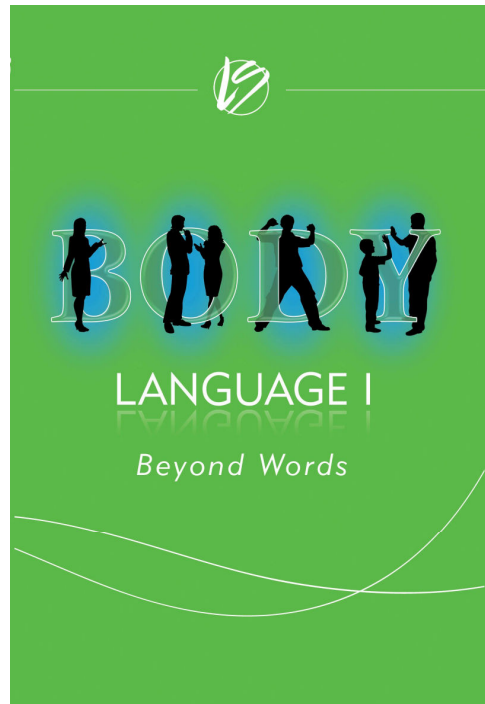


Body Language I: Beyond Words



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Body Language I

Beyond Words

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Body Language I

Beyond Words

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The Program

Summary

Some of your students may be bilingual and some may have taken a course in Spanish, Latin, or Japanese. But are any of them fluent in Kinesics? Kinesics is the study of body language as a form of communication.

People engaged in a conversation may exchange 200 words per minute, but more than half of their communication is non-verbal. We often use gestures, postures and eye contact without thinking twice about them, but these behaviors can communicate so much beyond the words that we use. The way we treat our personal space and that of others can send a message that is loud and clear, even if we never speak a word.

This program is an informative look into the fascinating world of non-verbal communication. *Body Language I* guides viewers through the land of space wars, eye contact cues, mirrored postures and the many layers that make up unspoken communication.

Key points:

- Learn the difference between a signal and a gesture.
- Understand congruent and incongruent body language.
- Learn how eye contact guides and governs conversation.
- Learn about the four zones of personal space.
- Discover what messages you send when you choose a place to sit in a meeting.
- Understand how we use objects to claim a greater amount of personal space.
- Learn about key cultural differences involved in interpreting certain gestures and postures.

What Is Body Language?

Speaking without words

When you think about communication, you probably think of words. When we converse with someone, we exchange about 200 words per minute. But just because we're speaking doesn't mean that's the only communication that's going on. About half of our communication is non-verbal—it occurs without words. Gestures, postures, facial expressions, eye contact, and the way we view and use our personal space convey just as much about what we're thinking as the words we speak. Understanding body language is essential to understanding how we communicate with one another.

The study of body language is called **kinesics**. Kinesics explores how we use the movement of our bodies and faces to communicate, distinguishing between **signals** and **gestures**. A signal is something agreed upon in advance and conveyed consciously. For example, sign language uses signals—to understand them, you must study the language. Similarly, baseball coaches, referees, and airport runway workers use signals to communicate. The meaning of the same signal can be different from one culture to the next. For example, North Americans wave a hand back and forth to say “hello” or “goodbye.” But in much of Europe, this same movement means “no.” Making a circle with the thumb and forefinger is the North American signal for “OK,” but in France it means “worthless,” in Japan it means “money,” and in many cultures it is an obscene gesture—hardly “OK.” Some movements or postures are meaningless in some cultures but are signals in others. For example, Americans often cross their legs while sitting, but in many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Thailand, it's considered rude to show the sole of a shoe in public. Signals offer a cultural shorthand for common messages, allowing us to communicate an amazing variety of ideas without any words at all.

Gestures

Gestures, on the other hand, are not preplanned, but come naturally. By making subtle motions with our heads, hands, and bodies, we reinforce our spoken words. Rather than replacing words like signals do, gestures reinforce our words, underlining and emphasizing the meaning of what we say. When we say something to express our mental or emotional states, our bodies often reflect our anger, happiness, confusion, or excitement. Gestures are also an important part of conversation. When talking with another person, we use head nodding and eye contact to regulate the conversation. By dropping our voice and slowing the speed of our speech, we indicate that it's the other person's turn to speak. If we want to interrupt the other speaker, we often indicate our desire by raising our finger, much like we used to raise our hands before speaking in grade school. Permission to interrupt can be delayed by a light touch on the arm. All of these non-verbal gestures are an essential part of normal conversation.

Congruence and incongruence

When we use and read these non-verbal communications correctly, we communicate well. But sometimes our gestures and our words don't match one another, leading to a breakdown in communication. If you're talking to someone whose gestures don't fit with his or her words, it can be like driving behind a motorist who turns without signaling or signals without turning. It's frustrating when actions and signals don't match. If you nod your head while telling someone that you agree with her, your action reinforces your spoken message—the two are **congruent**. If you roll your eyes, on the other hand, you lose credibility—your **incongruent** body language suggests that your words can't be trusted.

It's very easy to read a child's body language, because children haven't yet learned to hide their non-verbal messages. As we get older our gestures become subtler, and our body language becomes harder to read. Many of the gestures we use as adults are adapted versions of the body language we use as children. The “scolding finger” is one example. Students of kinesics speculate that the scolding gesture is an abbreviated hitting motion, suggesting attack and blame. If we tell someone that they're not to blame for a wrongdoing while using this gesture, our non-verbal message trumps the verbal one. Actions speak louder than words, and the scolding gesture clearly says, “you're to blame.”

Other Non-Verbal Signs

Eye Contact

Eye contact is another essential non-verbal cue that we use in everyday conversation. Like the conversational gestures discussed above, eye contact helps to guide conversation. When we speak to someone, we periodically look away from him or her. When we're done speaking, we indicate that it's their turn to speak by giving them a longer look. Looking at the person to whom we're speaking is a signal for feedback, such as a nod of the head. Looking away allows us a moment to gather our thoughts.

This is the procedure that a standard conversation follows, and varying from it sends a non-verbal message. If the person with whom we're speaking looks at us for longer than three seconds, we may interpret their attention as a sign of romantic interest or an attempt to dominate. It may make us uncomfortable, striking us as too intense. This discomfort explains why staring contests are usually so short—one person generally breaks the tension by laughing. If our conversation partner avoids eye contact, on the other hand, it shows a lack of interest in the discussion or a desire to get away. How we break eye contact also sends a message. We normally break eye contact by looking down.

There are some correlations between gender and the way eye contact is used in conversation. Women make more eye contact overall, and in particular make more eye contact when speaking with each other than two men would. One possible explanation is that women have a greater need for inclusion, and eye contact communicates connectedness.

Facial expressions

Facial expressions are another form of body language. Ray Birdwhistell, one of the founders of kinesics, believes that our physical appearance is partially learned. The facial features of a newborn baby are generally unformed. The placement of the scalp is not set at birth, and the shape of the mouth is not set until after permanent teeth develop. The facial expressions we learn to use in early childhood can affect the final shape and appearance of our face, as well as the habits of facial expression we will carry into adulthood.

Smiling is one of the most basic facial expressions. Different nationalities and regional cultures smile more than others. In the United States, Southerners smile more than New Englanders, and people in rural areas are more likely to smile and greet each other in public than people in cities. Women smile more than men, and show more facial expressions in general. The same is not true for children: there's no difference between boys and girls when it comes to using facial expressions to show their emotions. This suggests that boys learn to hide their facial expressions as they grow up. Some people in the public eye, like models and musicians, learn to smile constantly. But we can tell the difference between a "real" smile and a "fake" one. Slow motion cameras reveal tiny facial movements that identify an authentic smile—movements that we detect subconsciously.

Tongue-showing is a facial expression that suggests deep concentration and a desire not to be disturbed. The message that this expression sends is one that even children can detect easily. In one experiment, students were given a test with a missing page. The teacher sat in the front of the room, apparently grading papers. When students approached the teacher to inform her of the missing page, she showed the tip of her tongue to half of the students as an indication of her concentration. Those who saw the tongue showing waited 20 seconds before interrupting the teacher, while those who saw no tongue waited only 8 seconds. The messages our facial expressions send can sometimes communicate more clearly than words.

Posture And Personal Space

Posture

Another major aspect of body language is **posture**—the position of the body. Our posture can communicate our emotions or opinions. A relaxed posture suggests approachability, while a closed, defensive posture says, “Stay away.” Posture can also define groups. How we stand or sit when conversing with a group defines the boundaries of that group, either including or excluding people from the discussion. When we agree with someone, we will often mirror his or her posture. Salespeople are often trained to mirror the body language of potential customers, hoping to encourage rapport—and a sale.

What is personal space?

When someone gets too close to us, it makes us uncomfortable, even if they're not touching us. We all have an invisible bubble surrounding us—an area extending about 18 inches from the skin that we consider our own. This bubble is our **personal space**, and the study of how we use and regulate that space is called **proxemics**. There are four zones of personal space:

- Over twelve feet: this is the public zone. A person giving a speech to a large group might be this far away from the front row.
- Twelve feet to four feet: the social zone. In this space, we converse with people we need to talk to one-on-one, but that we don't know personally, like store clerks or strangers who are asking directions.
- Four feet to one and a half feet: the personal zone. This is the most-used zone, used for friends and casual acquaintances. Most social conversation occurs within this space.
- 16 inches or less: the intimate zone. We only allow those to whom we are emotionally close, like close friends and family, into this zone. If a stranger comes into this space, we feel invaded.

Strangers who enter our personal space pose a threat. When someone gets “in your face,” you will often back away or put up some kind of barrier. This barrier can be tangible, like raising a briefcase or purse between you and the invader, or intangible, such as taking a defensive posture. There are some cases where we allow strangers into this zone, like a doctor, dentist, or barber, but we must give permission before someone can get that close.

How we use our personal space

The distance we put between ourselves and other people sends a message. Friends stand closer together than strangers, and we stand closer to people we like than to people we don't. The way we use personal space takes on metaphorical meaning in the phrase “close friends.” People who are romantically involved will usually talk in the closest zone of personal space. When we begin a romantic relationship with someone, we “make a move” into a closer zone. There are gender and age differences in how this space is used, as well: some evidence suggests that, in conversation, women stand closer to other women than to men, and that older people prefer more space than younger people. There are differences between the body language used by adults and children, and much of the awkwardness of adolescence is a result of learning adult postures and gestures. Different cultures have different ideas about personal space. In Latin America and the Middle East, people stand much closer to one another than they do in America, sometimes even standing toe-to-toe. If you used the same distance in America, people might think you were pushy or aggressive, but those cultures simply have a different interpretation of the language of personal space. The boundaries and rules of our personal space are not clearly defined, and they change with different situations, people, and cultures.

The rules of personal space

When we're forced to allow strangers into a closer-than-normal zone of personal space, we follow certain rules. When strangers ride an elevator together, they usually remain silent and avoid eye contact, looking straight ahead rather than at each other. There are even predictable patterns for where strangers will choose to stand in an elevator—usually allowing the other riders as much space as possible in so confined a space. Similarly, if someone is studying in a library with many empty tables, a second person will usually choose a space far away from the first person, allowing him greater room and privacy. Most people will follow this unwritten rule, but we can send signals that make more explicit statements about our personal space. When we sit on a bench, we can allow room for another person to sit down as well, or we can “claim” the empty space by putting our belongings on it. We use possessions as territorial markers. One experiment in a public library found that leaving a book or personal object on a table or desk kept other people away for about 30 minutes. The object suggests that the space is occupied, even if there is no one there. A jacket over the back of a chair sends a stronger signal, keeping people away for about two hours. Putting down both a book and a jacket establishes an even stronger claim.

Position in a room is another aspect of personal space that can be used to send non-verbal messages. When people choose positions at a table for a meeting or class, they communicate by the places they choose. The group leader will most often claim a seat at the head of the table. If the group has no leader, the person who claims the end seat will often be appointed leader. If there are no end seats, leadership will come from the side with the fewest seats, probably because those seated on that side can control eye contact with a greater number of people. Someone who chooses a corner seat far away from the head of the table may be expressing a desire not to participate. Someone who sits next to the leader suggests a desire to be close to leadership or agreement with the leader. A person who wants to communicate friendliness or a desire to be a part of the group will choose a seat in the middle.

Our body language is a vital part of how we communicate with those around us. We use gesture, facial expression, eye contact, posture, and personal space to let other people know what we're thinking and how we're feeling without saying anything. Kinesics shows that actions truly do speak louder than words.

Review

- Kinesics is the study of how we use the movement of our bodies and faces to communicate.
- Kinesics distinguishes between conscious non-verbal signals and unconscious gestures.
- Gestures help to govern and guide communication, giving non-spoken cues and adding emphasis to our words and the thoughts and emotions behind them.
- Eye contact is an important aspect of our body language. We use its cues to guide our conversations, and it can also send more explicit messages. Too much eye contact can make a person seem too intense, whereas avoiding eye contact suggests a lack of interest in the conversation.
- Facial expressions are largely learned behavior, and different cultures and regions use expressions differently.
- Our posture also sends messages about us, telling other people that we are approachable or that we want to be left alone.
- Every person has an invisible bubble of personal space. This space is divided into four general zones: public, social, personal, and intimate.
- Our intimate space, which extends to about 16 inches away from our skin, is closely protected. If someone enters this space without our permission, we feel invaded.
- We can extend our personal space with non-verbal signals, such as placing our belongings next to us to “claim” an entire bench.
- How we position ourselves in a group also sends a message—for instance, someone who wants to avoid discussion in a meeting will choose a seat that is farthest from the head of the table.

Interactive Elements

Questions For Discussion

1. The video shows some examples of congruent and incongruent body language. Have your students come up with a short list of gestures or facial expressions (smiling, frowning, rolling eyes, etc.). Then, have them come up with one congruent and one incongruent statement to go with each one.
2. Kinesics makes a distinction between conscious signals and unconscious gestures. Have your students come up with lists of signals and gestures. (It may be easier if you limit it to gestures and signals made with the hands.) What distinguishes the two?

Common signals include the “OK” sign, mimed punching (of either anger or excitement), or the “this guy talks too much” signal demonstrated in the video. Some gestures include head nodding, chin stroking, or the “scolding finger.” When your lists are completed, be sure to emphasize the unconscious nature of gestures, contrasting it with the deliberate communication of signals.

3. Have your students come up with a list of different social encounters—buying something in a store, talking with a family member, asking a stranger for directions. Which zone of personal space is appropriate for each type of encounter? How might you react if the other person in each encounter used a different zone of personal space (too close for a stranger, or too far away for a friend)?
4. What are some cases where it's acceptable for a stranger to enter the personal or intimate zones of your personal space? What unwritten rules govern their conduct when they are there?

Some cases where strangers may enter these zones include visiting a dentist or barber and riding in an elevator or on public transit. The rules for each case are different, but may include: granting permission before allowing entry and giving clear verbal communication (in the case of a doctor's visit) and avoiding communication and granting as much space as possible (as in an elevator or subway ride).

Suggested Activities

1. Watch a short scene from a movie or television show in which two characters are having a conversation. (Be sure to pick a program that's appropriate for your class). Have your students pay attention to the body language of the actors. What do the movements of their hands, bodies, and faces say about how they are interacting with each other?
2. Have your students put together a "body language report" on one or more conversations they have during the day, describing the role of eye contact, posture, and gesture in communication.
3. Show your students photographs from magazines, newspapers, or advertisements that show people alone or in groups. Have them identify the key body language messages the people in the pictures are sending—approachable or defensive postures, inclusive or exclusive positioning, engaging or avoiding eye contact. What do these aspects of body language say about what the people and groups in the pictures are thinking or feeling?

Evaluation/Testing

Body Language I Fill-In-The-Blank

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the bank at the bottom of the page.

The study of how we use the movement of our bodies and faces is called _____. This approach to human communication focus on the unconscious messages we send with the movement of our heads, hands, faces, bodies, and eyes. Kinesics distinguishes between _____, which are conscious non-verbal messages, and _____, which are unconscious movements that come naturally. Gestures can communicate our thoughts and emotions without words, but if our gestures are _____ with our words, they can lead to communications breakdown. There's more to kinesics than just the movements of our hands—how we use the general position of our bodies, or _____, and eye contact are also big non-verbal communicators. A subset of kinesics is _____, the study of how we use the invisible bubble of our personal space. Our personal space has several zones, from the _____ zone at 12 feet and greater to the _____ zone within 16 inches of our skin. Unwritten rules govern the extent and use of this space, and disobeying these rules—standing too close, for instance—can be _____. Our actions speak louder than our words, and kinesics helps to decode those non-verbal messages.

proxemics
intimate
gestures
public
posture
signals
incongruent
kinesics
invasive

Body Language I

Fill-In-The-Blank Answer Key

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the bank at the bottom of the page.

The study of how we use the movement of our bodies and faces is called [kinesics](#). This approach to human communication focus on the unconscious messages we send with the movement of our heads, hands, faces, bodies, and eyes. Kinesics distinguishes between [signals](#), which are conscious non-verbal messages, and [gestures](#), which are unconscious movements that come naturally. Gestures can communicate our thoughts and emotions without words, but if our gestures are [incongruent](#) with our words, they can lead to communications breakdown. There's more to kinesics than just the movements of our hands—how we use the general position of our bodies, or [posture](#), and eye contact are also big non-verbal communicators. A subset of kinesics is [proxemics](#), the study of how we use the invisible bubble of our personal space. Our personal space has several zones, from the [public](#) zone at 12 feet and greater to the [intimate](#) zone within 16 inches of our skin. Unwritten rules govern the extent and use of this space, and disobeying these rules—standing too close, for instance—can be [invasive](#). Our actions speak louder than our words, and kinesics helps to decode those non-verbal messages.

Body Language I

Multiple Choice Worksheet

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

- 1) The word for how we hold our body is:
 - a) proxemics
 - b) posture
 - c) kinesics
 - d) congruence

- 2) Kinesics is the study of:
 - a) gestures
 - b) eye contact
 - c) facial expressions
 - d) all of the above

- 3) Gestures that conflict with the words they accompany are:
 - a) incongruent
 - b) trustworthy
 - c) intense
 - d) congruent

- 4) In general, women smile _____ men.
 - a) the same amount as
 - b) less than
 - c) more than
 - d) more intensely than

- 5) We usually break eye contact by:
 - a) looking up
 - b) closing our eyes
 - c) turning away
 - d) looking down

- 6) The public zone of your personal space is _____ from our body.
 - a) within 16 inches
 - b) 1½ to 4 feet
 - c) 4-12 feet
 - d) 12 feet or greater

- 7) The social zone of your personal space is _____ from your body.
 - a) within 16 inches
 - b) 1½ to 4 feet
 - c) 4-12 feet
 - d) 12 feet or greater

- 8) The intimate zone of your personal space is _____ from our body.
 - a) within 16 inches
 - b) 1½ to 4 feet
 - c) 4-12 feet
 - d) 12 feet or greater

- 9) The personal zone of your personal space is _____ from your body.
 - a) within 16 inches
 - b) 1½ to 4 feet
 - c) 4-12 feet
 - d) 12 feet or greater

- 10) We often use _____ as a way of marking our territory.
 - a) eye contact
 - b) possessions
 - c) kinesics
 - d) congruence

Body Language I

Multiple Choice Worksheet Answer Key

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

- 1) The word for how we hold our body is:
 - a) proxemics
 - b) posture**
 - c) kinesics
 - d) congruence

- 2) Kinesics is the study of:
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 - d) all of the above**

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 - d) 12 feet or greater

- 10) We often use _____ as a way of marking our territory.
 - a) eye contact
 - b) possessions**
 - c) kinesics
 - d) congruence

Body Language I Quiz

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| _____ | The public zone of your personal space begins _____ from your body. | 1) choose the seat at the head of the table |
| _____ | Someone who is not interested in conversation may _____ with their eyes. | 2) 16 inches |
| _____ | If you are having a conversation and you want to interrupt the other person, you may _____ to signal this desire. | 3) congruent |
| _____ | If your words and body language match, they are _____. | 4) proxemics |
| _____ | The study of how we use our personal space is called _____. | 5) 12 feet |
| _____ | The intimate zone of your personal space extends about _____ from the skin. | 6) raise your finger |
| _____ | Someone who wants to be chosen as the leader at a meeting will _____. | 7) 4-12 feet |
| _____ | The social zone of your personal space is about _____ from your body. | 8) look away |

Body Language I

Quiz Answer Key

Match the words in the first column to the best available answer in the second column.

- 5) 12 feet The public zone of your personal space begins _____ from your body.
- 8) look away Someone who is not interested in conversation may _____ with their eyes.
- 6) raise your finger If you are having a conversation and you want to interrupt the other person, you may _____ to signal this desire.
- 3) congruent If your words and body language match, they are _____.
- 4) proxemics The study of how we use our personal space is called _____.
- 2) 16 inches The intimate zone of your personal space extends about _____ from the skin.
- 1) choose the seat at the head of the table Someone who wants to be chosen as the leader at a meeting will _____.
- 7) 4-12 feet The social zone of your personal space is about _____ from your body.

Additional Information

Glossary

Congruent	When our body language emphasizes our spoken words, they are congruent with each other—they match.
Gesture	An unconscious movement or position that comes naturally. Gestures communicate what we are thinking or feeling without our using words or even being aware of them.
Incongruent	When our body language contradicts our spoken words, they are incongruent—they conflict, and can cause a breakdown in communication.
Kinesics	The study of body language—how we use the movement of our bodies and faces to communicate.
Personal space	An invisible bubble extending around us that we consider an extension of ourselves. It has four zones: Public, social, personal, and intimate.
Posture	The overall position of the body.
Proxemics	The study of how we use and regulate our personal space.
Signal	A conscious movement intended to communicate a specific message. Unlike gestures, we are aware of the signals we send, and their correct interpretation often requires shared linguistic or cultural knowledge.

For More Information...

Internet Resources

The Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs, and Body Language Cues

<http://members.aol.com/nonverbal2/diction1.htm>

Assembled by body language expert David B. Givens, this is a comprehensive, in-depth online dictionary to hundreds of the most common body language gestures.

ChangingMinds.org: Using Body Language

http://changingminds.org/techniques/body/body_language.htm

A guide to how to use body language to communicate more effectively.

Body Language, the Language Everybody Speaks

<http://www.bodylanguage.tk/>

A fairly in-depth guide to body language and communication. Includes a test of body language knowledge.

WikiHow: How to Communicate with Body Language

<http://www.wikihow.com/Communicate-with-Body-Language>

A richly illustrated step-by-step guide to better communication through knowledge of kinesics.

Blifaloo.com: How to Detect Lies

<http://www.blifaloo.com/info/lies.php>

A short guide to signs of deception, focusing on telltale facial expressions and gestures.

Print Resources

Birdwhistell, Ray. *Introduction to kinesics: an annotation system for analysis of body motion and gesture.* Louisville, KY: University of Louisville Press, 1952.

Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

Birdwhistell, who coined the term "kinesics," is considered by many to be the founder of the study of body language. In these two books, he lays the groundwork for the study of non-verbal communication.

Hartley, Gregory, and Maryann Karinch. *I Can Read You Like a Book: How to Spot the Messages and Emotions People Are Really Sending With Their Body Language.* Franklin Lakes, NJ : Career Press, 2007.

This book, co-written by a police interrogator, teaches how to read the signals that others send and how to be attentive to your own unconscious messages.

Miller, Patrick W. *Body Language: An Illustrated Introduction for Teachers.* Munster, IN: Patrick W. Miller and Associates, 2005.

This illustrated guide focuses on gestures and facial expressions often seen in the classroom.

Pease, Barbara and Allan. *The Definitive Book of Body Language.* New York: Bantam Books, 2006.

This practical guide to body language focuses on non-verbal communications in the context of business.