



Body Language

The Secret Messages We Send Without Words

What your gestures, expressions, and posture reveal about what you really think

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ People & Relationships

Level	B1 (Intermediate)
Skill	Reading
Topic	People & Relationships
Duration	30 minutes
Age Group	Teens & Adults

Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a text about non-verbal communication
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to communication and behaviour
- ◆ Identify the role of facial expressions, gestures, and posture in daily life
- ◆ Discuss cultural differences in body language
- ◆ Write a reflective paragraph about personal body language habits

1 Before You Read — Silent Signals

Think about non-verbal communication and discuss:

1. Can you think of a gesture that means different things in different countries?
2. Have you ever known someone was lying just from their body language? How?
3. Do you think you are good at reading other people's body language?

2 Reading: What Your Body Really Says

What Your Body Really Says

Imagine you are in a job interview. You have prepared excellent answers to every possible question, and your CV is impressive. But the interviewer barely looks at your qualifications — instead, they are watching how you sit, how you move your hands, whether you make eye contact, and how you **position** your body. Within the first seven seconds, they have already formed an opinion about you — and most of that opinion is based not on what you say, but on how you say it.

This is the power of **body language**. Research suggests that words account for only about 7 percent of the emotional message we communicate. Tone of voice contributes roughly 38 percent. And a remarkable 55 percent comes from non-verbal **cues** — facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact. In other words, more than half of what we "say" to others is communicated without speaking a single word.

The Face: A Window to Emotions

The human face is capable of producing over 10,000 distinct **expressions**, and many of them are **universal** — recognised by people across all cultures. The psychologist Paul Ekman identified seven basic emotions that produce the same facial expressions everywhere in the world: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and contempt. Whether you are in Tokyo, Buenos Aires, or Lagos, a genuine smile looks the same.

A real smile, known as a "Duchenne smile," involves not just the mouth but also the muscles around the eyes, creating small wrinkles at the corners. A fake smile only uses the mouth — the eyes remain unchanged. Most people can **instinctively** sense the difference, even if they cannot explain exactly how. This is why we sometimes feel uncomfortable around someone who is smiling but whose eyes seem cold — our brain detects the **mismatch** between what the face is showing and what the person is actually feeling.

Gestures and Posture

Our hands and body **posture** communicate just as powerfully as our faces. Open palms generally signal honesty and openness, while crossed arms can suggest defensiveness or discomfort. Leaning slightly towards someone shows interest and engagement, while leaning away signals boredom or disagreement. People who stand tall with their shoulders back are perceived as more confident and **authoritative**, while those who slouch appear less sure of themselves.

Mirroring — unconsciously copying the body language of the person you are talking to — is one of the strongest signals of **rappport**. When two people are getting along well, they naturally begin to adopt similar postures, gestures, and even breathing patterns. Skilled negotiators and salespeople use this technique deliberately to build trust and connection with others.

Cultural Differences

While some body language is universal, many gestures carry very different meanings in different cultures, and misunderstanding them can lead to **awkward** or even offensive situations. The thumbs-up sign, for example, is positive in most Western countries but is considered rude in parts of the Middle East. Direct eye contact is seen as a sign of confidence and honesty in Europe and North America, but in many Asian and African cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect.

Personal space is another area of significant cultural **variation**. In Northern European countries, people typically maintain a distance of about an arm's length during conversation. In Latin American and Arab cultures, people stand much closer, and stepping back can be interpreted as coldness or unfriendliness. These differences are rarely discussed openly, but they can cause real confusion and discomfort when people from different cultural backgrounds interact.

Using Body Language to Your Advantage

Understanding body language can improve almost every area of your life. In job interviews, maintaining good eye contact, sitting upright, and using open hand gestures can make you appear more **competent** and trustworthy. In social situations, mirroring the other person's posture and nodding while they speak shows that you are engaged and interested.

Perhaps most importantly, being aware of your own body language helps you understand yourself better. Do you cross your arms when you feel **anxious**? Do you avoid eye contact when you are unsure? Do you fidget when you are bored? Noticing these patterns is the first step towards communicating more effectively — not just with others, but with yourself.

3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
position	to place your body in a particular way	How you position your body in an interview affects the outcome.
body language	non-verbal communication through gestures, posture, and expressions	Body language accounts for over 55% of emotional communication.
cues	signals or hints that tell you something about a situation	Non-verbal cues like eye contact reveal what people really feel.
expressions	looks on a person's face that show their emotions	The human face can produce over 10,000 distinct expressions.
universal	found or applicable everywhere in the world	Some facial expressions are universal across all human cultures.
instinctively	done naturally without thinking; automatic	Most people can instinctively tell the difference between real and fake smiles.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
mismatch	a situation where two things do not match or agree	We feel uneasy when there is a mismatch between words and expressions.
posture	the position in which someone holds their body	Good posture makes you look more confident and professional.
authoritative	having or showing authority; commanding respect	Standing tall makes you appear more authoritative and confident.
rapport	a close and harmonious relationship between people	Mirroring body language helps build rapport with others.
awkward	uncomfortable or embarrassing; difficult to deal with	Cultural differences in gestures can create awkward misunderstandings.
variation	a difference or change from the usual form	There is significant cultural variation in personal space norms.
competent	having the ability and skill to do something well	Open gestures in interviews make you appear more competent.
anxious	feeling worried, nervous, or uneasy about something	People often cross their arms when they feel anxious or defensive.
fidget	to make small movements because of nervousness or boredom	Do you fidget when you are bored? Others notice more than you think.

4 Useful Collocations

body language · eye contact · facial expression · first impression · personal space · hand gestures · tone of voice · non-verbal communication · crossed arms · open posture · cultural differences · job interview · social skills · build trust · feel uncomfortable · pick up on

5 Reading Comprehension

1. What percentage of emotional communication comes from non-verbal cues?

- a) About 7%
- b) About 38%
- c) About 55% ✓**
- d) About 93%

2. How can you tell a real smile from a fake one?

- a) A real smile is always bigger
- b) A real smile involves the muscles around the eyes ✓**
- c) A fake smile lasts longer
- d) A real smile only uses the left side of the face

3. What does 'mirroring' in body language mean?

- a) Looking at yourself in a mirror before a meeting
- b) Unconsciously copying the other person's body language ✓**
- c) Standing directly opposite someone
- d) Repeating what the other person says

4. Why can the thumbs-up sign cause problems?

- a) Because it is too informal for business
- b) Because it means different things in different cultures ✓**
- c) Because only children use it
- d) Because it is a very old gesture

5. What happens when Northern Europeans talk to Latin Americans?

- a) They always agree on politics
- b) The Northern European may step back because personal space norms differ ✓**
- c) They cannot understand each other's language
- d) They always become best friends

6. What is the main benefit of understanding body language?

- a) You can trick people into liking you
- b) You can read minds
- c) You can communicate more effectively and understand yourself better ✓**
- d) You never need to speak again

6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

body language · universal · rapport · posture · instinctively · mismatch · awkward · competent

1. Over half of what we communicate comes from _____, not words.

2. Some facial expressions — like a genuine smile — are _____ across all cultures.
3. Mirroring someone's gestures and posture helps build _____ and trust.
4. Standing tall with your shoulders back shows confident and professional _____.
5. Most people can _____ tell the difference between a real and fake smile.
6. We feel uncomfortable when there is a _____ between someone's words and expressions.
7. Using the wrong gesture in another country can create an _____ situation.
8. Open hand gestures in job interviews make you appear more _____ and trustworthy.

7 Answer Key

■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. body language
2. universal
3. rapport
4. posture
5. instinctively
6. mismatch
7. awkward
8. competent

8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

■ ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- Are you good at reading body language? Can you give an example?
- What body language mistakes do people often make in job interviews?
- Have you ever been in a situation where body language caused a misunderstanding?
- Do you think body language is more honest than words? Why or why not?

■ Useful Phrases for Describing Communication

- **When someone crosses their arms**, it usually means they feel defensive or uncomfortable.
- **You can tell someone is interested because** they lean forward and maintain eye contact.
- **In my culture**, it is polite to avoid direct eye contact with older people.
- **I think body language is important because** it reveals what people really feel.
- **One thing I have noticed is that** people often fidget when they are nervous.

Writing Task: What My Body Says

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

"Think about your own body language. What do you do when you are nervous, excited, or bored? How does your body language change in different situations? What would you like to improve?"

Use vocabulary from this lesson. Give specific examples from your daily life and explain what your body language reveals about your feelings.