



## UNIT-16 Understanding Body Language

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Learn what non-verbal messages tell others
- ✓ Understand how to read visual cues more effectively
- ✓ Control their own body language to strengthen their communication with others

## Unit 16

### Body Language

#### What Do Our Bodies Say?

In significant (though often misinterpreted) research, **Albert Mehrabian** found that when it came to discussing emotions, only 7% of the speaker's message was communicated by words, and that tone of voice was responsible for about 38% of the meaning and body language about 55%. This means that the words themselves played only a very small part in conveying meaning. In other conversations (not the ones about emotions), we know that tone of voice and body language have a large impact on those messages, too.

(Source: *Silent Messages* by Albert Mehrabian)

We are always sending signals to others, whether we like it or not. Body language combined with vocal tone can override or even cancel the meaning of the words we say. If you want your messages understood, make sure your words and your body are sending congruent signals.

Here are some things to keep in mind about body language:

- Your **eyes, eyebrows, and mouth** send out the signals that can make a world of difference.
- People who smile are happier than those who don't. **Smiling** releases a chemical in your brain that makes you feel good. It's a great way to establish a rapport with listeners.
- **Eye contact** helps you carry your message to each person in the audience. It builds trust.
- Learn to speak with your **hands**. Draw lines in the air, make a point, count on your fingers, and emphasize length and width.
- Work on appearing **sincere and comfortable**.
- Let your **hands** do what they want to do, as long as they don't get in your pockets, fiddle with an object, or make obscene gestures to your audience.
- Your **body posture** affects your emotions and how you feel determines your posture. If you are confident, happy and ready, your body will show it.

One of the most important things you can do with body language is learn how to recognize cues from people that indicate you are making them uncomfortable. Ask yourself if you are doing what you can to make the other person comfortable. Do you fidget, chew gum, click a pen, or check your watch frequently? Are there other things that you do? If so, what message do you think you are sending?

If your conversation partner is doing any of these things while you talk, what could be going on?

- Rocking
- Leg swinging
- Tapping

These are the first signals of tension and indicate that the person feels intruded upon or nervous. If it escalates, these signals are often followed by:

- Intermittent closing of the eyes
- Slight tucking of the chin into the chest
- Shoulder hunching

If you sensitize yourself to these simple cues, over time, people will have the experience of feeling more relaxed, at ease, and open with you (and to you).

Basically, learn to watch for signals, and then adjust your approach. Sometimes just taking one step back, or ceasing talking and getting the other person to talk to you instead, will be all it takes to ease the tension.

### The Signals People Send

The chart below can be used as a guide to help you with some of the signals that people send.

#### Eye Contact

Non-Verbal Communication	Interpretation
<b>Facial Expressions</b>	
Frown	Displeasure, unhappiness
Smile	Friendliness, happiness
Raised eyebrows	Disbelief, amazement
Narrowed eyes	Anger
Blushing	Embarrassment
Glancing	Lack of interest
Steady	Active listening, interest, seduction

#### Hand/Arm Gestures

Pointing finger	Authority, displeasure, lecturing
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<b>Non-Verbal Communication</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Folded arms	Not open to change, preparing to speak
Arms at side	Open to suggestions, relaxed
Hands uplifted outward	Disbelief, puzzlement, uncertainty
<b>Body Postures</b>	
Fidgeting, doodling	Boredom
Hands on hips	Anger, defensiveness
Shrugging shoulders	Indifference
Squared stance or shoulders	Problem-solving, concern, listening
Biting lip, shifting, jingling money	Nervousness
Sitting on edge of chair	Listening, great concern
Slouching in chair	Boredom, lack of interest
<b>Clothing</b>	
Business dress	Authoritative, conservative
Sloppy attire	Disrespect, lack of responsibility
Casual clothes	Relaxation
<b>Proxemics (Physical Space)</b>	
From physical contact to 18 inches	Intimate space
From 18 inches to 4 feet	Personal space

Non-Verbal Communication	Interpretation
From 4 feet to 8 feet	Social space
From 8 feet outward	Public space
Voice Characteristics	
Speaking loudly, quickly, and with clipped enunciation	Anger
Monotone and downward inflection	Boredom
High pitch, fast rate, loud volume, and upward inflection	Joy
Status Symbols	
Rare or expensive possessions	High status
Prestigious titles	High status

## Gestures

We all interpret body language differently, and we can also feel differently about images. We are influenced by past experiences, background, culture, and so on. Our feelings may be colored by our mood, or by memories associated with these images, so we cannot assume that others will interpret our body language correctly.

A **gesture** is a type of non-verbal communication that is communicated through body language, with or without speech. Gestures can be a challenging part of communication. If you travel around the world or work with people from different cultures, you need to be aware of the multiple meanings to some gestures. While finger pointing is tolerated in some societies, it is a serious insult in others. While putting your feet up on a coffee table is a sign of relaxation at home, it can be very offensive to your guests if the bottoms of your feet are directed at someone.

