

Nonverbal Communication Skills

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD that the key to success lies in your ability to communicate well with others. What you may not know is that the majority of communication actually takes place without speaking any words at all. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body language are all nonverbal ways that you send messages to those around you. Developing a better awareness of nonverbal cues and practices will help you become the best communicator possible.



Objective:



Describe nonverbal communication cues.

Key Terms:



accenting
body language
complementing
contradiction
nonverbal communication
repetition
substitution

Nonverbal Communication Cues

Anytime you are interacting with others, you are giving off signals. Your nonverbal behaviors, including your posture, gestures, eye contact, and expressions send messages to those around you. These signals have the ability to make others comfortable or uncomfortable, build trust or create distrust, and compliment or offend without you ever speaking a word. Learning

how to project the appropriate nonverbal cues will be important to your success in school and in your future career.

TYPES AND ROLES

Types

Nonverbal communication

is communication that takes place without the use of any oral or written words. This can take place in various formats, including the use of **body language**, communicating nonverbally through conscious or unconscious gestures and movements. Nonverbal communication is actually used more frequently and effectively than verbal communication. Some of the ways you could communicate nonverbally are included in the chart below:



FIGURE 1. Your body language and nonverbal signs can tell others a lot about you.

Types	Description
Body Language	The way a person sits, walks, holds his or her head, or makes movements can tell a lot. For example, biting one's nails or twirling hair could imply nervousness.
Eye Contact	Eye contact is another very important form of non-verbal communication. The way one looks at another person can signify interest, affection, anger, attraction, concern, etc.
Facial Expression	The human face is capable of showing many different emotions. Facial expressions representing happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, etc. are universally understood by people — regardless of age, cultural background, sex, or religion.
Gestures	Gestures are often used to show expression by waving, pointing, beckoning, or using hands to indicate size or direction. Gestures are often used to emphasize a point. Gestures do not have the same meaning in all cultures, one must use them carefully.
Personal Appearance	Appearance includes dress, hair, make-up, accessories, etc. Dress and hair color or style can tell a lot about the person, his or her job, personality, interests, etc. For example, a person wearing a suit could be employed in a business or legal field. Someone wearing scrubs might work in the medical field. Athletic wear could indicate an interest in fitness or health.

Types	Description
Posture/Body Orientation	Holding one's body stiff and immobile could be a sign of tension or stress. Slouching might show apathy or boredom. The position of one's shoulders (raised or relaxed) indicates his or her level of anxiety or stress.
Space and Distance	Space and distance are important measures used to determine the relationship between two or more people. Typically, the less distance between individuals the more connected they are.
Touch	Touch is a widely used tool for communicating with others. However, there are very different levels of acceptable touching, depending on the age, gender, relationship, and culture involved. Like the use of gestures, it is important to know cultural values and standards of acceptance for these.

Roles

Nonverbal communication can be used to support and promote spoken messages, but can also indicate a lack of truthfulness or sincerity. Nonverbal signals may play important roles in supporting or negating what you are saying. The following list will help you understand these:

◆ ACCENTING: **Accenting**

consists of underlining the importance of a verbal message, using nonverbal communication signals or signs. Pounding the table to express anger, impatience, etc. would be an example of accenting.



FIGURE 2. Touch is an effective way to deliver a message.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Nonverbal Signals and Messages

View the YouTube presentation: "The Importance of Nonverbal Cues as told by *Friends*," found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvEci5Bjgd4>. The video uses clips from various sitcom episodes to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of nonverbal signals and messages. Published December 12, 2013, it provides some excellent examples of how nonverbal behaviors and body language can speak volumes, without the use of words.

- ◆ **COMPLEMENTING**: **Complementing** involves using body language or signals to support and add to the spoken message. Examples might be patting someone on the back in addition to praising one's performance or actions.
- ◆ **CONTRADICTION**: **Contradiction** exists when body language and nonverbal behaviors do not match with the spoken words. This indicates a lack of truthfulness.
- ◆ **REPETITION**: **Repetition** occurs when nonverbal cues and signals support the words spoken. This helps reinforce and strengthen the message.
- ◆ **SUBSTITUTION**: **Substitution** happens when a nonverbal message actually takes the place of a verbal one. For example, one's facial expression can convey sentiments of sympathy, anger, confusion, etc. very effectively.



FIGURE 3. Facial expressions can be effective substitutes for spoken words.

Summary:



Nonverbal communication is actually used more frequently and effectively than written or oral communication. There are many forms of nonverbal communication. These include: Body language, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, personal appearances, posture and body orientation, space and distance, and touch.

Nonverbal communication can also be used to accent, complement, contradict, repeat, or substitute for the spoken or written message. It is important for you to understand the significance of using nonverbal communication cues appropriately in your interactions with others.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Give an example of body language that indicates nervousness.
2. List 3 facial expressions that would be recognized universally.
3. What purposes do gestures serve?
4. What happens when verbal and nonverbal messages do not match?
5. How can nonverbal repetition impact the spoken message?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Ask your teacher for permission to do an activity with your class involving nonverbal communication. Write down 10 different emotions on separate slips of paper and place them in a bag. Ask for volunteers and play a version of your own nonverbal communication charades. Have one student at a time volunteer to draw an emotion from the hat and provide nonverbal cues to the class. Ask someone to serve as the timer, and actually record how long it takes for the class to identify the common emotions (fear, anger, frustration, surprise, boredom, etc.) being portrayed. Note that these are universally understood by people of all ages, backgrounds, languages, etc. Discuss the importance of using these expressions in different situations.

Web Links:



Reading Body Language

<https://www.inc.com/travis-bradberry/8-great-tricks-for-reading-peoples-body-language.html>

Differences Between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

<https://keydifferences.com/difference-between-verbal-and-non-verbal-communication.html>

Nonverbal Communication and Job Interviews

<https://www.resumecoach.com/nonverbal-communication-tips-for-job-interviews/>