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3rd Edition

Body Language

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Learn to:

- Understand what your body language is communicating to others
- Make sense of body language in multicultural environments
- Interpret body language in virtual meetings
- Improve your non-verbal communication skills

Elizabeth Kuhnke

Executive coach



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DUMMIES[®]
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by Elizabeth Kuhnke

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Body Language For Dummies® 3rd Edition

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Introduction

Body language speaks the truth. While the spoken word conveys facts and data – not all of which may be real – your body’s movements, gestures and facial expressions never lie. No matter what words you choose – ‘I love you’, ‘I’m disappointed’, ‘I’m happy’, ‘I’m sad’ – if your body isn’t reflecting what you’re saying, your listeners will be confused and will believe what they see and sense rather than what you say.

All day, every day, your body relays messages about your attitude, intentions and general state of being. Although at times you’re unable to control your body’s movements, all is not lost however. With awareness and practice, you can determine what messages you relay through your gestures, postures and expressions.

Although body language began with our ancient ancestors (long before vocal sounds turned into sophisticated words and phrases), only in the last 80 years or so has body language 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 recognise the important 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 body language, giving you an insight into their mental state before they may be aware of it themselves. Approach body language in a respectful and responsible way and base your judgements 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. By performing specific actions and gestures, you can create the corresponding mental states within yourself and others. By choosing your gestures and facial expressions, you can determine how others perceive you. Who knows? You may even become the person you want to be.

About This Book

For a subject that's relatively new to the study of evolution and social behaviour, you can find a sizeable amount of research on body language. As businesses expand across the globe and international travel is more accessible than ever before, people are recognising the impact of culture, gender and religious customs on body language and communication. While I've written the third 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 offence. Because of the vastness of the subject, I've been selective in what I've included and focus on how to use body language to enhance your personal and business relationships.

In this book I explain ways of recognising and identifying specific gestures, actions and expressions that both convey and negate the spoken message. By improving your reading of body language, understanding how your body conveys meaning and recognising how thoughts and emotions are reflected in your gestures and expressions, you have the upper hand in your interpersonal communications. Through body signals, you can direct the flow of conversation and facilitate meetings, discussions and everyday conversations with ease and effectiveness. I show you the impact of thoughts and feelings on gestures and expressions – yours *and* those of 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 non-verbal behaviour as well as offer you tips for sending signs and signals to facilitate clear and congruent communication.

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

Icons Used in This Book

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



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.



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.



This icon underscores a valuable point to keep in mind.



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



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



This icon highlights potentially awkward situations to avoid.



This is information that you may find interesting.

Beyond the Book

Find out more about Body Language by checking out the bonus content available to you at www.dummies.com.

You can locate the book's e-cheat sheet at www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/bodylanguage, where you'll find handy hints and tips.

Be sure to visit the book's extras page at www.dummies.com/extras/bodylanguage for further information and articles.

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 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 I. 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 to your own, go to Chapter 15.

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

Part I

Getting Started with Body Language

getting started
with

**Body
Language**



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects. Visit www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with *For Dummies*.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Find out more about the origins of body language and how it's evolved.
- ✓ Discover how body language reveals people's attitudes, beliefs and emotions.

Chapter 1

Defining Body Language

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding out how body language speaks
 - ▶ Gesturing for a purpose
 - ▶ Understanding what you're communicating
-

In the big scheme of things, the scientific study of body language is a fairly recent phenomenon, with documented research covering only the last 80 years or so. In order to better understand the thoughts and emotions behind human behaviour, psychologists, zoologists and social anthropologists have conducted detailed investigations into the use and components of body language – part of the larger family known as non-verbal behaviour.

When you take the time to focus on your own and others' physical movements and expressions, you can spot and interpret unspoken thoughts, feelings and intentions that reveal more about a person than that individual may want you to know. You can even identify some people by a particular gesture or expression such as pursed lips, swaying hips, fiddling fingers or an arched brow.

By observing people's body language you can detect their inner state. Are they despondent, in turmoil or feeling cool, calm and collected? Through a twitch of the mouth, flare of a nostril or change of posture, people unconsciously reveal their thoughts, intentions and feelings. In this chapter, you begin discovering how to interpret non-verbal language and you explore the gestures and actions that reveal attitudes, thoughts and intentions. You also have a quick dip into some of the research into this silent language and glance at the similarities and differences within non-verbal behaviour across the globe. In addition, you find out how you can use gestures to enhance your relationships and improve your communications.

Discovering How Body Language Conveys Messages

When cave-dwellers discovered how to decipher grunts and to create words to convey their messages, their lives became a lot more complex. Before verbal communication, they relied on their bodies to communicate. Their simple brains informed their faces, torsos and limbs. They instinctively knew that fear, surprise, love, hunger and annoyance were different attitudes requiring different movements and facial expressions. Emotions were less complex then, and so were gestures.

Speech is a relatively new introduction to the communication process and is used to persuade and influence others and to convey information, including facts and data. Body language, on the other hand, has been around forever. Without relying on the spoken word for confirmation, the body's movements also persuade and influence others by conveying feelings, thoughts and intentions. Like it or not, your body speaks through signs and signals.

According to research conducted by Professor Albert Mehrabian at the University of California, Los Angeles, 55 per cent of the message in face-to-face communication is relayed through body language when the message contains emotional content. You only have to experience any of the following gestures or expressions to know how true is the adage, 'Actions speak louder than words':

- ✓ Someone raising her fist to you
- ✓ A warm embrace
- ✓ A finger wagging in your face
- ✓ A child's pout
- ✓ A lover's frown
- ✓ A parent's look of worry
- ✓ An exuberant smile
- ✓ Your hand placed over your heart

Figure 1-1 shows two different gestures – one conveying a positive message and the other a negative one.



Figure 1-1:
His
gesture is
aggressive
while hers is
protective.

Creating an impression within moments

You can tell within the first seven seconds of meeting someone how she feels about herself by the expression on her face and the way she moves her body. Whether she knows it or not, she's transmitting messages through her gestures and actions.

You walk into a room of strangers and, from their stance, movements and expressions, you receive messages about their feelings, moods, thoughts and intentions. Look at the teenage girl standing in the corner. From her slouching shoulders, her lowered head and the way her hands fidget over her stomach, you can tell that this is not a happy camper.

Another young woman in this room of strangers is standing amongst a group of contemporaries. Her eyes twinkle, she throws back her head as she laughs, her hands and arms move with ease and openness and her weight is evenly distributed between her feet, which are placed beneath her, hip width apart. This woman is projecting an image of self-confidence and joie de vivre that draws people to her.

Early observations about body language

Before the twentieth century, only a few forays were made into identifying and analysing 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 nineteenth century, directors and teachers of drama and pantomime were instructing their actors and students 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 behaviour.

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

Like it or not, how you position your head, shoulders, torso, arms, hands, legs and feet, and how your eyes, mouth, fingers and toes move, tell an observer more about your state of being than any words you can say.

Transmitting messages unconsciously

In addition to your ability to consciously choose precise gestures and actions to convey a particular message, your body sends out signals without your awareness. Dilated or contracted pupils and the unconscious movements of your hands and feet indicate an inner emotion that you may wish to conceal. For example, if you notice that the pupils of someone's eyes are dilated, and you know that she's not under the influence of drugs, you'd be correct in assuming that whatever she's looking at is giving her pleasure. If the pupils are contracted, the opposite is true.



While body language speaks volumes, be careful when ascribing feelings and attitudes based solely on non-verbal behaviour. Individual signals can be easily overlooked or misidentified if they're taken out of their social context. Look for clusters of gestures and expressions that involve several parts of the body. Also observe breathing patterns to gauge someone's internal state. For more about how your breathing patterns influence the way you behave, have a look at *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley). At times, you may want to conceal your thoughts and feelings, so you behave in a way that you believe hides your true emotions. And then, wouldn't you

know it, out pops a giveaway gesture, barely perceptible to the untrained eye, sending a signal that all's not what it appears. Don't kid yourself that no one notices. Just because these micro-gestures and -expressions are fleeting doesn't mean that they don't send powerful messages.



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

According to research conducted by Professor Mehrabian, when people are discussing feelings and emotions in a face-to-face setting and an incongruity exists between the words themselves and the way you deliver them, 7 per cent of the message received is conveyed through your words, 38 per cent is revealed through your vocal quality and a whopping 55 per cent of your message is expressed through your gestures, expression and posture. Mehrabian's premise is that your non-verbal behaviours are directly tied to your feelings, whether you're conscious of the connection or not. Although sceptics contest Mehrabian's figures, the point remains that body language and vocal quality significantly contribute to the meaning of the message.



Gunther is the CFO of a global corporation and is a charming, successful and popular man. In addition, he is used to getting what he wants, when he wants it. You know the time has come to step lively when Gunther points his index finger in your direction, raises his chin, lifts his eyebrows and barks out a rapid-fire command, even if he has a smile on his face. For more about how smiling informs communication, flip to Chapter 6.

Substituting gestures for the spoken word

Sometimes a gesture is more effective in conveying a message than any words you can say. Signals expressing love and support, pleasure and pain, fear, 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. When you frown, smile or sneer you don't need words to clarify your meaning.

When words aren't enough or the word mustn't be spoken out loud, you can gesture to convey your meaning. For example:

- ✔ Putting your index finger in front of your mouth while at the same time pursing your lips is a common signal for silence.

- ✔ Putting your hand up sharply with your fingers held tightly together and your palm facing forward means 'Stop!'
- ✔ Winking at another person hints at a little secret between the two of you.
- ✔ Putting up your middle finger is an obscene gesture conveying contempt.

Figures 1-2 and 1-3 illustrate these behaviours.

Figure 1-2:
She's sending a clear message without saying a word.



Figure 1-3:
Wide eyes, open mouths and hands to head and face gestures tell you that these people have witnessed something shocking.





Nick and Holly were involved in a tough business negotiation. At one point 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 was a sign to Nick for him 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 words alone. If you're describing a round object, for example a ball, you may hold your hands in front of yourself 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 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 (see Figure 1-4). The point is that gesturing is a practical way to convey visual information.



Figure 1-4:
Her tight, contained gesture is describing something small.



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



Lotsie is a dedicated traveller and frequently speaks to students about her adventures. As she describes her climb up Mount Kilimanjaro she acts out those moments when the air is so thin that she's hardly able to breathe and when she struggles 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. Her listeners share her pain and determination through her gestures, posture and facial expressions.

Physically supporting the spoken word

Appropriate gestures add emphasis to your voice, clarify your meaning and give impact to your message. Whether you're sending out signals of interest or signs of disgust, when your body movements reflect your emotions you help your listener understand how you're feeling.

In addition to reinforcing your message, specific hand signals reflect your desire to communicate clearly. Watch well-schooled politicians standing at the podium. See how their hands move in a precise, controlled manner (see Figure 1-5) – no wasted gestures, just those specific ones that tell the tale they want you to believe.



When you're making a formal presentation, use illustrative gestures to help your audience remember the points you're making.



During the introduction to your presentation, as you establish the points to be covered, list them separately on your fingers. You may hold your fingers up in front of you, or touch them individually on one hand with a finger from your other hand as you say the point. 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 technique helps both you and your listener focus on the subject and stay on track.

Note: Many British and American people begin counting with their index finger. Many Europeans begin counting with their thumb. See Chapter 15 for more on cultural differences in body language.



Figure 1-5:
This precise chopping gesture demonstrates firmness and conviction.

Experienced lawyers, celebrities and anyone else who takes their public persona seriously strive to emphasise their messages through considered movements, gestures and facial expressions. By carefully timing, focusing and controlling their actions, they court the people they want by using open, welcoming gestures and dismiss others with a flick of the wrist.



When you're giving bad news and want to soften the blow, adapt your body language to reflect empathy. Move close to the person you're comforting and tilt your body towards hers (see Figure 1-6). You may even touch her on the hand or arm or place your arm around her shoulder if she doesn't object.

Revealing feelings, attitudes and beliefs

You don't have to tell people how you're feeling for them to know. Look at someone deep in thought. As she leans forward, looks downward, wrinkling her forehead in contemplation and rests her chin on her hand, she's replicating Rodin's sculpture, *The Thinker*. Equally so, a child throwing a tantrum with stomping feet, clenched fists and a screwed up face is letting you know that she's not happy. The body says it all.



Figure 1-6: The woman on the right is expressing her care and concern for the other woman who appears depressed.

Think of your body as if it were a movie screen. The information you project derives from your inner life of thoughts, feelings and intentions. Your physical body is the vehicle onto which the information is displayed. Whether you're anxious, excited, happy or sad, your movements and expressions tell your tale. Here are some examples:

- ✔ People who feel threatened or unsure of themselves touch their bodies as a means of self-comfort or self-restraint. Gestures such as rubbing their foreheads, crossing their arms and holding or rubbing their fingers in front of their mouths provide comfort and protection (see Figure 1-7).
- ✔ People who perform specific gestures reserved for religious rituals reveal their beliefs and values. Upon entering a Catholic church, the congregation dip their fingers into holy water and cross themselves. Before entering the home of many Jewish people, you may touch the mezuzah by the front door. Muslims bow in prayer facing east. By performing these gestures, people are demonstrating their respect for the culture, its traditions and values. See Chapter 15 for more about cultural differences and body language.