



# How to Recognize and Understand Body Language

## Interpreting Your Client's Body Language

Resistance, confusion, distaste, passivity, etc., all show up in the body language of your client, regardless of what they are saying. Experienced consultants have learned to trust what they see more than what they hear. Body language is always present. Too many speakers and listeners are unaware of body language.

The nature of a person's body language is highly dependent on the person's style. For example, some people are intent on sitting or standing upright with their hands at their sides in a stance of attention and respect. Other people might slouch in their chair or extend their legs, in part, to convey that they feel comfortable around others in the room.

It is difficult to make overall conclusions about body language, especially because it is culturally dependent. However, people trust non-verbal communication more than they do verbal (spoken) communication, so learn to notice non-verbal communication, and be aware of your own. In general, notice:

1. **Style of voice, for example, loud, soft, frequent, irregular.**
2. **Movement of the body, for example, gestures, face, eyes.**
3. **Distance, space and time between speaker and listener.**

Specifically, notice:

1. **Eye contact.**  
In the United States, this often conveys sincerity. In other cultures, though, it might convey aggressiveness or hostility.
2. **Frequent movements of the body.**  
Frequent movements might convey nervousness, poor listening.
3. **Openness of the body.**  
Arms crossed may mean defensiveness, which impedes communication.

## Interpreting Your Own Body Language

Your body language is often the true “compass” about your impression of the quality of a project. For you to remain authentic, you need to be in touch with your own non-verbal communication. Different people have different physical reactions in different situations. Consider the following.

1. **Are you moving your arms and legs a lot?**  
If so, maybe you are afraid, frustrated or confused about something about your client or project.
2. **Is your mouth dry?**  
Then maybe you are afraid of something.
3. **Is your body position closed?**  
Are your legs and arms crossed? Perhaps you feel attacked somehow?
4. **Is your brow furrowed?**  
Perhaps you are confused – or you are really interested in what your client has to say.
5. **Are you looking away from the client a lot?**  
Then there might be something about your client that is bothering you. Or, perhaps your style is to look away so you can think more clearly. If that is the case, then your client might see that as poor eye contact.
6. **Is your heart racing?**  
Perhaps you are afraid of your client or the project, or you are excited about the project.