

LEARNING MADE EASY



4th Edition

Body Language

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Learn to spot signs
and signals

—
Infer meaning from
what you see

—
Pick up on unspoken
cues

Elizabeth Kuhnke

The Body Watcher



Body Language

4th Edition

by Elizabeth Kuhnke

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Body Language For Dummies[®], 4th Edition

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Introduction

You don't have to be a professional performer for your body to communicate your emotions, thoughts, and intentions. Nor do you have to be a mind-reader to fathom the people you interact with. What you need is an awareness of nonverbal behavior – including voice and body language – and how it impacts communication. Some movements and expressions are subtle; some are obvious. Some are designed to reveal; others seek to hide. All body movements and facial expressions tell a story. You just need to know what to look for to understand the tale.

Body language speaks the truth. While the spoken word conveys facts, data, and sometimes fake news – your body's movements, gestures, and facial expressions never lie. No matter what words come out of your mouth – “I love you,” “I'm disappointed,” “I'm fine” – if your body isn't reflecting what you're saying, your listeners become confused and believe what they see and sense rather than the words you say.

Your body relays messages about your attitude, intentions, and general state of being. Although there are times when you can't control your body's movements or just haven't a clue what your hands, feet, lips, and eyes are doing, all is not lost. With awareness and practice, you can determine which messages you relay through your gestures, postures, and expressions.

Although body language served as the means of communication long before today's spoken word, only in the last 150 years or so has nonverbal behavior – including vocal sounds as well as physical gestures, movements, and expressions – been seriously studied. During that time, people have come to appreciate the value of body language as a tool for understanding and enhancing interpersonal communication. Politicians, actors, celebrities, and other high-profile individuals recognize the vital part that their bodies play in conveying their messages.

Each chapter of this book addresses a specific aspect of body language. In addition to focusing on individual body parts and their role in communicating your thoughts, feelings, and intentions, you discover how to interpret other people's physical movements, including their gestures and facial expressions, giving you an insight into their mental state before they may be aware of it themselves. You see how performing specific actions and gestures creates the corresponding mental states within yourself and others. You find out how others perceive you and how you perceive them based on nonverbal behaviors. Approach body language respectfully and

responsibly, and base your judgments on the clusters of movements you observe and the context in which you see them. Just as one word can't tell an entire story, nor can one gesture. By aligning your movements with your words, you experience the powerful impact of body language and the clear messages you can convey.

About This Book

For a subject that's relatively new to the study of evolution and social behavior, you can find a sizeable amount of research on body language. As businesses go global, international travel is more accessible, and meetings are regularly held online, people are acknowledging the impact of technology, culture, gender, and religious customs on body language as a way of communicating. While I've written the fourth edition of *Body Language For Dummies* from a mostly English-speaking Western perspective, Chapter 15 has been expanded to include body language in different cultures – what's acceptable and what could cause offense. Because of the vastness of the subject, I've been selective about what I've included and focused on using body language to enhance your relationships.

In this book, I explain how to distinguish and identify specific gestures, actions, and expressions that both confirm and negate the spoken message. By improving your reading of body language, understanding how body movements convey meaning, and recognizing how gestures and expressions reflect thoughts and emotions, you have the upper hand in your interpersonal communications. Through physical signals, you can direct the flow of conversation and facilitate meetings, discussions, and everyday conversations easily and effectively. I will also show you how thoughts and feelings influence gestures and expressions – yours *and* others.

The point of this book is for you to become conscious of the power of body language. To this end, I provide you with the means of identifying and interpreting nonverbal behavior and offer tips for sending signs and signals to enable clear and congruent communication.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, I use the following conventions:

- » *Italic* is used to emphasize and highlight new words or defined terms.
- » **Boldfaced** text indicates keywords in bulleted lists or the action part of numbered steps.

- » Monofont is used for web addresses.
- » Sidebars, which look like text enclosed in a shaded gray box, consist of information that's interesting to know but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the chapter or section topic.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume, perhaps wrongly, that you

- » Are interested in body language and know a little bit about the subject
- » Want to improve your interpersonal communication
- » Are willing to reflect and respond
- » Expect the best of yourself and others

How This Book Is Organized

Throughout this book, you explore and interpret facial expressions, gestures, breathing patterns, and postures, gaining insights into the meanings behind your body language and that of others. You pick up tips for developing and enhancing your relationships with different types of individuals through your nonverbal behavior. In addition, you discover signs that reveal what you might prefer to conceal, as well as signals that expose what you're happy to share. Finally, with exercises to practice and artwork to illustrate the diverse assortment of body language examples, your arsenal is stocked, and you're set to go!

Part 1: Getting Started with Body Language

Bodies always communicate. They always have. They always will. Consciously or not, people project their moods and attitudes through their posture, breathing patterns, facial expressions, and gestures. Body language creates powerful and lasting impressions.

This book's journey into the land of body language begins in Part 1 with historical and scientific data that supports anecdotal evidence. It offers the fundamental components of nonverbal behavior, gives examples of the impressions that specific expressions and movements project, and provides you with a firm foundation for coming to grips with body language.

Part 2: Starting at the Top

If you want to discover how tilting heads, raised eyebrows, scrunched cheeks, and puckered lips convey unspoken messages, this is the place for you. Here, you look at the many meanings divulged by head positions, lips, and eyes, such as lust and love; desire and despair; anger, arrogance, and assertiveness; pride and contempt; power and authority; and submission and superiority. You come to appreciate that as long as your facial muscles are in good working order, there's not a lot of emotion that you can't express.

Part 3: Letting the Limbs Do the Talking

Your posture (sitting, standing, or lying down), arm positions (open or closed), hands (clenched, fiddling, or folded in your lap), and legs and feet (held closely together or wide apart) all reveal and influence your attitude as well as the attitudes other individuals form about you. This part shows you how to welcome some people into your space and shut others out. As a bonus, you pick up tips for using accessories to increase your appeal and reveal the inner workings of your mind.

Part 4: Putting the Body into Social and Business Context

Whether you relish or abhor the company of friends, family, clients, colleagues, or strangers, engaging with people from similar and different socioeconomic backgrounds is a part of modern life. Interacting with individuals other than those with whom you relate and feel comfortable is nonnegotiable when living in a world where teamwork and good social karma are the gateways to success. This part considers the impact that space and seating arrangements have on relationships and perceived status. For those of you looking for tips on how to score at a

soiree, interview for your dream job, influence someone whose worldview is different from yours, and communicate clearly in virtual settings, you can find them here.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

If your idea of a good read is to flip through easily accessible information, come on down! Demonstrating confidence, reading nonverbal messages, and building on your existing strengths – yes, you do have some – are here. If you want a quick tutorial on how to decipher gestures and facial expressions, turn to Chapter 17. If demonstrating confidence is more up your alley, look at Chapter 18. If you think developing your self-awareness and improving your interpersonal communication could be interesting, Chapter 19 is the one for you.

Icons Used in This Book

For sharpening your thinking and focusing your attention, let these icons be your guide:



ANECDOTE

This icon highlights stories to entertain and inform you about people I know or people I've observed and the signals they've sent through their body language.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Here's a chance for you to stand back and observe without being seen. By distancing yourself and taking a bird's-eye view, you can see how others behave and then reflect on the outcome.



REMEMBER

This icon underscores a valuable point to keep in mind.



TIP

These are practical and immediate remedies for becoming a skilled and confident body language practitioner.



TRY THIS

Here, you can have a go at putting theory into practice. Some practical exercises are designed to enhance your nonverbal communication, while others aim to help you understand the meaning behind what others are saying.



WARNING

This icon highlights potentially awkward situations to avoid.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This is information that you may find interesting.

Beyond the Book

Find out more about body language by checking out the bonus content at www.dummies.com.

You can locate the book's Cheat Sheet at <https://www.dummies.com/article/body-mind-spirit/emotional-health-psychology/psychology/social/body-language-for-dummies-cheat-sheet-207509/>, where you'll find handy hints and tips.

Where to Go from Here

Although all the material in this book is designed to support you in being yourself at your best, not all the information may be pertinent to your specific needs or interests. Read what you want, when you want. You don't have to read the book in any specific order, nor is there a sell-by date for covering the material.

If you're interested in how body language conveys messages, begin with Part 1. If you're seeking to improve your body language for a job interview or for playing politics in the professional world, have a look at Chapter 14. If you're curious about facial expressions, turn to Chapter 4. And if you want to know how to behave appropriately in cultures and countries different from your own, go to Chapter 15.

Now turn to a page, chapter, or section that interests you and begin reading. I hope you take away something useful and have fun in the process.

1

Getting Started with Body Language

IN THIS PART . . .

Get the skinny on body language.

Learn how your body outs your feelings.

- » Seeing how body language speaks
- » Gesturing for a purpose
- » Understanding what your body's saying

Chapter **1**

Exploring the Fundamentals of Body Language

In the big scheme of things, the scientific study of body language is a fairly recent phenomenon, with documented research covering only the last 150 years or so. To understand the thoughts and emotions behind human behavior, psychologists, zoologists, and social anthropologists have conducted detailed investigations into the use and components of body language – part of the larger family known as nonverbal behavior.

When you take the time to focus on physical movements and facial expressions, you can identify and interpret unspoken thoughts, feelings, and intentions that you or someone else may not have realized you or they were communicating. Like it or not, nonverbal behaviors reveal more about a person than you or they may want to expose.

You can detect someone's inner state by carefully observing their physical movements. Are they despondent or in turmoil, or are they feeling cool, calm, and collected? They both consciously and unconsciously reveal their beliefs, plans, and

emotions by licking their lips, baring their teeth, flicking their hair, and other recognizable gestures. In this chapter, you discover how to recognize and interpret nonverbal behaviors that reveal moods, ideas, and intentions. You also quickly dip into some of the research about nonverbal behavior and glance at this silent language's similarities and differences across the globe. As a bonus, you find out how you can use gestures to enhance your relationships and improve your communications.

Discovering How Body Language Conveys Messages

Before speaking in words, sentences, and paragraphs, people relied on their bodies and the occasional grunt to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Except for the evolution of spoken language, not much has changed.

The spoken word is a relatively new form of communication. Its purpose is to persuade, influence, and convey information including facts and data. On the other hand, body language has been around since the dawn of the dinosaur. You don't have to be taught how to persuade and influence others through the use of physical movements, gestures, and facial expressions. You're born that way.

According to frequently quoted research conducted by Professor Emeritus Albert Mehrabian at the University of California, Los Angeles, 55 percent of the message in face-to-face communication is relayed through body language and 38 percent through vocal signals *when the message contains emotional content*. Experience any of the following examples of body language to appreciate the saying, "Actions speak louder than words":

- » Someone raising their fist to you
- » A warm embrace
- » A finger wagging in your face
- » A child's pout
- » A parent's frown
- » An exuberant smile
- » Your hand placed over your heart

Creating an impression within moments

You can create any impression you want within moments through your facial expressions, movements, and gestures. Actors, celebrities, and people famous for being famous recognize the impact of a well-timed smile, a swing of the shoulder, a swagger in the step, or the wiggle of a hip. Politicians, police, newscasters, service personnel, and industry leaders are schooled in creating an impression within moments. While some people recognize the value of creating a positive impression, not everyone does.



ANECDOTE

Judy and Edith work for the same company. Judy creates an impression of an attractive, fun, smart, and caring person. Her eyes twinkle, she's interested in others, and her movements are open and free. Edith creates a different impression. She shuffles, slouches, and seldom smiles. She fidgets when she speaks and struggles to look people in the eye. While she is good at her job, the impression she creates is dull, listless, and dismal. Edith doesn't recognize the importance of creating a positive physical impression, which is one of the reasons she remains unseen in the back office while Judy takes clients out to dinner.

An astute observer doesn't have to ask how you're feeling. All they have to do is to take in your posture, facial expressions, gestures, breathing rate, and pace of movement to identify your internal state. Signs that indicate positive feelings include

- » Upright posture
- » Free and open gestures
- » Eye contact
- » Smiling

Some signs of negative feelings include

- » Slouching
- » Tense and closed gestures
- » Little eye contact
- » Frowning



TIP

Within less than 20 seconds of seeing you, a person can tell how you feel by your facial expressions and body movements. Depending on the impression you want to create, you can adopt the appropriate behaviors.

EARLY OBSERVATIONS ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE

Before the 20th century, only a few forays were made into identifying and analyzing movement and gesture. The first known work exclusively addressing body language is John Bulwer's *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand*, published in 1644. By the 19th century, directors and teachers of drama and pantomime were instructing their actors and students on how to convey emotion and attitude through movement and gesture.

In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Charles Darwin explores the connection between humans, apes, and monkeys. These species use similar facial expressions inherited from a common ancestor to express specific emotions. Out of Darwin's work grew an interest in *ethology* – the study of animal behavior.

In the late 1960s, Desmond Morris created a sensation when his interpretations of human behavior, based on ethological research, were published in *The Naked Ape* and *Manwatching*. Further publications and media presentations continue to reveal how much our nonverbal behavior is based on our animal nature.

Humans share similar expressions and gestures with their primate cousins.



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Transmitting messages unconsciously

In addition to your gestures and facial expressions conveying intended messages, your body often sends out signals without your control or knowledge. For example, dilated or contracted pupils or the unconscious movements of your hands and feet indicate an inner emotion you might prefer to conceal.



WARNING

While body language speaks volumes, be careful when ascribing feelings and attitudes based solely on what you see. Body language can be ambiguous, and individual signals can be misidentified if they're taken out of context. Look for clusters of gestures and expressions involving several body parts. Also observe breathing patterns to gauge someone's internal state. For more about how your breathing patterns influence how you behave, look at *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In the 1970s, Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) to measure, describe, and interpret facial behaviors. This instrument is designed to gauge minute facial muscle contractions and determine which action fits into which category or categories of expression. It detects what the naked eye can't see and is used by the police, film animators, and human behavior researchers.

As referred to earlier in this section, research demonstrates that when people are discussing feelings and emotions in a face-to-face setting and incongruity exists between the spoken words and how they're delivered, people believe what they observe – such as your body language and vocal quality – more than what you say. In other words, your nonverbal behaviors are directly tied to your feelings, regardless of whether you're cognizant of the connection.

Substituting gestures for the spoken word

Sometimes a gesture is more effective in conveying a message than any words you can imagine. Signals expressing love and support, pleasure and pain, fear and surprise, and loathing and disappointment are clear to decipher and require few – if any – words for clarification. Approval, complicity, or insults are commonly communicated without a sound passing between lips. Whether you frown, smile, or sneer, your message is plain.

You can gesture to convey your meaning when words aren't enough or the word mustn't be spoken out loud (see Figure 1-1). For example

- » Placing your index finger in front of your mouth while at the same time pursing your lips is a common signal for invoking silence

- » Bending your elbow and raising your hand with your fingers upright and your palm facing forward means “Stop!”
- » Winking at another person hints that you two share a little secret

FIGURE 1-1: Hands over the eyes, ears, and mouth signal that you should not see, hear, or say anything evil.



Minerva Studio/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Nick and Holly were involved in a tough business negotiation. During the meeting, Nick started to give away too much information. Holly calmly placed her index finger over her lips while resting her chin on her thumb. This sign told Nick to listen more and talk less.

Gesturing to illustrate what you're saying

When you describe an object, you frequently use gestures to illustrate what the object is like. Your listener finds it easier to understand what you're saying when your body creates a picture of the object rather than relying on your words alone. If you're describing a round object, you may hold your hands in front of you with your fingers arched upward and your thumbs pointing down. When describing a square building, you may draw vertical and horizontal lines with a flat hand, cutting through the space like a knife. If you're telling someone about a turbulent ride on a boat or plane, your arms and hands may beat up and down in a rhythmic fashion. You may hold your arms out wide when describing a large object and hold your fingers close together when you're illustrating a small point. The point is that gesturing is a practical way to convey visual information.



TIP

Because some people are more comfortable processing information through the visual channel, illustrate your messages through gestures to create a clear picture. If you want to help a blind person experience what you're describing, hold their hands in the appropriate position



WARNING

Too many gestures can overwhelm your listener. In some cultures, large and frequent gestures are frowned upon while in other cultures, gesturing is part of life. For more about gesturing in foreign lands, turn to Chapter 15.



ANECDOTE

Lotsie is an intrepid explorer who frequently speaks to students and other serious travelers about her adventures. As she describes her climb to Mount Everest base camp, she acts out those moments when the air is so thin that she struggles to breathe or to put one foot in front of the other. She mimes leaning on her walking stick, bending over with the weight of her equipment, gasping for air, and pausing between shuffled steps as she puts one foot in front of the other. Through her use of gestures, posture, and facial expressions, her audiences experience her pain and determination.

Physically supporting the spoken word

Gesturing adds emphasis to your voice, clarifies your meaning, and gives impact, to your message. Whether you're sending signals of interest – such as wide-opened eyes, a tilt of the head, and a smile – or signs of disgust – curling your upper lip, wrinkling your nose, and turning away – your body movements reflect your feelings and help your listener understand your meaning.



ANECDOTE

Maria and her husband, Eric, had a bit of a spat in the car on their way to see her parents. As they walked toward the front door, Eric reached out to hold Maria's hand. Maria growled under her breath, "Don't touch me!" and swatted her husband's hand away. Watching from the living room window, Maria's father turned to his wife, saying, "Uh-oh. Seems there's trouble in Paradise." Although he hadn't heard the words spoken, the supporting action told him all he needed to know.

People in positions of power, like parents and politicians, rely on specific signals to reinforce their messages. A favorite of the well-schooled politician standing at the podium is a precise, controlled chopping gesture because the action conveys strength and conviction. A fed-up father might use a similar gesture when he's telling his son – for the umpteenth time – to tidy his room.



TIP

When you're making a formal presentation or in everyday life, include illustrative gestures to help your listener remember the points you're making such as the thumbs up / thumbs down gesture shown in Figure 1-2.

FIGURE 1-2:
The thumbs up/
down gesture
supports your
verbal message
of something
being good
or bad.



James Steidl/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you are called upon to present at an event, establish the points you intend to cover by listing them separately on your fingers during your introduction. You may hold the fingers on one hand up in front of you or touch them individually with a finger from your other hand as you list your topics. When talking about point one in your presentation, point to the first finger or gesture to it; when you reach point two, point or gesture to your second finger, and so on. This simple technique helps both you and your listener follow your details and stay on track.



TIP

Many British and American people begin counting with their index fingers. Many Europeans begin counting with their thumbs. See Chapter 15 for more on cultural differences in body language.

Instagramers, TikTokers, and all who take their public persona seriously emphasize their messages through considered movements, gestures, and facial expressions. By carefully timing, focusing, and controlling their actions, they court their followers through well-devised facial expressions and poses intended to enhance their brands and increase their influence. Some pout, frown, or produce wide-toothed grins, matching their body language to their messages. Their poses become their signature gestures. (Signature gestures are discussed later in this chapter.)



TIP

When you're giving bad news and want to soften the blow, adapt your body language to demonstrate rapport. Move close to the person you're comforting and tilt your body toward them. You may even touch them on the hand or arm or place your arm around their shoulder if they don't object. You can learn more about the benefits of building rapport later in this chapter.



WARNING

Never— as in *never* — touch someone without their permission. Even if every inch of your body wants to put a comforting arm around their shoulder or a supportive pat on their back, confirm that the other person's good with that. What you might interpret as an innocent gesture, someone else might take as invasive.