

2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS EXCLUSIVE

Body Language Experts Share Advice on How to Tell When Politicians Lie



Former President Donald Trump points toward the crowd at a Save America rally in support of Arizona GOP candidates in Prescott Valley, Arizona, on July 22, 2022. Mario Tama/Getty Images



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9/19/2022 | Updated: 9/28/2022

With midterm elections looming, some voters are still undecided about candidate choices.

And when campaign claims conflict, some wonder, who's being honest?

That doesn't have to be a mystery anymore, body language experts told The Epoch Times.

But first, voters seeking to root out the truth must forget everything they've been told about how to spot a lie. Wrong are the generations-old myths, such as a liar's inability to look into the eyes of the person he's trying to deceive.

"Averting eyes is not a clue of deception, and not looking up to the right, and not looking up to the left—all of that science has been debunked" by at least 22 peer-reviewed studies, says Susan Constantine, an expert on body language.

So what does expose a lie?

There's no one sign for any person. But there are behaviors all liars have in common, experts say.

Blips From the Baseline

When someone tries to deceive, he or she unconsciously reveals a burst of behaviors associated with lying, Constantine and two other top truth-detectors say.

And that "cluster" of what experts call "hotspots" or "tells" will stray from the person's usual way of acting or speaking.

"We have a general way that we behave—that's our baseline," said Traci Brown, author of "How to Detect Lies, Fraud, and Identity Theft."

To spot untruthfulness by a politician or a suspect under investigation, Brown looks for two to five deception-linked clues "off their baseline" in the span of about one sentence.

Constantine coaches her clients to look for at least three signs in seven seconds.

Clue clusters happen fast, and they indicate anxiety. Anxiety accompanies deception, experts agreed. It's the body's response when untruthfulness is

being formulated in the brain.

“That is the science, and there’s research to back that up,” Constantine said.

Blips from the baseline will expose even a polished politician adept at exaggerating the truth, hiding facts, or telling outright whoppers.

Most seasoned politicians have “learned how to answer questions and present them in a way where they’re giving you information,” Constantine said.

“They’re withholding, omitting, and skipping over pertinent information, which is purposeful.”

By rehearsing their talking points, they practice hiding the delivery of not-so-truthful tidbits.

But it’s almost impossible to completely camouflage their deception, especially when forced off-script by an unexpected question, experts agreed.

That’s when the body gives it away. And that’s the best time for observers to watch closely.

One doesn’t have to be a pro, though. People are wired to naturally pick up on fibs, making all of us an effective “human lie detector,” says body language expert Patti Wood, author of “Snap: Making the Most of First Impressions, Body Language, and Charisma.”



Body language expert Susan Constantine is the author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Reading Body Language" and the presenter of the online course "How to Spot a Liar in 7 Seconds or Less." Courtesy of Susan Constantine

Giveaways to Clinton’s Big Lie

In January 1998, when President Bill Clinton denied involvement with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, he didn’t fool experts trained to read

body language. They saw the classic clues.

Months later, their observations were proven correct when Clinton admitted the “improper physical relationship.”



President Bill Clinton addresses the nation from the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington on Dec. 11, 1998, to apologize for misleading the country about his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. William Philpott/AFP/Getty Images

In a [video clip](#) from the William J. Clinton Presidential Library, the former president’s eyes appear “locked and frozen,” which was a big giveaway, Constantine said.

His eyebrows flick up briefly, another clue. And he uses his pointer finger to point, speaking more “to convince than convey” information, Constantine said.

“All signs of deception” because they happen in a cluster, and stray from his normal way of speaking, his baseline, she said.

During the denial, Clinton punches out the words: “I wanna say one thing to the American people. I want you to listen to me. I’m gonna say this again. I did not have sexual relations with that woman—Ms. Lewinsky.”

Pounding the podium for emphasis, Clinton says: “I never told anybody to lie. Not a single time. Never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people. Thank you.”

Even his word choices help reveal the lie, Wood said.

When he calls Lewinsky “that woman” before catching himself and using her name, that’s called “depersonalization,” and it’s a clue that law enforcement officers note when interviewing suspects, Wood said.

“When someone depersonalizes, that’s actually a signal that they’re guilty of a crime against that person or with that person.”

Also, Clinton pauses for an unnaturally long time between the words “woman” and “Ms. Lewinsky.”

“Longer than normal, and out of his baseline,” Wood said.

The Key Is the Cluster

In seeking to spot fibs, “it’s really important to understand how the brain works,” Constantine said. “When a person knows they’re going to tell something that’s untrue, there are clues that begin to develop.”

That’s when they veer off their baseline.

“When they’re about to fabricate, or skip over, or bolster and leave out, or out-and-out lie, you’ll start to see these little clusters that happen,” she said.

Like Clinton, the deceiver may pause unnaturally or lock eyes with the audience or interviewer. Or “one shoulder will pop up just ever so slightly—that’s a sign of deception. But there are so many,” Constantine said.

The key, as always, is the cluster.

It might include a giggle, a yawn, raised eyebrows, puffing out air, poking the tongue out of the side of the mouth, stammering, shifting weight, tapping feet, moving a hand to the face, pressing lips together, biting the corner of

the mouth, a flutter of blinks or not blinking enough, and sudden changes in a person's tone, tempo, volume, or pitch.

Those behaviors occur, Constantine said, because of “internal anxiety, and that’s what we call cognitive load, and that’s what happens to the brain when the brain knows you’re going to lie.”

Constantine said Vice President Kamala Harris shows signs of deception when she holds a forced smile, or laughs off what someone else says. It’s a deception clue that experts call “duping delight.”



Vice President Kamala Harris laughs after answering a question from the press during an event on high-speed internet access at the White House complex on June 3, 2021. Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images

“When a person says something, and then they feel like they duped you, sometimes will see a smirk come out, or a smile,” or ill-timed, awkward laughter.

“She does that,” Constantine said about Harris. “And she over-faces,” which means holding an expression, such as a smile or frown, for too long.

Genuine expressions are fleeting, leaving “your face in microseconds,” Constantine said. “So when you hold it, whether it’s a smile or a frown, or it’s

an exaggerated expression, those are over-expressions. Those are ones that are contrived. Those are the ones that are forced.”

That’s a dishonesty alert, she said.

Often, Harris’s over-facing “is really more about that she feels very uncomfortable and insecure.” Constantine said. “So she thinks that in over-smiling or over-facing that she will win people over. It does the opposite.”

But, Constantine adds, “I would never trust anybody if they sat there across from me” with a forced, insincere-looking smile.

“You think you’re gonna win me over, because you’re trying to be charismatic, and you are over-facing, which, to me, is not authentic,” Constantine said. “It’s contrived. To me, that’s a triple-check no.”

Often asked to analyze debates, Wood also watches the mouth for more clues.

“When they suck in their lips, I call that lip withholding—they’re withholding the truth. So it’s highly probable the next thing out of their mouth is a lie,” Wood said.

It’s the same when candidates “hear a question and their lips press together,” she said. “They have the truth inside them, but they’re keeping it from coming out. So it’s very likely that the next thing out of their mouth is a lie.”



Patti Wood is a body language expert and author often hired to teach how to read clues people unwittingly send with their behavior. Courtesy of Patti Wood

Or, if the subject is upset with an interviewer for asking a tough question, they might stick out their tongue, just barely and very quickly. Wood slows video playback speed to watch for such clues.

“It means they’ve been cornered and found out,” Wood said.

She sees that often in witnesses testifying before Congress.

In their cluster of signs, liars may lick their lips, usually from left to right, she said, “like they’re erasing what they just said.”

And in looking for lies, she watches the eyes.

People formulating a lie may hold eyelids closed for longer than normal.

“You’re closing your eyes to what you don’t like, or you’re trying to have a minute to think of the lie,” Wood said. “It lets your brain rest for a second, so that you can go over to your neocortex [area of the brain], where the lies are, and think of the lie.”

Biden’s Bluffs

Brown and Constantine noted what they see as unmistakable signs that President Joe Biden has strayed from the truth.

During his campaign for the presidency, he often spoke smoothly and confidently—his baseline—until he took on one particular topic, Brown said.

“Whenever he would talk about race and racial equality,” she said, that’s when he’d begin to stutter or have a “hitch in the middle of a word. That happened frequently on the campaign trail.”

The word that trips up a speaker could be the one at the heart of a lie, she said.

And when a smooth speaker suddenly begins to stammer, and “the word-error rate is super-high, that’s an indicator of deception,” Brown said.

Her impression: When Biden repeatedly proclaimed racial inequality is a widespread problem in the United States, he didn’t actually believe it.

His eyes told a similar story, she said.

“Anytime anyone’s blink-rate changes, that’s high anxiety,” Brown said. “Super-high stress can be connected to deception. Not always. But it sure can be.”



President Joe Biden covers his mouth while coughing during a virtual meeting with CEOs and labor leaders regarding the CHIPS Act, in Washington on July 25, 2022. Brendan Smialowski/AFP via Getty Images

Constantine suspects dishonesty when Biden suddenly starts coughing or clearing his throat. Those behaviors indicate “super-high anxiety for him, and can be connected to deception, absolutely,” she said.

You’ll see similar behavior everywhere, even in church, Wood agreed.

When listening to a “sermon from the minister, and he talks about infidelity, listen to the congregation, to who’s coughing and clearing their throat,” Wood advised. Coughers call their own faithfulness into question, she said.

It’s a tip that she’s shared with friends, with comical results.

“We all went to see this movie, and the characters were talking about infidelity in the movie, and people were coughing and clearing their throat suddenly in the theater,” Wood recalled. “All my friends looked at me and laughed.”

But there's more to Biden's mannerisms that cause Constantine and Brown to suspect deception.

"The pausing, hesitation, clearing the throat, looking down after they've been looking up, the smirk, the rolling of the eyes, the raise of the eyebrows, the duping delight—Biden does them all," Constantine said. "It's been shocking to me that people would believe him."

"The smirking!" she said. "And then he would listen to a question and just break into laughter. It's like he's shrugging off what somebody says, like, 'You don't know what you're talking about.'"

"And that's his way of camouflaging what he's really feeling by putting on a duping-delight smile, which is very condescending."

Or when he says, "C'mon, man!"

"That's the contempt" that signals dishonesty, Constantine said.

Trump

Former President Donald Trump is "an interesting case for body language experts to study" as well, Constantine said.

"He has his own little gesturing that really is not even in any of our textbooks," she said. "He is like a textbook all on his own with his gestures—his funny little 'A-OK' signs, and swiping gestures to the side."

"But overall, I think he believes in what he's saying," Constantine said.

His "bizarre" gestures appear to reflect truthfulness, including the way he often flashes open palms, she said.



Former President Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Dallas on Aug. 6, 2022. Bobby Sanchez for The Epoch Times

“But he’s got a high level of insecurity, and that’s why he bolsters and fabricates,” she added. “I don’t think he’s trying to deceive. I think it just is part of his narcissism. His personality comes out in his gestures. Everything about him is so much grander and bigger.”

Trump’s finger-pointing during presidential debates suggested to Brown that he hadn’t been coached on body language.

Coached candidates often acknowledge two or three people in the front row when they take the stage, standard behavior for Hillary Clinton.

“That says, ‘I’m so popular, and I’m seeing all my friends,’” Brown said. “They point and smile, and that’s coached.”

But, unlike Trump, “they’re not pointing with the pointer finger, but bringing the thumb to the pointer finger, and toning down the aggression,” she said.

“To point with your pointer finger, that’s super-aggressive. Until Trump, we only saw that from Middle Eastern dictators. Generally, Americans up to

now haven't wanted that form of aggressive politician," she said.



Former President Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Dallas on Aug. 6, 2022. Bobby Sanchez for The Epoch Times

Trump also came out from behind his podium, like “he was stalking Hillary,” Brown said. “It was super-aggressive” body language.

Human Lie Detector

During debates, Brown notes who grasps the side of the podium, a sign of discomfort, and a clue that, when coupled with other “hotspots,” deception is coming.

“Pacifying behaviors” also signal stress that comes from an effort to deceive, Brown said. She looks for knuckle-cracking, self-hugging, tapping, drumming fingers, coughing, swallowing, clearing the throat, and yawning.

And “anything that’s asymmetrical can show deception,” she said, such as an involuntary lopsided smile or shoulder shrug.

“Your body almost never lets you get away with” a lie without creating evidence, Brown said.



Body language expert Traci Brown teaches seminars on “deception detection” and how to spot “whose pants are on fire.” Courtesy of Traci Brown

The body also has a way of reacting to lies before we consciously recognize them, Wood said.

So don’t fail to listen to that nagging feeling that “your central nervous system, which is your human lie detector, doesn’t feel right,” she said.

If you’re watching a candidate and “something just makes you cringe” and “you want to change the channel,” take note, she said.

It’s because “your central nervous system will alert you to deception, because your body perceives it as danger, saying, ‘Something’s not right! Something’s not right!’” she said.

But there’s one sure way to let a liar escape detection, all three experts agreed.

It’s allowing preconceived bias to cloud thinking.

People “want to believe so desperately in the person that they want to support or vote for,” Constantine said. It’s a difficult feeling to suppress.

“But if they can set aside their own belief system, and just listen and watch for the clues,” she said, “they’re going to have a much cleaner and more precise view of what the candidate is saying, and whether the words that they’re saying are true.”

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