



Effective Body Language

Level 3 Project



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Effective Body Language

About Effective Body Language

When presenting a speech, a vast amount of information is visually conveyed by your appearance, manner, and physical behavior.

In this project, you will learn to use your body to express emotion and attitude, recognize different forms of body language, and identify gestures to help you show confidence when speaking in public. You will also learn about the impact of unintentional movement and how you can use gestures to enhance your speech content while supporting the work you do to communicate your message.

Resources

The following is a list of resources available in your digital project on Base Camp. Some of these resources, such as evaluations, are also available on the Resources section on Base Camp.

Project Checklist

Evaluation Resource

Introduction and Assignment

Introduction

In public speaking, your body can be an effective tool for adding emphasis and clarity to your words. It is also your most powerful instrument for convincing an audience of your sincerity, earnestness, and enthusiasm.

Your Assignment

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to deliver a speech with awareness of your intentional and unintentional body language, as well as to learn, practice, and refine your use of gestures when delivering a speech.

Overview: Prepare a 5- to 7-minute speech on a topic that lends itself to expression through your movement and gestures. Video record your presentation and get feedback from your mentor or another reviewer before speaking to your club. If you do not have access to a recording device, perform your speech in front of a mirror and make adjustments before your scheduled speech. Present your speech at a club meeting.

Your speech can be persuasive, humorous, informational, or crafted in any style that appeals to you and supports your speech content.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



Weblink: Return to your digital project when you see this icon to link to a website or Base Camp location.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist.

Learning in Effective Body Language

Assess and Reflect



To assess and track your knowledge, complete the activity below by listing what you already know and what you wonder about the topic today. Add up to five items to each list. After you complete your project, you will have an opportunity to review your answers and add what you have learned.

Know

For example: I know the importance of understanding body language.

Wonder

For example: I wonder how I can support my message with gestures.

Competencies

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Understand how body language expresses emotion and attitude.
- Recognize the body language used when speaking publicly.
- Identify gestures that show confidence when speaking in public.
- Use gestures to support listener understanding.
- Demonstrate awareness of unintentional movement.

Body Language

Body language is the nonverbal expression of thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Your posture, movement, position, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions all contribute to the message you send when you communicate. Your body language and gestures can help your listeners understand your message. They can also intentionally or unintentionally communicate a meaning that opposes your spoken communication.

Posture, Stance, Position, and Movement

When you present a speech, effective body language is an important tool in connecting with your listeners. Appropriate gestures support your audience and can help ensure your message is understood. If you are comfortable and able, adjusting your body language, gestures, and eye contact can make an important difference in how a speech is perceived.

Posture

How you carry yourself when you speak communicates a strong visual message. Your posture reflects your attitude and your level of confidence. Without making any changes to your speech content, you can communicate that you are alert and in command of yourself and the situation. The most important way to improve your posture is to breathe. Breathing from your diaphragm will lift your chest and correct your posture without conscious effort. An added benefit of this type of breathing is that it will help improve your speaking voice and decrease nervousness.

To be sure you are breathing the proper way, practice before your speech by placing your hand on the bottom of your ribs and taking a breath. Your ribs should move as you take breaths, not your shoulders, head, and neck. Take the time to do some research about proper breathing. It is worth your time to help you understand the mechanics, how your body works best, and how to improve your posture.

Stance

Some presenters speak while sitting, and some presentations, such as a panel, require a presenter to be seated. If you stand for a speech, your stance is the way you position your body. The ideal stance to demonstrate confidence includes:

- Weight evenly distributed over your feet.
- Knees straight but not locked, shoulders relaxed.
- Feet pointing straight ahead, not quite shoulder-width apart.
- Arms hanging naturally at your sides.

If you are sitting while delivering your speech, how you hold your body is still important.

- Be aware of your posture and sit up straight when possible.
- Avoid leaning forward on any surface in front of you, such as a table or desk.
- Face the audience or camera whenever possible.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed.

Position

Practice in front of a mirror, with a friend, or with a mentor. Your goal is to feel comfortable and relaxed, regardless of the position you take. Adjust your position until you see the message you want to communicate reflected back to you in the mirror. The best position will always be what feels natural and comfortable.

Movement

If you are physically able, movement adds energy and variety to your presentation and helps you appear confident. Changing your position or location by moving from behind the lectern during a speech is the most visible of physical action you can perform.

While constant motion, such as swaying or pacing, will likely distract audience members and detract from your message, there are types of intentional movement that can be meaningful and support your presentation.

Move Forward

Take a step or move forward to emphasize a point.

Move Back

Move or take a few steps back to create a distance and help your audience process information.

Use Lateral Movement

Make a lateral movement to help emphasize a transition in your speech.

Open to the Audience

Stand or move in front or to the side of the lectern to appear more open to the audience.

Be Still and Pause

Combine stillness with a verbal pause to add drama or intrigue.

Gestures

Gestures are a natural part of communication. People with congenital blindness (those who are blind from birth) gesture at the same rate as individuals who are sighted (Iverson and Goldin-Meadow 1998).

Posture

A speaker's gestures can suggest very precise meaning to an audience. To be effective, a speaker uses gestures that are purposeful—even when they are performed unconsciously. Unconscious movement is unintentional, often a habit or a natural expression of the speaker's personality, without conscious thought. This type of movement or unintentional, gestures must support a speaker's words, as well as the meaning behind the message.

There are four types of effective gestures.

Descriptive Gestures

Descriptive gestures indicate position, location, or anything tactile. For instance, use your hands as you describe different objects. You might use a descriptive gesture to demonstrate how large or small an object you are describing appears. This is particularly effective if you need audience members to imagine something they have never seen before.

Emblematic Gestures

Emblematic gestures are often culturally specific and convey a verbal meaning. Placing your hand on your heart in many cultures communicates a powerful belief in your message. These types of gestures are very useful when you want to share an easily communicated and understood concept quickly without doing so verbally. For example, in many cultures if someone were to ask you a question in casual conversation that you did not have an answer to, you could shrug. Though a shrug is not a formal response, it is a quick and definitive answer when you do not have time for a verbal response, such as, "I don't know. I'll have to look it up for you."

Representational Gestures

Representational gestures are symbols of thoughts and emotions. Very simply, you can use a representational gesture to show your audience what you mean. You can demonstrate throwing a ball or swinging a bat if your speech is about baseball or kicking a ball if you are talking about football. An open palm can suggest giving or receiving a tangible item or metaphorically giving or receiving ideas. Your gestures can represent your words in an emphatic or even humorous way to bring your audience with you as you tell a story or share your thoughts.

Pantomime Gestures

Pantomime gestures are intended to evoke a response from audience members. When asking for a show of hands to answer a question, you might raise your hand to encourage audience members to contribute feedback. If you would like audience members to stand, you might move away from the lectern and raise your hands to demonstrate rising from their seats.

Pantomime gestures are highly effective for engaging audience members in an activity or bringing their focus to a movement you need them to mimic or accomplish.



Video: Watch a Video on Base Camp to learn more.

Ineffective Gestures

When you gesture, you want to do so with intention. Unintentional gestures communicate and they may not send the message you would choose. You may communicate anxiety, frustration, or other discomfort by exhibiting the following gestures:

- Gripping the lectern
- Clutching an object such as a pen or notes
- Fidgeting with clothing or accessories
- Tapping your fingers
- Biting or licking your lips

Eye Contact

Part of engaging with your audience can be visual. When you are using a webcam, be sure to focus your eyes on the camera. This will give the appearance of eye contact. When you are in front of an onsite audience, direct your attention toward the people. If you are comfortable and able, make eye contact by focusing on individual listeners to create a connection. Recognize that some audience members may be more at ease with eye contact than others. Be sensitive by keeping your contact brief and moving on to another person. Brief eye contact acknowledges the individual without making them uncomfortable.

A Note for the Visually Impaired

Members with visual impairments may not be able to make eye contact with audience members. That does not mean they cannot engage an audience. When you present with a significant visual impairment, move your head instead of keeping it fixed in one direction. Your voice will carry to different parts of the room as you shift your position and engage audience members regardless of their location.

Arrive for your presentation early and orient yourself to the room. Locate the area where you will present, either the front of the room or the lectern. When it is your turn to make your speech, take the time you need to make sure you are properly positioned and lined up to face your audience. Ask another member to assist you if needed.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions can enhance your message. One of the biggest challenges for many speakers is relaxing their facial muscles when they are nervous. When anxiety is an issue, concentrate on what you can control. Practice your speech in front of a mirror, on video, or with a friend to provide feedback while focusing on your facial expressions. Consider using natural expressions that communicate your message.

There is no perfect way to create an expression that shows your emotions. Expressions are cultural and unique to each individual. You know your face and your feelings. Delivering your speech with openness while staying aware of your expressions and connecting with your feelings will help you communicate with words and expressions.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.

Body Language

Too Much

A speaker who moves frantically around the stage is likely to catch audience members' attention but not necessarily in a positive way. Audience members may be trying to figure out what the speaker is doing, rather than listening to their message.

Intentional and purposeful movement and gestures support and enhance your presentation. Being conscious and aware of each movement will help you avoid agitated and unfocused gestures that can detract from your speech.

Intentional and Purposeful

Intentional and purposeful movement and gestures support and enhance your presentation. Being conscious and aware of each movement will help you avoid agitated and unfocused gestures that can detract from your speech.

Cultural Differences

Acceptable gestures can vary widely between cultures. An innocuous gesture in one culture can be inflammatory in another. Because of this, you must be aware of cultural differences when planning body language in your presentations. If you are presenting to a group with members from a culture or cultures that are unfamiliar to you, research common body language and its corresponding meaning in those cultures.

Review and Apply

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- In what ways can body language express emotion?
- Why is eye contact with your audience an important part of your speech?
- How can facial expressions enhance the content of your message?
- Why is too much body movement distracting for an audience?
- Why is it important to be aware of cultural differences in the use of body language?

Complete Your Assignment



Project Checklist

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report. First, review your assignment.

This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

The following list includes tasks for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You can use the checklist here or complete the digital version in your project on Base Camp.

Schedule your speech with the Vice President Education.

Write your speech. Be sure to choose a topic that supports the use of body language.

Rehearse your speech.

If possible, have your mentor, a friend, or family member video record your speech. If you do not have access to a recording device, perform your speech in front of a mirror.

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Evaluation Criteria



Review the criteria for the evaluation in this project. Your evaluator will use the following scale:

5 – Exemplary 4 – Excels 3 – Accomplished 2 – Emerging 1 – Developing

Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

Unintentional Movement

- 5 – Every movement enhances the speech
- 4 – Most or all movements appear intentional to add to the speech
- 3 – Distracting movement is limited and rarely noticeable
- 2 – Movement detracts from speech
- 1 – Excessive movement is highly distracting

Purposeful Movement

- 5 – Speech is an exemplary example of the effective use of body language
- 4 – Speech is enhanced and improved by purposeful choices of movement
- 3 – Speech is strengthened by purposeful choices of movement
- 2 – Some movements appear purposeful
- 1 – Few movements appear purposeful

Complete Your Project



Once you have delivered your speech and received your evaluation, take a minute to review what you recorded under “Know” and “Wonder” in the Assess and Reflect section at the start of this project. Then add what you have learned while working through this project. Add up to five items.

Learned

For example: I learned how to align my body language with my message.

Before You Move On

Review Your Learning

Review all the material in this project.

Deliver Your Speech

Plan, practice, and deliver your speech.

Receive Your Evaluation

Receive your evaluation and complete any other tasks required by your club.

Assess and Reflect

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Congratulations!

If you have completed every task, CONGRATULATIONS! You have completed your Effective Body Language project and you are ready to move on to your next project.



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