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## 7 forms of nonverbal communication

Non-verbal communication offers a forum for individuals of varying language skills to interact with each other. Without using words, individuals can convey information through observation, body gestures and facial expressions. Non-verbal activities can engage individuals prone to kinesthetic or dramatic movement, as well develop interpersonal skills between individuals who do not verbally interact. Best of all, non-verbal activities are fun, easy and require few resources to implement. Mix up a "follow the leader" game by changing leaders frequently, suggests the website [creativekidsathome.com](http://creativekidsathome.com). Choose the first leader, then let her initiate actions which the rest of the group must follow. However, she may designate the next leader, by eye contact or gesture. Changing leaders democratizes the game and also encourages players to observe an array of different leadership styles. Within a group of people, entangle your limbs, then try to unravel them, suggests Winona State University. If the group size warrants, divide the group into two smaller teams. Have each group sit in a tight circle, whereby they can extend their arms and grab hold of a person not directly seated beside them. You can become tangled at any speed that feels appropriate, but detangle carefully, to prevent injury. Refrain from speaking during the entire process, encouraging players to use gesture. Dramatize a text using just your hands, face and body gestures, recommends the website [teachingenglish.org.uk](http://teachingenglish.org.uk). For dialogues or conversations requiring multiple characters, let students work together to try to embody and convey the text. You should encourage observers to guess the content and context before using words to discuss the challenges the group faced and their specific intent. Divide the group into teams and challenge them to collaborate on drawings based on a specific idea or theme, recommends the website [businessballs.com](http://businessballs.com). Keep a firm five-second time limit and cue each person to contribute to the drawing, then pass it on. Make sure all individuals contribute to the picture, then create a second image, changing the order of the contributors. Alternatively, you should request that teams exchange unfinished pictures or swap artists mid-way through the process. What people don't say can be just as important as what they do say. Words are just one form of communication. Facial expressions, body language or style of clothing are other critical components in communication, called nonverbal communication. This type of "language" goes beyond words. According to Gareth R. Jones and Jennifer M. George's book, *Contemporary Management*, nonverbal communication is "the encoding of messages by means of facial expressions, body language, and styles of dress." According to Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, and Ronald E. Smith's book, *Introduction to Personality*, people can look at other's faces and naturally obtain information about "happiness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust/contempt, interest and sadness." It does not take special training to recognize basic forms of nonverbal communication. However, it may take more extensive training to become self aware of how you are portraying your nonverbal communication to others. A congruence between verbal and nonverbal communication can ensure that a common understanding has been established, such as a genuine smile that accompanies a positive agreement with another person. However, people can also inadvertently express nonverbal communication that contradicts their verbal communication. People tend to have less control over their nonverbal communication. For example, an attempted positive agreement may reveal underlying discontent through a grimace. Body language and facial expression can reveal underlying emotions, such as love and hate. For example, according to a British Broadcasting Corporation report, crossing arms and legs while standing can be interpreted as a defensive gesture that implies a person wants to be left alone. However, when seated, this can represent empathy or sympathy. Feet also can signal attraction when your feet are pointing toward a romantic prospect. Eyes have commonly been said to be "the window to the soul." When someone is attracted to another person, he maintains eye contact longer and the pupils dilate. Disgust universally is expressed by wrinkling up noses and raising the upper lip. When people say that someone is making a "fashion statement," this is true in terms of nonverbal communication. Examples of styles of dress are casual, formal, conservative and trendy. Style of dress as a form of nonverbal communication is evident in the top corporate managers. According to Jones and George, for example, "top managers in General Motors wear slacks and sports jackets rather than suits to communicate or signal that GM's old bureaucracy has been dismantled and that the company is decentralized and more informal than it used to be." There is a trend toward increasing workforce empowerment, so managers dress informally to communicate that employees are a team and not part of a hierarchy. Does this scenario seem familiar? You're talking to a friend about an upcoming social event and you don't want to tell him you're skipping it. You tell him how great it's going to be and that you'll definitely be there. At the end of your conversation, your friend says, "So you aren't going to be there, are you?" You did your best to convey interest. You even explicitly said the words, yet your friend saw right through you. What happened here is a great example of nonverbal communication, or metacommunication. You probably didn't realize it, but while you were talking, it's likely your eye contact, body language and perhaps even the tone and inflection in your voice changed. All of these nonverbal clues told your friend to question the words you were saying. This is an example of how nonverbal cues can give away a fib and work against you. But there are also ways the same nonverbal "language" can be an effective communication tool and work in your favor. Over the years, linguists, sociologists and other researchers have conducted a great deal of research on nonverbal communication. Many of these studies indicate that the actual words we use play a very small role in how we communicate. What really gets a message across are facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, voice and eye contact. Even touch and the amount of personal space you allow or insist upon play a part in how you communicate with someone. To consider how effective metacommunication can be, let's look at a few scenarios. Consider the human face. Expressions like scowls, smiles, looks of shock, surprise and rage are almost completely cross-cultural. You can be dropped in most any part of the world without the benefit of knowing the language and communicate basic thoughts and feelings through facial expressions and hand gestures. Think about how important tone and inflection are in a conversation. You can convey several different meanings for the same sentence by merely emphasizing different words. Sarcasm is a great example of using inflection as a nonverbal cue. Even silence is a form of metacommunication. Remaining silent can be an effective way to get someone to reveal something. A constant, intense stare can be more intimidating than angry words. Maintaining good eye contact says more about your interest in a conversation than insisting (with words) that you're listening. A firm handshake was once the measure of a man in some circles, and a gentle touch can be much more comforting to someone than a sincere statement of empathy. These are just a few examples of nonverbal cues humans use every day to effectively communicate something. An infinite amount of nonverbal nuances impact how what we say is perceived. In some cases, perhaps we don't need words at all. Nonverbal communication is a natural way of communicating through body language -- from your face, to your feet. Most of us don't think about it, especially in daily, informal conversations and interactions. In professional or important situations like a job interview, however, you want to be aware of what messages you may be sending nonverbally to ensure they are consistent with what you are saying. Ask friends for honest feedback on your nonverbal communication in a practice interview so you know that how you say something and how you listen is consistent with your words and not distracting. Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, the tone and volume of your voice, and body movements such as posture, hand gestures and how you handle personal space, including touching someone. These communication actions reinforce what you say verbally. For example, if you are excited about a specific job responsibility, moving slightly forward in your chair and smiling reinforce that message to the prospective employer. If you slouch and have a disinterested look on your face, your nonverbal communication is contradicting or substituting a message for your verbal one. Nonverbal communication can't be faked, but it can be managed. Research findings published in 2011 in "Psychology Today" indicate that while nonverbal communication is not more important than what you say aloud in an interview, it can cause misgivings if it doesn't match your verbal communication. For example, saying you don't mind traveling with a dour expression sends conflicting messages. Similarly, if you concentrate heavily on your nonverbal communication, believing it can boost a weakness in knowledge or experience, think again. Consistency between verbal and nonverbal cues is the most effective. Demonstrating a genuine interest, controlling your nervousness and displaying a positive outlook are important behaviors you can practice. Practice your handshake. Make sure it is firm -- not limp, but not overly aggressive either. During the interview, don't hold anything that prevents you from using your hands naturally during the interview, like a pencil or purse. Hand gestures are natural as long as they are not distracting or excessive. Keep your hands away from your face so the interviewer can make eye contact and see your expressions. Never use your hands to display nervousness, such as tapping on a desk, twirling your hair or adjusting your tie. Don't fix your gaze on your interviewer, but maintain steady eye contact for at least five seconds, glance away briefly, then re-establish contact. If there are several interviewers, do this with each one, giving full attention to the person asking the question. Eighty percent of your interview time should be spent maintaining eye contact. Your posture should be relaxed, but at attention. Sit more at the edge of your seat than all the way back; this will help keep your back straight. If you have a nervous habit such as tapping your feet, practice controlling it before the interview.

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