



THE VISUAL YOU
WHY BODY
LANGUAGE
MATTERS WHEN
YOU SPEAK

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The Visual You: Why Body Language Matters when You Speak



Your body language matters when it comes to persuading and influencing others. [Here are 5 secrets of nonverbal communication to help you speak with power!](#)

Do you think only in terms of the content you're delivering in your speeches and presentations?

Too many speakers proceed exactly like that. But the information you convey to your listeners is only the tip of the iceberg. Data of one sort or another can only go so far in influencing audiences. You, on the other hand, are a gold mine of information for your listeners.

Your attitude and expertise, your honesty and good will, even how you feel about yourself come through loud and clear by what you're *showing* an audience.

In other words, your body language is helping reveal who you are.

Let's look at how your gestures and movement, posture, stance, facial expressions, your use of your performance space, and even the vocal component of your presentations play into how others perceive you. Those factors in turn affect how listeners *receive* the signals you're sending and respond to them.

Why Does Physical Expression Matter?

Nonverbal communication often punches above its weight in terms of the information it conveys. People are not only judging you by what they see, but also your ideas, your organization, even the products and services you represent. It's a great reason why you should become familiar with the 5 body language errors that will sink your presentation.

Obviously, then, you need to pay attention to how you use your body, considering whether it is strengthening or weakening your case and the impression you're making on others. In other words: when you speak, you'd better be aware of what you're showing!

Below are 5 key components to using physical expressiveness effectively. These may or may not be secrets. But there's no denying their power to add or detract from the success of your speeches, presentations, meetings, and all other forms of public speaking.

1. The "Visual" You

What are the impressions you get from each of them? Do these speakers/performers appear to demonstrate confidence? How about their level of comfort on stage? Do you get any impression of poise and professionalism? Does each convey a sense of dynamism and excitement?

The truth is, the cues that help us decide to trust someone, accept what they say or show, and be willing to follow their lead are often not language related. Many of them are wholly visual. And so the "visual you" has great importance when you're speaking to others. Physical information predates language in evolutionary terms, running like a swiftly moving river *underneath* what you're saying. So the more you're aware of what you're displaying, the better you'll be able to confidently lead your listeners where you want them to go.

2. Why Content Isn't Enough

Do you depend too much upon your content to convey your message and the response you want from your listeners? Many speakers do. They think that once essential information is conveyed, the people receiving that information will think, feel, and do what the speaker wants them to based on that information.

But how can that be? People need to know not only what is *behind* information being delivered. They also have a strong need and desire to understand the speaker's intentions and motives, and whether that speaker is more interested in the audience's benefit or their own. These components of communication come through strongly in how that speaker relates to the audience in physical terms.

Words alone, that is, usually don't persuade people, because audiences have learned not to trust words blindly. Likewise, data may be powerful, but it's almost never powerful enough by itself. What you show matters as much and sometimes more.

So the next time you speak, make a conscious effort to be sure your movement and gestures support what you're saying. Here, for instance, is how to use natural and strong gestures in public speaking.

3. How to Command Space

In my speech coaching practice, I give all my clients and trainees the same advice, whatever their level of competence or expertise: *You need to get out of your head and into your body.* That's because most of us are guilty of "Talking Head Syndrome," as though we were brains perched on a lectern, spewing out pure wisdom! Of course, the reality is that you are a body in space when you present. And that body has a critical part to play in your effectiveness as a speaking performer.

Here are 4 ways to "command space" when you speak to allow this to happen:

- **Make a strong entrance.** Enter, move to your spot, stand (or sit) there, then begin. People will be primed to pay attention.
- **Ground yourself.** Stand or sit with your feet at armpit-width apart. Feel how stable you are? Get your energy from the earth or floor itself—you'll look and feel more powerful. Here's more on using grounding to look and feel more confident.
- **Use the two public circles of energy.** A helpful visualization is the three circles of intimacy in terms of interpersonal or public speaking. *First circle* is the intimate

or private space. *Second circle* is interpersonal. *Third circle* is the most public of the three. Start to pay attention to the level of energy you're using when you speak to others, as well as the space you're speaking in. Adjust your output of energy, in terms of the size of your gestures, vocal volume, and how much space you take up when you speak. Doing so is an essential if often unconscious use of body language.

- **Move with purpose.** Use your space productively when you speak! Move to a different spot for each of your main points. Approach a questioner or your PowerPoint screen. Make the effort to get closer to your audience instead of staying stuck behind a lectern. Speakers who move with purpose not only make what they're saying easier to receive and retain, but they also get a big boost in terms of engaging their audience.

4. Speak with Power

An essential element of effective public speaking is strong vocal dynamics (since “verbal” which deals with content, is not “vocal” which is how you speak about the material). And that begins with proper breathing. Breathing is not only the source of life. It's also the basis of effective physical expression in terms of vocal output. Stability, energy, and strength all start with sustained breath. Click [here](#) for 4 ways to achieve more vocal power as a speaker.

The truly reliable way to achieve vocal power is to use your breath to support and project your sound. So practice some breathing exercises: Place your hand around 9 inches from your mouth and “touch it” with your breath. Now speak to cover that distance, gradually increasing it—6 feet away; across the room; and finally to a point outside the window. Make sure that as you increase the amount of breath you're using and projecting your voice, that you do it from your diaphragm or belly area, avoiding creating a harsh sound from your throat. That's the way to produce a strong, sustained sound. Here are some more techniques for developing a warmer and more pleasant voice.

5. Handling Nervousness

Confident speakers look the part. Nervous speakers do too. You need to look like the former rather than the latter.

If you're someone who suffers a bout of the jitters just before speaking, or even during your presentations, you need to find a way to calm yourself quickly and reliably. And you definitely should be aware of where you fall in the nervous-to-confident range. To display an open, focused, and strong image when you speak, see my article "Body Language Secrets: What Self-Image Are You Broadcasting?"

To calm nervous clients, I usually take them through a progressive relaxation: starting with the top of your head and relaxing each part of your body in turn going downward. Imagine that a warm wave of relaxation like lava is releasing the tension in each part of your body. When you get to your fingertips and toes, allow any remaining tension to flow effortlessly out of them.

Want another way to avoid appearing nervous when you speak? Simply tell yourself you're going to broadcast confidence instead. It may be difficult at first to envision doing this, but you can; and with practice, you'll get better at it.

Assume a strong stance, move with purpose, and make your gestures clean and strong (and don't use too many of them). Remember: when you appear confident, the audience will have confidence in you in turn. And you yourself will feel a greater level of self-assurance.

Now you're using *the visual you* to maximize the language of your body when you speak!

Key takeaways from this blog:

- Your content may only be the tip of the iceberg concerning your influence. People
- gain information about your motives and judge you by what they see.
- You can command space by moving with purpose and using energy effectively.
- The powerful voice you need begins with good diaphragmatic breathing. If
- you feel nervous, concentrate on *looking* confident. It truly will help!

Gary Genard, Ph.D., founder of [The Genard Method](#), is an expert in theater-based public speaking training. As an actor and speech coach, he uses performance techniques to help executives and leadership teams speak with confidence and influence. Dr. Genard consults and trains for corporations, governments, nonprofits, and individuals worldwide. He is the author of the books *How to Give a Speech* and *Fearless Speaking, Speaking Virtually, and Speak for Leadership*.