
Interview Body Language

Send the Right Message

Using appropriate interview body language in your interview is essential to your success. Non-verbal communication accounts for over 90% of the message you are sending in your interview! Your verbal content only provides 7% of the message the interviewer is receiving from you.

Both your body language (55% of the message) and the way you speak, such as voice tone (38% of the message), are as important as the actual words you use in your answers.

Posture Sends a Message

When the interviewer offers you a seat at the start of the job interview, sit upright but not too stiffly in your chair. This indicates that you are comfortable and feeling confident. Hunching down in your chair gives the impression of nervousness and low self-esteem. A sloppy posture indicates a careless attitude and a lack of energy. Sitting on the edge of your chair can come across as being nervous and tense.

Relax and lean slightly forward, about 10 degrees, towards your interviewer. This gives the message that you are both interested and involved. Leaning back makes you appear too casual. Leaning to the side can be perceived as not feeling comfortable with the interviewer.

How you position your head also sends a message. Tilting your head very slightly to one side comes across as friendly and open. Keeping it straight comes across as self-assured and authoritative.

It is important to pay attention to the posture of your interviewer. You can establish rapport by adopting the same posture as the other person. This is called mirroring. If they have adopted a more formal posture do the same until you see that the interviewer has relaxed and become less formal.

What to do with your Hands

If you are unsure of what to do with your hands, rest them, loosely clasped in your lap or on the table in front of you. Having your hands above the neck, fiddling with jewelry, glasses or your hair, is unprofessional and conveys nervousness and anxiety.

Common wisdom is that the less you move your arms and hands about the more confident and in control you are. Practice a comfortable way to loosely place your arms and hands while you are sitting, both at a table and in a chair on its own. Folding your arms across your chest suggests a closed and defensive attitude.

Leg Movement

Be aware of the interview body language message your legs are giving. Lots of leg movement is both distracting and indicates nervousness. Resting one leg or ankle on top of your other knee makes you look too casual and comes across as arrogant. Crossing your legs high up conveys a defensive attitude in the one-on-one context of a job interview. Avoid "bouncing" your leg if you have them crossed at the knees – this is very distracting

and unprofessional. Crossing them at the ankles or placing both feet flat on the floor conveys a confident and professional look during the job interview.

Making Eye Contact

Eye contact is essential interview body language to establish rapport with your interviewer. If the interviewer is talking, and you want to show that you are actively listening, you need to establish direct eye contact and maintain it. Avoid appearing as if you are staring aggressively by blinking at regular intervals and moving your head every now and then, such as giving a small nod. Interview body language experts suggest that when you are doing the talking you need to hold eye contact for periods of about 10 seconds before looking away briefly and then re-establishing eye contact. Over-using direct eye contact when you are speaking can come across as challenging the interviewer. Typically, the listener maintains direct eye contact for longer than the speaker, who breaks it off at intervals.

Looking constantly downwards makes you appear insincere or submissive. It is acceptable to look down if you are making notes or referring to information in front of you.

With panel interviews it is best to look at and direct your answer to the person asking the question, with a glance periodically at the other interviewers.

Avoid speaking in a monotone by varying your tone and pitch, however don't overdo it and come across as overly excited or emotional. Speaking in a clear and controlled voice conveys confidence. You should interact with the interviewer as an equal, not a subordinate. Ensure that your voice tone is not apologetic or defensive. Breathe and pause before starting to answer the interviewer's question – this gives you a chance to compose your answer and assures that the interviewer is finished speaking.

Monitor your Voice Delivery

“Reading” the Interviewer's Message

Watch for these interview body language signals from your interviewer to read the message they are sending you. Body language cues that can indicate boredom include resting head on hand, fiddling with hands and losing eye contact. If this happens wrap up what you are saying and move on by asking the interviewer a question such as: *“Is there anything else you would like to know about that topic?”*

Drumming fingers and rubbing the face can indicate irritation. Clarify that you are answering the question with the information they want and not frustrating them with an off-the-point response.

If the interviewer crosses arms or leans away it could mean that they are feeling uncomfortable. Consider your interview body language. Perhaps you are leaning in too close and invading their space in some way. Create more space between yourselves. If there is not a table between you that creates a safe degree of personal space, keep a distance of about two to three feet, this is a comfortable amount of personal space for most people.

###

Preparing for your job interview includes not only knowing what to say but how to say it. The best way to be aware of your interview body language and the way you are coming across is to practice in front of a mirror. This way you can be confident that you are sending the right message in your job interview.