

Interview techniques: Body language

Having a slick CV and all the right answers to tricky interview questions won't get you anywhere if your body language gives an entirely different message.

Research has shown that tone of voice and body language accounts for 65 per cent of what's communicated, and words account for 35 per cent of the message that's communicated.

Body language can give away a lot of our feelings, regardless of whether we keep our mouths shut or not. And without an awareness of our actions, nervousness, dishonesty, boredom and other negative attributes can become dead give-aways.

Before taking a seat, be mindful of what you'll be staring at. If you have a choice, avoid staring at a bright window. If you don't apparently have a choice, don't be afraid to ask. Ensure that you have room to move and reposition yourself if you become stiff or restless.

To begin with, you need to set yourself up in a confident and comfortable position to help avoid negative body language habits. Make sure you are comfortably seated in an upright position ensuring that no particular part of your body is under strain (e.g. your neck).

Keep your hands rested in your lap, your head raised showing an expression of interest, and relax your shoulders without slumping into the seat.

Although we'll cover specific body language signs later, here are the obvious ones to watch out for.

- Fidgeting shows boredom and restlessness
- Crossing arms indicates an unwillingness to listen
- Tapping your foot is distracting and a sure sign of boredom
- Doodling on paper shows you're not paying attention
- Touching your face or playing with your hair can be a sign that you're hiding something
- Looking away or hesitating before or while speaking indicates that you're unsure of what you're saying
- A fixed, unfocused stare shows your attention is elsewhere

Voice

A good CV and all the right answers to the toughest interview questions won't land you the job if your voice gives off an entirely different impression. It is important to project yourself confidently in a clear, controlled and steady voice that can be easily understood.

Take some time to practise, even staging a mock interview with a friend or colleague. Try to be aware of the following:

- Speak clearly in a controlled range of tones, avoiding a monotone
- Always pause before speaking. This avoids instinctively reacting and saying the wrong things
- Speak slightly slower than normal, but don't overdo it
- Vary your tone and dynamics, but try not to speak too loudly or too softly
- Don't mumble or gabble on excitedly
- Keep your hands away from your mouth as you speak
- Watch your pitch. High-pitched voices are tough on the ears, and avoid a 'sing-song' tone
- Let your voice show your enthusiasm and keenness

Body signals

Whether we intend it or not, our body language gives off subtle signs which are subconsciously interpreted by the other party. We likewise read the same into other people's behaviour.

Imagine conducting an interview with someone behind a two-way mirror. We wouldn't have the benefit of responding to their facial expressions and would feel quite unnerved by the experience.

Every little frown or smile gives us the caution or confidence to make our next statement and it is a sublime skill which every human being has developed since childhood.

Some people are more receptive to body language than others, but as a candidate striving to make a good impression, it is important to be aware at all times of the body language that may give out a negative impression.

Guide to body language:

POSITIVE

- Responsive/eager: Leaning forward, open arms, nodding
- Listening: Head tilted, constant eye contact, nodding and verbal acknowledgement
- Attentive: Smiling

NEGATIVE

- Bored: Slumped posture, foot tapping, doodling
- Rejection: Arms folded, head down, subconscious frowning
- Aggression: Leaning too far forward, finger pointing, grinding teeth
- Lying: Touching face, hands over mouth, eyes averted, shifting uncomfortably in your seat, glancing

Signals for a successful interview:

- A smile is the most positive signal you can give. It reaffirms your enthusiasm and good nature, but be careful of over-grinning stupidly.
- Maintain regular, attentive eye contact but remember to avert your gaze from time to time to avoid staring.
- Relax! Give off calm signals and don't rush through the interview. Be mindful of time, but let the interviewer dictate the pace of the interview.
- Mirror the interviewer's techniques. If they laugh, laugh with them, if they lean forward to impress a point, respond by leaning forward to show your attention.
- Do not hurry any movement. If you're challenged with a difficult question, remind yourself about negative body language habits before answering the question.
- Try to maintain an alert position. Sit up straight and adjust your position slightly if you get uncomfortable, but don't fidget.
- Always try to adopt an open, honest and confident attitude. This is the starting point of managing subconscious body language.