

Nonverbal Communication

Unit: Communication Skills

Problem Area: Presentation Skills

Lesson: Nonverbal Communication

- **Student Learning Objectives.** Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

- 1 Describe elements of physical nonverbal communication.**
- 2 List and explain elements of paralanguage.**
- 3 Identify guidelines for using nonverbal behaviors during presentations.**

- **Resources.** The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:

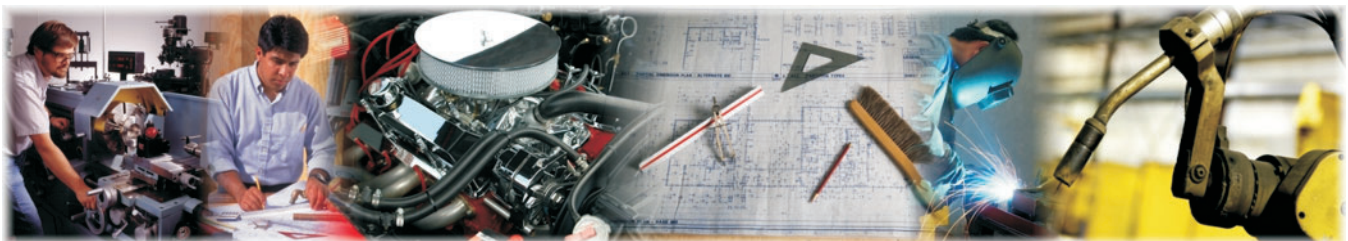
“Communication: Nonverbal Communication,” *Select, Assess, and Train*. Accessed Dec. 13, 2008. <www.selectassesstrain.com/hint6.asp#Body%20Language%20of%20Leaders>.

“Nonverbal Communication,” *Communication, Cultural, and Media Studies*. Accessed Dec. 13, 2008. <<http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/index.html>>.

“Nonverbal Communication,” *Small Business Knowledge Base*. Accessed Dec. 13, 2008. <www.bizmove.com/skills/m8g.htm>.

Van Fleet, James K. *Lifetime Conversation Guide*, Ch. 11. Prentice-Hall, 1984.

Van Wagner, Kendra. “Top 10 Nonverbal Communication Tips,” *About.com: Psychology*. Accessed Dec. 13, 2008. <<http://psychology.about.com/od/non-verbalcommunication/tp/non-verbaltips.htm>>.



■ **Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities.**

- ✓ Overhead or PowerPoint projector
- ✓ Visual(s) from accompanying master(s)
- ✓ Copies of sample test, lab sheet(s), and/or other items designed for duplication
- ✓ Materials listed on duplicated items
- ✓ Computers with printers and Internet access
- ✓ Classroom resource and reference materials

■ **Key Terms.** The following terms are presented in this lesson (shown in bold italics):

- ▶ emphasis
- ▶ hand gestures
- ▶ inflection
- ▶ nonverbal communication (NVC)
- ▶ orientation
- ▶ paralanguage
- ▶ pauses
- ▶ posture
- ▶ proximity
- ▶ volume

■ **Interest Approach.** Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situation. A possible approach is included here.

This activity may be conducted in small groups or as a whole class; it is like the game Charades. Create role-play scenarios, writing one scenario on each of several index cards. Shuffle the cards, and have pairs of students select an index card scenario and take turns being the “speaker.”

The object of the game is for the “speakers” to act out the scenario shown on the selected card using only nonverbal cues. Speakers are not allowed to talk. Each speaker has a two-minute time limit to get their partner and the class to guess the scenario on the card. The class makes the first guess after one minute and the second guess before the two-minute time limit. If a student pair guesses the scenario, they become the next scenario “speakers.” Following the game, conduct a discussion of the most effective nonverbal communication observed during the game and what was learned by watching the “speakers.”

Suggested scenarios for interest activity:

1. *A fire chief giving commands to a crew fighting a fire*

2. *A speaker giving a presentation and answering questions from the audience*
3. *A teacher and student in the pool for a swim class with the student being afraid of the water*
4. *A door-to-door salesperson conducting a cold-call to sell cosmetics to someone at the front door*
5. *Two basketball players communicating during a game*
6. *An Air Force ground control person flagging a plane to its gate*
7. *A referee calling a foul on a player at a football game*
8. *A person walking into a surprise birthday party being greeted by a close friend*

SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1: Describe elements of physical nonverbal communication.

Anticipated Problem: What are the elements of physical nonverbal communication?

- I. **Nonverbal communication (NVC)** is conveying meaningful interpersonal messages through channels that are independent of words. Studies indicate that 7 percent of interpersonal communication is verbal and 93 percent is nonverbal (Select, Assess, and Train, 2008). NVC behaviors are innate and learned; therefore, people convey NVC behaviors subconsciously and consciously. Also, NVC meanings vary based on cultural context. For example, the “O.K.” hand gesture has a positive and affirming meaning in the United States, but it has a derogatory and insulting meaning in the United Kingdom. The elements of physical nonverbal communication include:
 - A. Proximity, orientation, posture, and hand gestures are examples of bodily NVC elements.
 1. **Proximity** is how close a person’s body is positioned to another person.
 2. **Orientation** is the direction or angle of a person’s body in relation to another person’s body.
 3. **Posture** is the “shape” a body takes at any given moment (e.g., slumped, erect, crouched, bent, languid, or fluid).

4. **Hand gestures** are the activity of the hands while communicating (e.g., wringing, shaking, expressive, clapping, encouraging, halting, or pointing).
- B. Eye contact and expressions are examples of facial NVC elements.
1. Eye contact is the amount of time a person looks (or does not look) directly into another person's eyes.
 2. Facial expressions are messages conveyed by a person's eyebrows, forehead, mouth, and gaze (e.g., smile, frown, wink, cry, and wrinkled nose).

Use VM–A to demonstrate elements of NVC. Use the Interest Activity to identify and discuss other elements of physical NVC.

Objective 2: List and explain elements of paralanguage.

Anticipated Problem: What are the elements of paralanguage?

- II. **Paralanguage** is how words or sounds are spoken, independent of the words themselves.
- A. Inflection, emphasis, and volume are elements of paralanguage.
1. **Inflection** is the change of pitch or tone that adds an emotional dimension to the statement.
 2. **Emphasis** is stressing particular words to affect the meaning of a sentence.
 3. **Volume** is how loudly or softly words are spoken.
- B. Pauses and sounds are elements of paralanguage.
1. **Pauses** are moments of silence in a dialogue or presentation.
 2. Non-lingual sounds (e.g., a sigh) give hints about the sender's message. For instance, a sigh could convey exhaustion, fatigue, exasperation, frustration, or relief; it may convey impatience based on the context in which it is uttered.

Use VM–B to demonstrate elements of paralanguage. You may also use Web sites listed in the Resources section for more examples.

Objective 3: Identify guidelines for using nonverbal behaviors during presentations.

Anticipated Problem: What are guidelines for using nonverbal behaviors during presentations?

- III. Effective presenters are perceived as leaders capable of communicating the significance and value of a project. Presenters must consciously monitor NVC during a presentation to avoid giving mixed messages, such as speaking confidently and acting apprehensively. The nonverbal communication of presenters must convey leadership and confidence.

- A. Guidelines for the effective use of NVC during presentations
1. Proximity—It is necessary to respect personal space by not entering the 2- to 3-foot space around a person.
 2. Orientation
 - a. It is best to face the audience most of the time.
 - b. It is important to avoid power struggles with an audience member.
 - c. To defuse an escalating confrontation, it is best to stand at an angle to the agitated person rather than facing the person directly.
 - d. It is important to lean slightly toward an audience or an individual.
 - e. A presenter should stand in one place initially and then move around once the presentation is underway.
 - f. Excessive movement should be avoided because it may convey restlessness or nervousness.
 - g. Standing too rigidly or in too stationary a position should be avoided because it may communicate that the speaker is intimidated.
 - h. Sitting with legs crossed or creating any barrier (with feet or legs) between the presenter and the audience is best avoided. Foot or leg “wagging” when seated is also unacceptable for presenters.
 - i. Folding arms or turning one’s back after a question is asked is not polite because these movements may convey defensiveness or rejection of a message.
 3. Posture
 - a. It is best for the speaker to sit or stand tall with slightly flexed knees, the rib cage pulled up, shoulders squared, and head held up.
 - b. It is important to relax, but the speaker should not slouch, slump, or sit or stand too rigidly. Some studies indicate that relaxed postures (e.g., leaning back in a chair) communicate leadership qualities, but this is usually the norm after a person has already established a leadership presence with the group. As a leader, being relaxed conveys the message of being in control and not anxious.
 4. Hand gestures
 - a. Hand gestures should be smooth; they should not compete for attention with what the speaker is saying. Letting hands hang to one’s side or rest on a table or podium is adequate. Excessive hand movement can communicate nervousness, jitters, and a sense of uneasiness. However, some studies state that occasional broad, sweeping hand gestures convey leadership power.
 - b. Conveying negative emotions (e.g., wringing the hands or clenching fists) is not acceptable. Pointing fingers directly at people, especially in a defensive mode when rebuking an objection, is also best avoided. Picking or biting hands conveys nervousness and should be avoided.
 - c. If a speaker places his or her hands in a “steeple” or in a “thinker” position, it tends to convey the message that the speaker is thoughtful or is considering options.

5. Eye contact
 - a. Adequate eye contact should be maintained. However, it is important for the speaker not to stare (i.e., 5 to 7 seconds of concentrated eye contact is considered maximum). The presenter should look into the eyes of the audience and avoid staring at the mouths or sides of the faces as this conveys distraction. When faced with a situation involving unusually long eye contact (e.g., listening to a long question), the presenter may focus on one point on the person's eyebrow rather than focusing on the eye as this may be more comfortable and is still perceived as maintaining eye contact.
 - b. When speaking to a large audience, it is best to avoid excessive scanning (as if trying to look at every person individually) because this conveys nervousness. Instead, a bowling approach should be used. If good eye contact with people in the front is maintained, then people in the back of the group will feel as if the speaker is looking at them all as one set of people.
 - c. It is important for the speaker to look at people as they ask questions and as the speaker answers them.
 6. Facial expressions
 - a. It is best for the speaker to keep mostly a neutral facial expression, smiling at times.
 - b. The presenter should maintain pleasant and genuine emotions through a relaxed face, not conveying negative emotions (e.g., frowning or furrowing the eyebrow).
 - c. The speaker should stay alert and avoid conveying boredom through yawning or closing his or her eyes.
- B. Guidelines for effective use of paralanguage during presentations
1. Inflection
 - a. The speaker should maintain a steady tone of voice.
 - b. The speaker should avoid using any sarcastic inflection.
 - c. The speaker should avoid ending sentences with a higher pitch as if turning a statement into a question.
 2. Emphasis
 - a. Prior to the presentation, the speaker should select concepts or facts to add emphasis.
 - b. Prior to the presentation, the speaker should practice the emphasis and tones out loud.
 3. Volume
 - a. The speaker should speak slightly louder than normal to ensure that all can hear.
 - b. The speaker should avoid speaking too softly as that action may convey uncertainty.

4. Pauses and other sounds
 - a. The speaker should use silence (a pause) to signal a move from one topic or concept to another.
 - b. The speaker should use a pause in conjunction with thoughtful hand gestures to convey thinking.
 - c. The speaker should avoid sighing, groaning, or any other sound that may convey negative emotions or a loss of control.
 - d. The speaker should avoid using verbal filler pauses (e.g., “aaaa” or “ummm”).

Copy and distribute VM–C as a guide for student note taking about NVC use during presentations. Use VM–D to help demonstrate paralinguage proper usage. The Web sites listed in the Resources section can also be used for additional examples.

- **Review/Summary.** Use the student learning objectives to summarize the lesson. Have students explain the content associated with each objective. Student responses can be used in determining which objectives need to be reviewed or taught from a different angle.
- **Application.** Use the included visual masters and lab sheet to apply the information presented in the lesson.
- **Evaluation.** Evaluation should focus on student achievement of the objectives for the lesson. Various techniques can be used, such as student performance on the application activities. A sample written test is provided.

■ **Answers to Sample Test:**

Part One: Matching

1. c
2. e
3. d
4. b
5. a

Part Two: Short Answer

1. Answers will vary but should include four of the following examples of NVC:
 - a. Proximity
 - b. Orientation
 - c. Posture
 - d. Hand gestures
 - e. Eye contact

- f. Facial expressions
- 2. Answers will vary but should include three of the following examples of paralanguage:
 - a. Inflection
 - b. Emphasis
 - c. Volume
 - d. Pauses or other sounds (e.g., a sigh)

Part Three: True/False

- 1. F
- 2. T
- 3. F
- 4. F
- 5. T

► **Part Three: True/False**

Instructions: Write T for true or F for false.

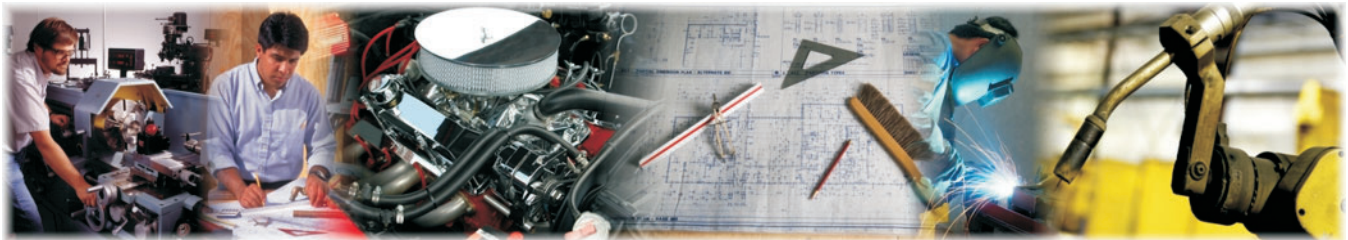
- _____ 1. A presentation should begin with the presenter moving around the stage or presentation area.
- _____ 2. Picking at your hands communicates nervousness and jitters.
- _____ 3. It is recommended that a presenter yawn during a presentation.
- _____ 4. It is recommended that a presenter sit with legs crossed.
- _____ 5. When presenting to a large group, it is best to face the audience and make good eye contact with those in the front.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication involves conveying meaningful interpersonal messages through channels that are independent of words.

Elements of Physical Nonverbal Communication

- ◆ Proximity is how close a person's body is positioned to another person's body.
- ◆ Orientation is the direction or angle of a person's body in relation to another person's body.
- ◆ Posture is the "shape" a body assumes at any given moment.
- ◆ Hand gestures are the activity of the hands while communicating.
- ◆ Eye contact is the amount of time a person looks (or does not look) directly into another person's eyes.
- ◆ Facial expressions are messages conveyed by the eyebrows, forehead, mouth, and gaze.

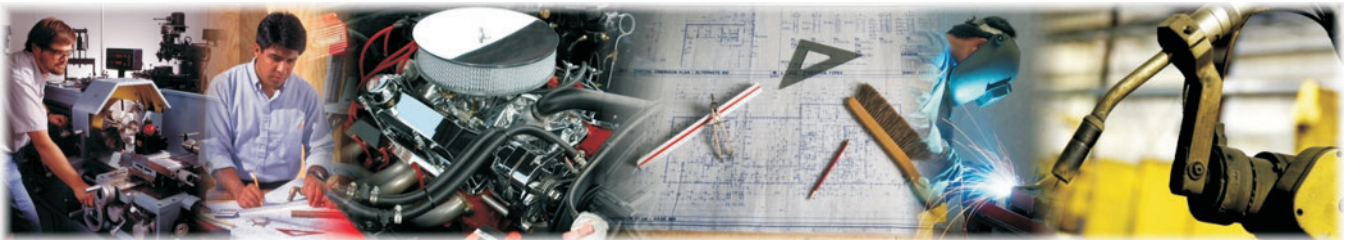


PARALANGUAGE

Paralanguage is how words or sounds are spoken, independent of the words themselves.

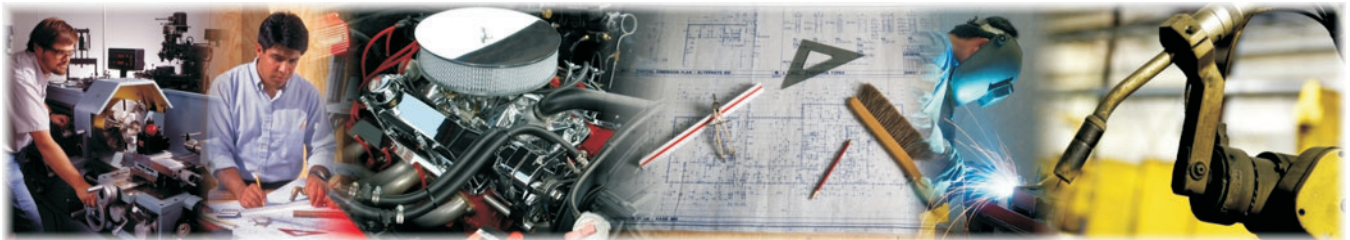
Elements of Paralanguage

- ◆ Inflection is the change of pitch or tone that adds an emotional dimension to the statement.
- ◆ Emphasis is stressing particular words to affect the meaning of a statement.
- ◆ Volume is how loudly or softly words are spoken.
- ◆ Pauses are moments of silence in a dialogue or presentation.
- ◆ Non-lingual sounds (e.g., a sigh) give hints about the sender's message. Based on the context and the way in which the sigh is uttered, it may convey:
 - Exhaustion, fatigue, exasperation, or frustration
 - Relief
 - Impatience



GUIDELINES FOR USING PHYSICAL NVC

- ◆ Proximity
- ◆ Orientation
- ◆ Posture
- ◆ Hand gestures
- ◆ Eye contact
- ◆ Facial expressions



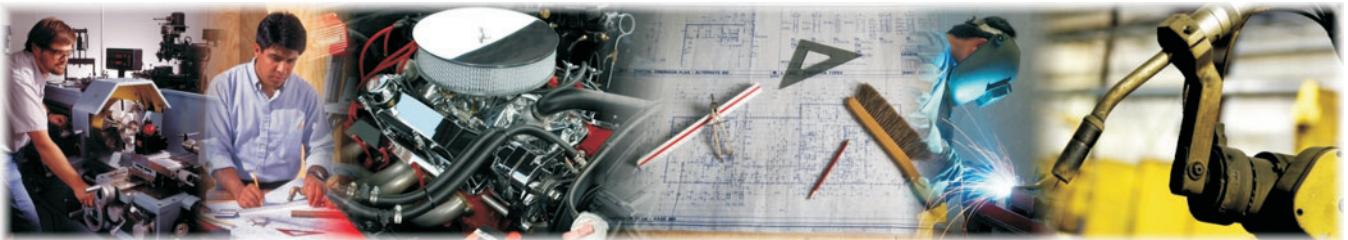
GUIDELINES FOR USING PARALANGUAGE

Inflection

- ◆ Maintain a steady tone of voice.
- ◆ Avoid using any sarcastic inflection.
- ◆ Avoid ending sentences with a higher pitch, as if turning a statement into a question.

Emphasis

- ◆ Prior to the presentation, select concepts or facts to add emphasis.
- ◆ Prior to the presentation, practice the emphases and tones out loud.



Volume

- ◆ Speak slightly louder than normal to ensure that all can hear.
- ◆ Speaking too softly conveys uncertainty.

Pauses and other sounds

- ◆ Use pauses to signal movement from one topic or concept to another.
- ◆ Use a pause in conjunction with thoughtful hand gestures to convey thinking.
- ◆ Avoid sighing, groaning, or making any other sounds that convey negative emotions or loss of control.
- ◆ Avoid using verbal filler pauses, such as “aaaa” or “ummm.”

Practice Using NVC Elements During a Presentation

Objectives

1. Present a project proposal to an audience.
2. Demonstrate nonverbal communication elements in the presentation.
3. Observe another presenter, and give feedback on the use of nonverbal communication elements.

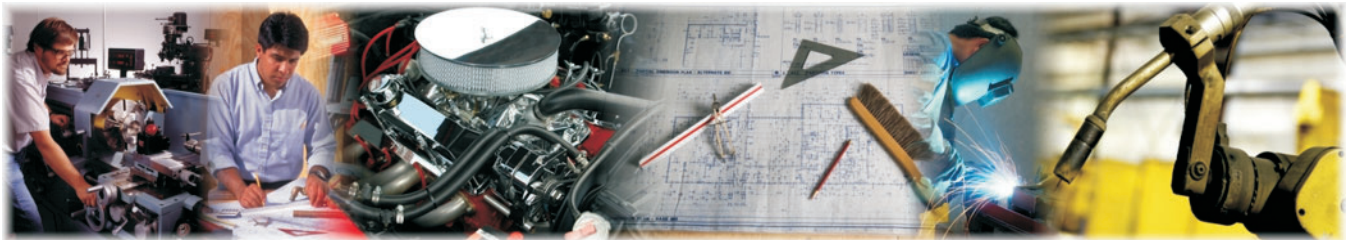


Materials

- ◆ paper
- ◆ writing utensil

Procedure

1. Individually or with a partner, think of a school rule you would like to change.
2. Design a step-by-step “change project” that would implement the new school rule. The project presentation should be approximately five minutes in length and include:
 - a. A description of the current school rule
 - b. A description of the newly proposed school rule
 - c. A description of the steps needed to change from the current rule to the newly proposed rule



3. Present your “change project” to an audience of classmates, student council members, and administrators.
4. The audience observing the presentation should provide feedback on the NVC elements utilized during the presentation and on the feasibility of the proposal.
 - a. Proximity
 - b. Orientation
 - c. Posture
 - d. Hand gestures
 - e. Facial expressions
 - f. Volume
 - g. Emphasis
 - h. Use of pauses
 - i. Feasibility of implementing the proposed new school rule