

VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

All forms of communication that involve the use of language, both spoken and written, are verbal forms of communication. Although this is the form that is learned formally, in actual practice, there is a third kind of communication, which is nonverbal. Nonverbal communication sometimes works alone and at other times accompanies verbal communication, particularly spoken, to support or supplement it. Nonverbal communication is the process of sending messages or expressing emotions or attitudes without using words and sentences. This form of communication consists of our appearance, body language and how we use our eyes and our voice. It differs sometimes from one culture to another, but it is largely universal in nature.

There are three main kinds of nonverbal communication that you should give attention to when speaking.

Body Language

Body language refers to the way we communicate through our facial expressions, gestures and movements, posture and eye contact. People you are speaking to—at an interview, meeting or presentation—will note your facial expressions and form their opinions about you. Look relaxed, calm and pleasant because this makes most people respond favorably to you and listen to what you are saying. If you are not careful, your facial expressions will show that you are tense, irritated or bored.

A gesture is a movement of the hands, arms, head, etc., that expresses some meaning: e.g., nodding the head conveys agreement, shaking it disagreement, shrugging (or raising your shoulders and then lowering them) a lack of knowledge or interest. Fiddling with objects you are holding in your hands, for example pens or slides, distracts the audience and will take their attention away from what you are saying. Similarly, standing with your arms folded in front of your body will tell the people you are talking to that you are nervous or not confident about yourself.

Moving about too much is also something that disturbs people who you are talking to. If you are sitting down, for example when you are being interviewed or when you are making a very

informal laptop presentation before a small group of colleagues you work with closely, do not fidget (or make continuous small movements) in your chair, but sit back or lean forward slightly and move only as much as you would normally. Avoid sitting with crossed legs, which will send out negative signals; keep legs relaxed and a little apart, feet pointing towards the people you are talking to. Keep your hands loosely on your lap, on the armrests or by the equipment you are using. If you are making a presentation, avoid walking up and down because this will distract the audience. It is best to stand in one place except when you need to walk to the flip chart or write something on the whiteboard. When you are speaking, leave your hands by your sides, hold them lightly in front of you or rest one hand on the lectern, the projector by your side or do all these to avoid monotony for the audience.

Work continuously towards developing good posture (or the way in which you usually hold your back, neck and shoulders, or how you stand or sit) because it is not something that you can correct on the day of your interview, meeting or talk. Always sit and stand straight, with the head held high and the shoulders held back in line with your ears. However, take care that you hold yourself in a relaxed way so that you do not appear stiff, uncomfortable or tense.

You also need to maintain eye contact with the people who are listening to you, which means that you should look at your audience when speaking. Looking down continuously at your hands or at your script or notes will not help you build a rapport (an ability to communicate well with others) with your audience. Unless you are answering someone's question, move your eyes continuously from one side of the audience to the other and from the front to the back. Avoiding eye contact or rubbing your eyes or closing them while speaking may all be seen as signs of your nervousness and lack of confidence and sincerity.

Voice

Voice is also a nonverbal cue that affects communication. Learn to use your voice well if you want to be a good speaker. Some of the aspects that you must specially take care of when practising your speaking skills are: loudness, clarity, speed, intonation,

tone and pitch. By varying the pitch (level of voice), tone (a quality in the speaker's voice that tells the listener about his/her feelings and attitudes for example, satisfaction) or loudness of your voice, you can express a range of emotions and attitudes.

- Speak clearly so that you can be understood. People listening to you will find it difficult to understand you if you do not pronounce words clearly.
- When making a presentation or a speech before a group of people, be louder than you would in a one-to-one conversation. If your talk is in a big room and if there is no microphone, you must project, or throw, your voice so that it reaches every part of the room.
- Speak at a moderate speed, neither too slow nor too fast; the audience will understand you and will not get bored.
- Use the right intonation patterns (sound changes produced by the rise and fall of the voice to show that you are asking a question, stating a fact, etc). Many educated English speakers in India and other South Asian countries do not do this because intonation is not a feature of languages in the region. However, learn and practise at least the two basic patterns so that you will be better understood if your audience includes people from non-South Asian countries. These patterns are as follows. The voice falls from a high to a low level towards the end of a statement (e.g., I'm giving a presentation today) or a question beginning with the words 'what', 'where', 'when', 'which', 'why' and 'how', asking for information (e.g., Who is giving a presentation today?). The voice rises from a low to a high level in questions that need a yes-no answer (e.g., Are you giving a presentation today?).
- Find out how to stress (or say a syllable or a word with force) the words you will be using in your presentation or speech and practise saying them. Again, stressing words incorrectly may not really affect understanding among people of the region, whose languages stress all the syllables in a word uniformly. But there are some words in English that differ only in how they are stressed: for example, 'pro.test (noun) and pro.'test (verb). You must, however, learn to use stress in sentences to emphasise what you want: