

## You Really Expect Me to Believe That...?

**Y**ou are in an interview and said “X,” but actually conveyed “Y.” Oops...!!! The dichotomy between verbal and nonverbal communication occurs for a variety of reasons, including nervousness, uncertainty, ambivalence, frustration, or at the extreme - dishonesty - so job seekers must remain acutely aware of how they project their nonverbal cues.

Reverse roles for a minute and imagine interviewing a candidate who verbally recounts an impressive list of achievements, but fidgets anxiously while responding and gazes toward the ceiling. Would you believe the candidate’s reply? Most people would not; when we send these forms of mixed messages, listeners place greater emphasis on the nonverbal response.

Listeners perceive information through (1) what we say verbally, (2) how we sound vocally, and (3) how we appear visually. All three must be synchronized for maximum effect. An often cited UCLA study <sup>1</sup> found that when conflicts of trust and believability exist between what is said (verbal), how it was said (vocal), and how it was portrayed (visual), the visual is overwhelmingly dominant. <sup>2</sup>

Job seekers - look in a mirror or record yourself with a webcam and take note of your body language. This includes eye contact, facial expressions, posture, hand and arm gestures, and all other bodily movements.

Once you understand the insinuation of body language, it will be easy to use it to your advantage during the job interview to:

**Amazingly, spoken words account for only 7% of what listeners believe.**

- ▶ Illustrate and accentuate your verbal response.
- ▶ Hold the interviewer’s attention.
- ▶ Make your verbal response more lasting and memorable.
- ▶ Help release nervous energy.

### Eye Contact

With no disrespect to cultures where it is improper to stare anywhere but toward the ground when speaking with someone superior, job seekers should exude confidence by looking the interviewer in the eye. Be conscious though, of overdoing this to the point of making the interviewer uncomfortable; prolonged eye contact can be threatening.

- ▶ **When Listening:** Make more eye contact when listening; if you are not looking at the interviewer, they will feel you are not paying attention.



Be conscious of when you look away while listening because human tendency is to break eye contact when an uncomfortable issue is being discussed or an intimidating question is being asked.

- ▶ **When Speaking:** Break contact occasionally when speaking and when you do, look down instead of up or off to the side. Looking toward the ceiling can imply boredom or rudeness, and glancing off to the side can suggest that you are easily distracted from the core of the conversation. Looking down conveys a more serious pose.

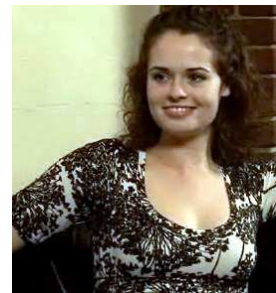
## Posture

Sit back in your chair and don't fidget. Restlessness conveys nervousness, and at the extreme it may suggest to the interviewer that you are being less than truthful in your presentation. Don't slouch and don't lean backward in the chair; sit straight upward or lean forward slightly and keep both feet on the floor.

## Facial Expressions

The face is one of the most reliable indicators of a person's attitudes, emotions & feelings.

Consider these two images of the same individual: <sup>3</sup>



The one on the left suggests a withdrawn and unengaged candidate, compared with the one on the right which conveys a confident and enthusiastic candidate. Which would you rather have on your team?

People like to work with others who are enthusiastic about their work. Enthusiasm is also a projected behavior and tends to make others equally excited about their work.

During your interview, radiate energy and interest through natural, animated facial expressions, but as with eye contact, don't overdo it.

- ▶ Present a relaxed and natural smile rather than a forced grin. Phoniness shows.

Practice in front of a mirror. If you don't like your smile or your teeth, try a gentler, closed mouth or partially-closed-mouth smile.

Regardless of how you choose to smile, remember - the more relaxed you are, the more natural and more convincing your smile will appear. If smiles don't come naturally to you, think pleasant thoughts. Imagine something funny or think of someone who makes you happy. (*My spouse/partner/child will be so happy and proud if I get this job...!*)

- ▶ Smile with your eyes. Forced smiles involve only the mouth; learn how to use your entire face, especially your eyes. When something really makes us happy, our eyes get brighter and radiate with excitement. Once this happens your cheekbones will lift naturally and pull your whole face into a genuine smile. For some people, this comes naturally; the rest of us need to train our minds through practice. Try beaming with your eyes first, and then allow your mouth to follow. Convince yourself that what you are smiling about during your interview is something that really makes you happy (like getting the job, perhaps...?).
- ▶ Tilt your head toward the side to tell the interviewer that you are receptive and interested; tilt forward slightly to send a message that you are attentive to what the interviewer is saying.

- ▶ Nod slowly. Nodding vigorously sends a message of impatience, as well as eagerness to interrupt and add to what the interviewer is saying.
- ▶ Be conscious of your eyebrows; raising your eyebrows implies surprise in the interviewer's remarks, and if you are one of those rare individuals who can raise a single eyebrow, your body language is subliminally cross-examining the interviewer in disbelief, "Are you sure?"
- ▶ Refrain from frowning; this can imply confusion on your part, or distrust in what the interviewer is saying.

### Gestures

Gestures are an evocative form of body language. Understanding the different types will help you use them effectively to enhance your verbal presentation during the interview.

The four basic types of gestures:

Example

▶ Descriptive	Clarifies or illustrates your words.	Scribbling your hand in the air when asking for a check in a restaurant.
▶ Emphatic	Emphasizes your words.	Pointing your finger or pounding the desk, both of which you shouldn't do in an interview because they suggest too much aggressiveness.
▶ Suggestive	Creates a mood or expresses a thought.	Shrugging your shoulders to indicate ignorance or perplexity.
▶ Prompting	Evokes a response from your listener.	Raising your hand if you want the listener to do the same.

### Props

Props can help, but can also damage an interview, so use them with caution. Reaching for a drink of coffee or water that you may have been offered will allow you a quick moment to gather your thoughts in response to a question, but an unsteady hand will jiggle the contents, signaling nervousness or worse still, could send that drink down your dress or on your lap. Taking too many swallows may also start Mother Nature calling, so sip lightly enough just to wet your lips.

Nervous people also reach for a crutch to release their tenseness. The most common example is a pen, but fiddling too much will only show the interviewer how nervous you really are and at the extreme you might drop it or sent it flying across the room. Keep your hands on your lap if you can't control your gestures to your advantage.

### Mirroring

Some people have a habit of reflecting the body language of the other person - when they lean forward in their chair, you do, or when they reach for their drink, you do the same. This can be intentional or subconscious, and can be effective for creating subtle empathy and rapport with the interviewer, but beware that when exaggerated it comes across as ridiculous.

### Conflicting Messages

Conflicting messages occur when the visual communication does not match the verbal communication. As noted previously, the visual message accounts for 55% of what is believed, versus only 7% from the spoken words, so when you verbally

**Actions speak  
louder than  
words.**

tell the interviewer how excited you are about this opportunity and are eager to take it to the next step in the process, don't let your body language communicate uncertainty or hesitancy by frowning or portraying a deadpan image that actually says you are not enthusiastic about the position.

### Timing

Scientists tell us that nonverbal communication starts before verbal, and our words are after-the-fact explanations of why we just gestured as we did.<sup>4</sup> Think of a time when you were really angered by what someone said or did - your face most likely reddened and your nostrils flared before you growled a single word.

During interviews, pay close attention to how you visually react to the interviewer's statements and questions, and make sure your verbal response matches your visual communication.

### Entering & Exiting

Candidates who walk fast and swing their arms freely tend to know what they want and to go after it, projecting an image of confidence.

Dejected job seekers tend to scuffle along with their heads down, hands in pockets, and shoulders hunched.

### Nervous Gesticulation

Avoid nervous habits such as tapping your fingers, swinging your foot, jingling pocket change, pouting, biting your lips, tightening your jaw, clenching your teeth or hands, brushing or picking at lint, looking at your watch too many times, twirling your hair, playing with your jewelry, touching your face, or clearing your throat constantly.



During your interview, every word, gesture and expression is being evaluated, so do your best to ensure your verbal, vocal, and visual messages are synchronized for maximum effectiveness.

A parting note - however you posture yourself just remember that while body language conveys your thoughts, there are times when it can also be ambiguous and innocent.



Folded arms can send a signal of being defensive and closed to what the interviewer is saying, or can simply mean that you are unpleasantly cold.

Be natural - be relaxed.

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1 Mehrabian, Dr. Albert. Silent Messages. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth (currently distributed by Albert Mehrabian). 1981.

2 Believability: verbal = 7%; vocal = 38%; visual = 55%; based on Dr. Albert Mehrabian's UCLA study.

3 Used with permission: <http://www.wikihow.com/Communicate-With-Body-Language>; original image from <http://www.videojug.com/film/how-can-i-look-more-confident>

4 Morgan, Nick. "How to Become an Authentic Speaker." Harvard Business Review. November 2008. pp. 115-119.