention to your nonverbal expressions more than your words. As a result, nonverbal communication is a powerful way to contribute to (or detract from) your success in communicating your message to the audience.

Answer Key for Facial Recognition Activity – F: Disgusted; E: Annoyed; D: Angry; C: Sad; B: Confused; A: Joyful

## Nonverbal Communication Is Fast

Nonverbal communication gives your thoughts and feelings away before you are even aware of what you are thinking or how you feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your

nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the unintentional ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react.

## Nonverbal Communication Can Add to or Replace Verbal Communication

People tend to pay more attention to how you say something rather than what you actually say. You communicate nonverbally more than you engage in verbal communication, and often use nonverbal expressions to add to, or even replace, words you might otherwise say.

You use a nonverbal gesture called an illustrator to communicate your message effectively and reinforce your point. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object to someone. Think about how you gesture when having a phone conversation, even though the other person can't see you, there's an important unconscious element to nonverbal communication.

Unlike gestures, emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning, like when someone raises their thumb to indicate agreement. Many cultures have a variety of different nonverbal emblems.

In addition to illustrators or emblematic nonverbal communication, you also use regulators. "Regulators are nonverbal messages which control, maintain or discourage interaction" (McLean, 2003). For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the speaker to stop talking.

Let's say you are in a meeting presenting a speech that introduces your company's latest product. If your audience members nod their heads in agreement on important points and maintain good eye contact, it is a good sign. Nonverbally, they are using regulators encouraging you to continue with your presentation. In contrast, if they look away, tap their feet, and begin drawing in the margins of their notebook, these are regulators suggesting that you better think of a way to regain their interest or else wrap up your presentation quickly.

"Affect displays are nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings" (McLean, 2003). An affect display that might accompany holding up your hand for silence would be to frown and shake your head from side to side. When you and a colleague are at a restaurant, smiling and waving at coworkers as they arrive lets them know where you are seated and welcomes them.



Figure 4.1. Matthew – [I Hate Bad Hair Days](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

“Adaptors are displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure” (McLean, 2003). A self-adaptor involves you meeting your need for security, by playing with your hair for example, by adapting something about yourself in way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose. Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior.

An object-adaptor involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed. You may see audience members tapping their pencils, chewing on them, or playing with them, while ignoring you and your presentation. This is an example of an object-adaptor that communicates a lack of engagement or enthusiasm for your speech.

Intentional nonverbal communication can complement, repeat, replace, mask, or contradict what we say. When a friend invites you to join them for a meal, you may say “Yeah” and nod, complementing and repeating the message. You could have simply nodded, effectively replacing the “yes” with a nonverbal response. You could also have decided to say no, but did not want to hurt your friend’s feelings. Shaking your head “no” while pointing to your watch, communicating work and time issues, may mask your real thoughts or feelings. Masking involves the substitution of appropriate nonverbal communication for potentially negative nonverbal communication you may want to display (McLean, 2003).

Finally, nonverbal messages that conflict with verbal communication can confuse the listener. Table 4.1 below summarizes these concepts.

Table 4.1 – Some Nonverbal Expressions

Term	Definition
Adaptors	Help us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Affect Displays	Express emotions or feelings
Complementing	Reinforcing verbal communication
Contradicting	Contradicting verbal communication
Emblems	Nonverbal gestures that carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
Illustrators	Reinforce a verbal message
Masking	Substituting more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
Object-adaptors	Using an object for a purpose other than its intended design
Regulators	Control, encourage or discourage interaction
Repeating	Repeating verbal communication
Replacing	Replacing verbal communication
Self-adaptors	Adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose

## Nonverbal Communication Is Universal

Consider the many contexts in which interaction occurs during your day. In the morning, at work, after work, at home, with friends, or with family. Now consider the differences in nonverbal communication across these many contexts. When you are at work, do you jump up and down and say whatever you want? Why or why not? You may not engage in that behavior because of expectations at work, but the fact remains that from the moment you wake until you sleep, you are surrounded by nonverbal communication.

If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, and perhaps as a member of the opposite sex, your whole world would be quite different. Yet nonverbal communication would remain fairly consistent. It may not look exactly the same, or get used in exactly the same way, but it will still be nonverbal with all of its many functions and displays.

## Nonverbal Communication Is Confusing and Contextual

Nonverbal communication can be confusing. You need contextual clues to help you understand, or begin to understand, what a movement, gesture (or lack of gestures) means. Then you have to figure it all out based on your prior knowledge (or lack thereof) of the person and hope to get it right. Talk about a challenge! Nonverbal communication is everywhere, and you and everyone else uses it, but that doesn't make it simple or independent of when, where, why, or how you communicate.

## Nonverbal Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional

Suppose you are working as a salesclerk in a retail store, and a customer communicates frustration to you. Will the nonverbal aspects of your response be intentional or unintentional? Your job is to be pleasant and courteous at all times, yet your wrinkled eyebrows or wide eyes may have been unintentional. They clearly communicate your negative feelings at that moment. Restating your wish to be helpful and displaying nonverbal gestures may communicate "no big deal," but the stress of the moment is still "written" on your face.

Can you tell when people are intentionally or unintentionally communicating nonverbally? Ask ten people this question and compare their responses. You may be surprised. It is clearly a challenge to understand nonverbal communication in action. You may assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their display is unintentional, and often hard to interpret.

## Nonverbal Messages Communicate Feelings and Attitudes

Albert Mehrabian asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Mehrabian, 93 percent of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55 percent of these nonverbal cues associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and normative space between speaker and receiver can also be clues to feelings and attitudes (Mehrabian, 1972).

Is your first emotional response always an accurate and true representation of your feelings and attitudes, or does your emotional response change across time? You are changing all the time, and sometimes a moment of frustration or a flash of anger can signal to the receiver a feeling or emotion that existed for a moment, but has since passed. Their response to your communication will be based on that perception, even though you might already be over the issue.

## Nonverbal Communication Is Key in the Speaker/Audience Relationship

When you first see another person, before either of you says a word, you are already reading non-verbal signals. Within the first few seconds you have made judgments about the other based on what they wear, their physical characteristics, even their posture. Are these judgments accurate? That is hard to know without context, but it is clear that nonverbal communication affects first impressions, for better or worse.

When a speaker and an audience first meet, nonverbal communication in terms of space, dress, and even personal characteristics can contribute to assumed expectations. The expectations might not be accurate or even fair, but it is important to recognize that they will be present. There is truth in the saying, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Since first impressions are quick and fragile, your attention to aspects you can control, both verbal and nonverbal, will help contribute to the first step of forming a relationship with your audience. Your eye contact with audience members, use of space, and degree of formality will continue to contribute to that relationship.

As a speaker, your nonverbal communication is part of the message and can contribute to, or detract from, your overall goals. By being aware of that physical communication, and practicing with a live audience, you can learn to be more aware and in control.



Read the following 4-page PDF on how to dress for success “[First Impressions: A Study of Nonverbal Communication](#)” (Latha, 2014)

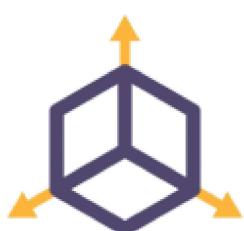
To summarize, nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words; it relates to the dynamic process of communication, the perception process and listening, and verbal communication.

Nonverbal communication is fluid and fast, universal, confusing, and contextual. It can add to or replace verbal communication and can be intentional or unintentional. Nonverbal communication communicates feelings and attitudes, and people tend to believe nonverbal messages more than verbal ones.

## 24. Types of Nonverbal Communication

Now that you have learned about the general principles that apply to nonverbal communication, here are eight types of nonverbal communication to further understand this challenging aspect of communication:

1. Space
2. Time
3. Physical characteristics
4. Body movements
5. Touch
6. Paralanguage
7. Artifacts
8. Environment



### Space

When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of business communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing “too close” for comfort and not know it.

Territory is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Families or households often mark their space by putting up fences or walls around their houses. This sense of a right to control your space is implicit in territory. Territory means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

Among most humans there is a basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for

space vary greatly by culture. You may perceive that in your home people sleep one to each bed, but in many cultures people sleep two or more to a bed and it is considered normal. If you were to share that bed, you might feel uncomfortable, while someone raised with group sleeping norms might feel uncomfortable sleeping alone. From where you stand in an aerobics class in relation to others, to where you place your book bag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others.

Watch the following 3 minute video from CBS with special correspondent Taryn Winter Brill about personal space:



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/?p=312>

In the same way that there are cultural contexts and expectations for nonverbal behavior, public speaking also happens in contexts. In North America, eye contact with the audience is expected. Big movements and gestures are not generally expected and can be distracting. The speaker occupies a space on the “stage,” even if it’s in front of the class. When you occupy that space, the audience will expect to behave in certain ways. If you talk to the screen behind you while displaying a PowerPoint presentation, the audience may perceive that you are not paying attention to them. Speakers are expected to pay attention to, and interact with, the audience, even if the feedback is primarily nonverbal. Your movements should coordinate with the tone, rhythm, and content of your speech.

Pacing back and forth, keeping your hands in your pockets, or crossing your arms may communicate nervousness, or even defensiveness, and detract from your message.

## Time



Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented.

When you give a presentation, does your audience have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor of the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your audience respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the audience stops listening; if the audience perceives that you have “gone over time,” they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

## Physical Characteristics



You didn't choose your genes, your eye color, the natural color of your hair, or your height, but people spend millions every year trying to change their physical characteristics. You can get colored contacts; dye your hair; and if you are shorter than you'd like to be, buy shoes to raise your stature a couple of inches. However, no matter how much you stoop to appear shorter, you won't change your height until time and age gradually makes itself apparent. If you are tall, you might find the correct shoe size, pant length, or even the length of mattress a challenge, but there are rewards.

Regardless of your eye or hair color, or even how tall you are, being comfortable with yourself is an important part of your presentation. Act naturally and consider aspects of your presentation you can control in order to maximize a positive image for the audience.

## Body Movements



The study of body movements, called kinesics, is key to understanding nonverbal communication.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to a customer about a software program. As you say, “Click on this tab,” you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce each other. You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say, “Click on the tab,” and then motion with your hand to the right, indicating that the customer should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head to indicate that you are listening may encourage the customer to continue asking questions. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages. For example, if the customer makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by customers takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

## Touch



Before giving your presentation, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. This interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage. Once on stage, most people do not touch audience members physically, but you can interact with audience members through visual aids, note cards, and other objects.

Watch the following short video that demonstrates the importance of handshakes. Bad Business Handshakes:



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/?p=312>

## Paralanguage



Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that nonverbal communication was defined as “not involving words” but paralanguage is a unique form of nonverbal communication that exists when we are speaking, using words. Paralanguage involves tone and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including how loudly or softly you are speaking, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you've also heard of a pregnant pause, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there nonetheless. For example, your coworker Jan comes back from a sales meeting speechless. You may ask if the meeting went all right. “Well, ahh...” may be the only response you get. The pause speaks volumes. Something happened, though you may not know what.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as

a sign of respect. Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say.

Watch the following 1 minute video. It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It:



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## Artifacts



Do you cover your tattoos when you are at work? Do you know someone who does? Or perhaps you know someone who has a tattoo and does not need to cover it up on their job? Expectations vary a great deal, and body art or tattoos may still be controversial in the workplace. In your line of work, a tattoo might be an important visual aid, or it might detract from your effectiveness as a business communicator. Body piercings may express individuality, but you need to consider how they will be interpreted by employers and customers.

Artifacts are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars,

watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. Artifacts may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality, and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to a customer's artifacts can give you a sense of the self they want to communicate, and may allow you to more accurately adapt your message to meet their needs.

In this 1 minute, 24 second video, Adoni Irani, from the University of Toronto, shares the story behind his tattoos:



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/?p=312>

## Environment



Environment involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt con-

siderable, but Google's actions speak volumes. In Google's view, the results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration, are worth the effort.

To summarize, nonverbal communication can be categorized into eight types: space, time, physical characteristics, body movements, touch, paralanguage, artifacts, and environment.

## 25. Movement in Your Speech



At some point in your business career you will be called upon to give a speech. It may be to an audience of one on a sales floor, or to a large audience at a national meeting. You already know you need to make a positive first impression, but do you know how to use movement in your presentation? In this section we'll examine several strategies for movement and their relative advantages and disadvantages.

Customers and audiences respond well to speakers who are comfortable with themselves. Comfortable doesn't mean overconfident or cocky, and it doesn't mean shy or timid. It means that an audience is far more likely to forgive the occasional

"umm" or "ahh," or the nonverbal equivalent of a misstep, if the speaker is comfortable with themselves and their message.

Let's start with behaviors to avoid. Who would you rather listen to: a speaker who moves confidently across the stage or one who hides behind the podium; one who expresses herself nonverbally with purpose and meaning or one who crosses his arms or clings to the lectern?

Audiences are most likely to respond positively to open, dynamic speakers who convey the feeling of being at ease with their bodies. The setting, combined with audience expectations, will give a range of movement. If you are speaking at a formal event, or if you are being covered by a stationary camera, you may be expected to stay in one spot. If the stage allows you to explore, closing the distance between yourself and your audience may prove effective. Rather than focus on a list of behaviors and their relationship to environment and context, give emphasis to what your audience expects and what you yourself would find more engaging instead.

The questions are, again, what does your audience consider appropriate and what do you feel comfortable doing during your presentation? Since the emphasis is always on meeting the needs of the customer, whether it is an audience of one on a sales floor or a large national gathering, you may need to stretch outside your comfort zone. On that same note, don't stretch too far and move yourself into the uncomfortable range. Finding balance is a challenge, but no one ever said giving a speech was easy.

Movement is an important aspect of your speech and requires planning, the same as the words you choose and the visual aids you design. Be natural, but do not naturally shuffle your feet, pace back

and forth, or rock on your heels through your entire speech. These behaviors distract your audience from your message and can communicate nervousness, undermining your credibility.

## Gestures

Gestures involve using your arms and hands while communicating. Gestures provide a way to channel your nervous energy into a positive activity that benefits your speech and gives you something to do with your hands. For example, watch people in normal, everyday conversations. They frequently use their hands to express themselves. Do you think they think about how they use their hands? Most people do not. Their arm and hand gestures come naturally as part of their expression, often reflecting what they have learned within their community.

For professional speakers this is also true, but deliberate movement can reinforce, repeat, and even regulate an audience's response to their verbal and nonverbal messages. You want to come across as comfortable and natural, and your use of your arms and hands contributes to your presentation. We can easily recognize that a well-chosen gesture can help make a point memorable or lead the audience to the next point.

As professional speakers lead up to a main point, they raise their hand slightly, perhaps waist high, often called an anticipation step. The gesture clearly shows the audience your anticipation of an upcoming point, serving as a nonverbal form of foreshadowing.

The implementation step, which comes next, involves using your arms and hands above your waist. By holding one hand at waist level pointing outward, and raising it up with your palm forward, as in the "stop" gesture, you signal the point. The nonverbal gesture complements the spoken word, and as students of speech have noted across time, audiences respond to this nonverbal reinforcement. You then slowly lower your hand down past your waistline and away from your body, letting go of the gesture, and signaling your transition.

The relaxation step, where the letting go motion complements your residual message, concludes the motion.

Watch the following 3 minute video featuring Toastmasters International world champion of public speaking Dananjaya Hettiarachchi. Using Hand Gestures in Presentations:



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/?p=314>

## Facial Gestures

As you progress as a speaker from gestures and movement, you will need to turn your attention to facial gestures and expressions. Facial gestures involve using your face to display feelings and attitudes nonverbally. They may reinforce, or contradict, the spoken word, and their impact cannot be underestimated. As in other body movements, your facial gestures should come naturally, but giving them due thought and consideration can keep you aware of how you are communicating the non-verbal message.

Facial gestures should reflect the tone and emotion of your verbal communication. If you are using humor in your speech, you will likely smile to complement the amusement expressed in your words. Smiling will be much less appropriate if your presentation involves a serious subject such as cancer or car accidents. Consider how you want your audience to feel in response to your message, and identify the facial gestures you can use to promote those feelings. Then practice in front of a mirror so that the gestures come naturally.

Eye contact refers to the speaker's gaze that engages the audience members. It can vary in degree

and length, and in many cases, is culturally influenced. Both in the speaker's expectations and the audience member's notion of what is appropriate will influence normative expectations for eye contact. In some cultures, there are understood behavioral expectations for male gaze directed toward females, and vice versa. In a similar way, children may have expectations of when to look their elders in the eye, and when to gaze down. Depending on the culture, both may be nonverbal signals of listening. Understanding your audience is critical when it comes to nonverbal expectations.

When giving a presentation, avoid looking over people's heads, staring at a point on the wall, or letting your eyes dart all over the place. The audience will find these mannerisms unnerving. They will not feel as connected, or receptive, to your message and you will reduce your effectiveness. Move your eyes gradually and naturally across the audience, both close to you and toward the back of the room. Try to look for faces that look interested and engaged in your message. Do not focus on only one or two audience members, as audiences may respond negatively to perceived favoritism. Instead, try to give as much eye contact as possible across the audience. Keep it natural, but give it deliberate thought.

Watch the following 1 minute video on the triangle method of eye contact:



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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/commbusprofcdn/?p=314>

In summary, use movement strategically in your presentation, keep it natural and consider using facial gestures, and natural eye contact.

# 26. Nonverbal Strategies

Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of business communication, from the context of an interpersonal interaction to a public presentation. It is a dynamic, complex, and challenging aspect of communication. You are never done learning and adapting to your environment and context, and improving your understanding of nonverbal communication comes with the territory.

When your audience first sees you, they begin to make judgments and predictions about you and your potential, just as an employer might do when you arrive for a job interview. If you are well dressed and every crease is ironed, your audience may notice your attention to detail. Wearing jeans with holes, a torn T-shirt, and a cap would send a different message. Neither style of dress is “good” or “bad,” but simply appropriate or inappropriate depending on the environment and context. Your skills as an effective business communicator will be called upon when you contemplate your appearance. As a speaker, your goal is to create common ground and reduce the distance between the audience and yourself. You want your appearance to help establish and reinforce your credibility.

In order to be a successful business communicator, you will need to continually learn about nonverbal communication and its impact on your interactions. Below are three ways to examine nonverbal communication.

## Watch Reactions

Market research is fundamental to success in business and industry. So, too, you will need to do a bit of field research to observe how, when, and why people communicate the way they do. If you want to be able to communicate effectively with customers, you will need to anticipate not only their needs, but also how they communicate. They are far more likely to communicate with someone whom they perceive as being like them, than with a perceived stranger. From dress to mannerisms and speech patterns, you can learn from your audience how to be a more effective business communicator.

## Enroll an Observer

Most communication in business and industry involves groups and teams, even if the interpersonal context is a common element. Enroll a coworker or colleague in your effort to learn more about your audience, or even yourself. They can observe your presentation and note areas you may not have noticed that could benefit from revision. Perhaps the gestures you make while speaking tend to distract rather than enhance your presentations. You can also record a video of your performance and

play it for them, and yourself, to get a sense of how your nonverbal communication complements or detracts from the delivery of your message.

### **Focus on a Specific Type of Nonverbal Communication**

What is the norm for eye contact where you work? Does this change or differ based on gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, context, environment? Observation will help you learn more about how people communicate; looking for trends across a specific type of nonverbal communication can be an effective strategy. Focus on one behaviour you exhibit on your videotape, like pacing, body movements across the stage, hand gestures as you are making a point, or eye contact with the audience.

Use nonverbal communication to enhance your message, watch reactions and consider enrolling an observer to help you become aware of your nonverbal habits and how your audience receives non-verbal messages.

# 27. Conclusion



After reading this chapter, and returning to Dhavit's challenge related to nonverbal communication, how might Dhavit adapt his body language and facial expressions to ensure that workshop participants believe he is open to hearing their questions and concerns?

## Additional Learning Activities

1. Watch a television program without the sound. Can you understand the program? Write a description of the program and include what you found easy to understand, and what presented a challenge, and present it to the class.
2. Interview someone from a different culture than your own (explaining your purpose clearly) and ask them to share a specific cultural difference in nonverbal communication—for example, a nonverbal gesture that is not used in polite company.

## Check Your Knowledge



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## Additional Resources

Visit this site for a library of University of California videotapes on nonverbal communication produced by Dane Archer of the University of California at Santa Cruz. <http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu>

Read “Six Ways to Improve Your Nonverbal Communications” by Vicki Ritts, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley and James R. Stein, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.

<http://www.comprofessor.com/2011/02/six-ways-to-improve-your-nonverbal.html>

Is “how you say it” really more important than what you say? Read an article by communications expert Dana Bristol-Smith that debunks a popular myth. [http://www.sideroad.com/Public\\_Speaking/how-you-say-not-more-important-what-you-say.html](http://www.sideroad.com/Public_Speaking/how-you-say-not-more-important-what-you-say.html)

## Glossary

**Adaptors** – displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure.

**Affect displays** – nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings, for example smiling and waving to coworkers to welcome them to an event.

**Artifacts** – forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept.

**Emblems** – gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning, like when someone raises their thumb to indicate agreement.

**Environment** – involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context.

**Eye contact** – refers to the speaker’s gaze that engages the audience members. It can vary in degree and length, and in many cases, is culturally influenced.

**Facial gestures** – involve using your face to display feelings and attitudes nonverbally.

**Gestures** – involve using your arms and hands while communicating.

**Illustrator** – a nonverbal gesture, such as a hand motion to emphasize or illustrate a point you're making.

**Kinesics** – the study of body movements.

**Nonverbal communication** – the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture and where you stand as you communicate.

**Object-adaptor** – involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed.

**Paralanguage** – involves tone and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including how loudly or softly you are speaking, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

**Space** – in a nonverbal context, this means the space between objects and people.

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