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## Success Checks

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### 10 Body Language Do's and Don'ts for Presentations

By Asia Rols Ph.D, President, Body Language Cards,  
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The qualities that make a successful presentation or speech aren't just what you say and the slides you show. Your body language conveys more to an audience than your words do about your confidence, trustworthiness, honesty and intentions. People interpret what you say to them only partially from the words you use. They pick up most of your message, and the entire emotional nuance, behind the spoken words, from your nonverbal signals.

Here are ten body language do's and don'ts to help you deliver presentations and speeches at the top of your game.

#### Show confidence with long strides when entering the room/stage.

The posture of a leader starts with the entrance. Walk out to the podium with a confident, upright posture using long strides. Avoid shifting your weight from side to side. This gesture is often perceived as nervousness. First impressions are made quickly, last a long time, and can't be repealed. Play the scenario in your head ahead of time. Think about what you want to project and act accordingly.

#### Show credibility and confidence by stepping away from the podium.

Face-to-face meeting is a powerful communication medium. The best leaders get out from behind the podium so the audience can see their entire bodies. They fully face the audience, make eye contact, keep their movements relaxed and natural, and stand tall - all of which are nonverbal signs of credibility and competence.

#### Express interest by turning your ear towards an audience member asking a question.

When you tilt your head and turn your ear towards someone who is asking a question, you're simultaneously showing interest in what they have to say and encouraging them to express their thoughts.

#### Show engagement by making eye contact with the audience.

Direct eye contact often increases significantly when we are listening, especially when we pay close attention to what another person is saying. Eye contact is often reduced when talking, particularly by people who are visual thinkers, as they stare into the distance or upwards and "see" what they're talking about. Strong, consistent eye contact is essential. Dry, tired-looking or bloodshot eyes reduce the effectiveness of eye contact. Use eye drops to help your eyes sparkle.

#### Emphasize your message with a pause.

A great way to emphasize a point is by pausing both your talk and body movement after you make it. This is an effective tool but don't overuse it or you may bore the audience.

#### Agree with and acknowledge the audience by nodding.

By using positive gestures such as nodding repeatedly to acknowledge the audience, you build an alliance with them, a nonverbal agreement that you are all on the same side.



#### Show honesty with open hands.

Keeping your hands open sends the message that you have nothing to hide. Straight, open hands forming one line with the arm, shows honesty and openness. Keep open body posture and appropriate eye contact.



#### Answer questions confidently, using the "The Tower."

Placing tips of fingers, one against the other, indicates active listening and serious attention. It also displays a honest attempt to provide an accurate and thorough answer.

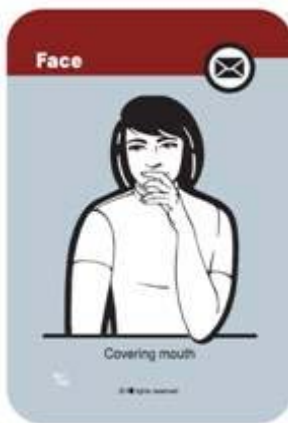
**Finish strong with shoulders back and head high.**

Finish as convincingly as you started--with energy and confidence. Walk away with your shoulders back and head high. This is the image to leave your audience with.

**Deepen relationships by shaking hands after the presentation.**

When people ask you questions or greet you after a presentation, use a handshake to empower and deepen relationships. Pump hands once or twice, while maintaining eye contact and then release. Weak handshakes and bone-crushing handshakes both leave a negative impression. Don't be afraid to practice shaking hands.

When preparing a talk, try to align the message or subtext (openness, restraint, willingness etc.) with associated and commensurate body gestures. Practice gestures in front of a mirror until they flow and feel natural.

**Gestures to avoid when making a presentation****Don't cover your mouth.**

This gesture suggests that you're hiding information, lying or not convinced of what you are saying.

**Don't press on the bridge of your nose.**

This is sign of fatigue and stress, the equivalent of saying, "I want to get out of here."

**Don't play with a ring.**

Fidgeting with a ring may be a habit for some people, but avoid doing it during presentations as it indicates emotional sensitivity, agitation or boredom.

**Don't massage your throat.**

This suggests that you're having difficulty accepting someone else's premise, argument or terms and it can alienate your audience.

**Don't put your hands on your hips.**

This position is an attempt to increase your presence, show dominance or attract attention.

**Don't hide behind objects or hold items between you and the listener.**

Standing behind a chair or other object, holding an object close to your body or even crossing your arms indicates defensiveness and



insecurity.



### Don't lock your ankles.

Locked ankles conveys that things are getting too difficult for you.



### Don't point at someone while casting a direct look at them.

This gesture is aggressive, authoritarian and, in some cultures, insulting.

*Asia Rols, holds a PhD in neuroscience and currently conducts research on memory consolidation processes at Stanford University. She's been a key contributor in the development of the [Body Language Cards](#). Body Language Cards use flash card methodology to introduce the basics of body language and the general concepts of how to read and understand body language.*

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All of the hard work done on a project can be negated by a bad presentation. The wrong hand gesture, inattentiveness, or a nervous quirk, can all block an otherwise successful proposal. These points are on the mark and important.

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This is an outstanding article - it provides specific examples which I know I will think about and incorporate next time I present to a group! Thank you so much.

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