

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS – THE 10 SKILLS YOU NEED TO LEARN



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Nonverbal communication is when a person conveys their thoughts, feelings and mood through visual rather than **verbal cues**.

These visual signals include:

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Subtle (and not so subtle) gestures
- Tone of voice
- Touch
- Posture
- Personal space

These physical signals are essential, especially if you are looking to impress an employer with your **interpersonal skills**.

Many research studies show people have more trust in nonverbal communication over the spoken word.

If you think about it, it makes sense why people are reliant on and trusting of nonverbal communication. Long before being able to talk, you would have spent your early years making sense of your world through nonverbal communication. Most babies (up to two years of age) exclusively rely on facial expressions and gestures to communicate their needs.

It is not surprising that many researchers claim nonverbal communication accounts for anywhere between 70% to over 90% of all adult communication.

Without getting too technical, nonverbal communication involves both conscious, semiconscious and unconscious elements:

- **Conscious** – For example, standing up to shake the hand of an interviewer
- **Semiconscious** – Illustrative gestures and other movements that help you articulate an idea, but you use them automatically, without conscious thought
- **Unconscious** – Nonverbal cues that are so subtle and momentary that you are entirely unaware of them. These can be anything from posture and positioning to micro facial movements and fleeting eye contact

Much of what you communicate nonverbally is received unconsciously by other people in the room.

What Role Does Nonverbal Communication Play in the Workplace?

From the moment you first speak with a potential new employer to how you use **soft skills** to interact with coworkers, it is essential to perfect those nonverbal communication skills.

You may have done all your prep for your interview and feel confident about your chances of securing the role. However, how you come across to the employer in the interview largely depends on your nonverbal communication.

At an interview, the employer will get a feeling about you from the nonverbal cues you consciously and unconsciously use. Quite often, this feeling is what tips an interview in your favor and lands you that job over another candidate.

During Phone Screening

It is not just the interview you need to think about, though. You may have been selected for an initial candidate **screening by phone**.

Nonverbal communication still matters, even if you are not physically in the same room as the other person. Your body language can impact your overall attitude and tone of voice. There is a good reason why telemarketing consultants always speak with a smile.

For example, if you are sat at home in bed in your PJs while receiving a call to shortlist for a job, you are unlikely to come across as professional.

Your voice can be unconsciously affected by your choice of environment and posture. Your vocal inflection (the ups and downs of your voice) is controlled by how you hold your body and jaw. If you are sitting in a reclined position, you may not sound as clear or engaged on the phone.

It is not just how you sound that you need to consider. Effective use of pauses can also work to your advantage. If you answer an **interview question** particularly strongly, a short pause afterward can grab the interviewer's attention.

Before the Interview

Remember, the impression you give through nonverbal cues starts from the moment you enter the reception area. The way you **introduce yourself** to the receptionist and what you do when you are waiting, all play a deciding role.

It is essential to have a friendly expression and tone of voice, but not to be too overbearing or distracted. Keep your phone switched off and wait patiently. If there is a company magazine, take a read to show you are interested in the organization.

During the Interview

There are a few nonverbal cues that will be expected of you. Some employers may even have a nonverbal communication checklist they will use to benchmark your performance.

Top of the list are greeting and **addressing all interviewers**, making eye contact, showing interest, remaining present, and most importantly, listening.

Making a Good Impression with Coworkers

Suppose you landed that all-important role; that's excellent news. You are about to start your first day and need to sail through your probationary period.

So, how can you use nonverbal communication to your advantage?

Well, by deciphering the types of nonverbal communication your coworkers use, you will gain a good understanding of their persona, likes and dislikes, and approach to work.

Armed with this knowledge, you can consciously create strong working relationships and boost your business profile.

Choosing to be more self-aware of your nonverbal communication style will also help.

For example, you may decide to alter your posture when making an **elevator pitch** but soften your stance when a colleague needs emotional support.

What Are the Top 10 Nonverbal Communication Skills?

Thankfully, just as **verbal communication** is split into different types, nonverbal communication cues can be condensed into categories.

Below are 10 nonverbal communication examples that everyone should be aware of within the workplace.

1. Eye Contact

How many times have you heard your eyes 'speak the truth' or that they are 'the window to the soul'? This is because the eyes convey a message from the emotional part of the brain, near the neocortex.

Eyes (and eyebrows) are the primary nonverbal cues you will consciously or unconsciously use to communicate with others.

If you think about it, most people will connect with their eyes first before talking at a business **networking event**.

Having good eye contact in an interview is essential. It shows your interest in the role, **your character** and your credibility.

What constitutes good eye contact though?

If you cannot hold an interviewer's gaze for more than a second, you may show that you are anxious or nervous. Aim for direct contact with the interviewer for two or three seconds before looking away. Any more than this may feel awkward or strained.

2. Correct Posture

From our shoulders to our toes, how we position ourselves is far more critical than you may think in nonverbal communication.

The saying 'stand tall, be proud' comes to mind.

When you stand up tall and push your shoulders forward, you send out a message of self-confidence and authority. The same applies if you are seated at an interview.

It would be best if you sat up straight. Your gaze should be at eye-level with the **interviewer** and your weight should feel balanced with your feet on the floor, so keep your legs uncrossed.

3. Firm Handshake

Touch is incredibly important when communicating, and a handshake is often the only appropriate form of physical contact in business, so it is best to have a good one.

The handshake conveys a lot as a nonverbal cue. It should be firm and not too limp. A strong handshake is one that involves complete palm to palm contact.

If nerves have got the better of you before an interview and you have clammy palms, you can visit the restroom or make sure you have a tissue to wipe them discreetly.

Keeping your hands open rather than clasped will also help and show that you are relaxed.



Nonverbal Communications Skills

4. Listen

In any situation, but particularly at an interview, you will want to give somebody your full attention.

When your words and nonverbal cues match up and mirror the person in front of you, you convey that you are sincere and interested. If you are not listening, this is almost impossible to do.

You will want to pay attention to what the interviewer or your coworker has to say and take time to digest it before moving on to the next point. This is called **active listening**, where you concentrate on the detail of what is being said rather than just passively hearing words.

People who are good at active listening in an interview will blend the skill with other senses. While acutely listening to the words of the interviewer, they nod in all the right places, maintain eye contact and **ask relevant questions**.

5. Show That You Are Interested

Using nonverbal communication to show your interest will positively reinforce that you are engaged in the conversation.

When a person is engrossed in something that genuinely interests them, they will unconsciously lean in. Lean forwards just a fraction so that you provide a nonverbal cue that you are listening.

It is not just the upper body that can be used as a nonverbal sign, though. If more than one person is interviewing you, it is a good idea to slightly rotate your body to face them when they are speaking.

Whatever you do at the interview, make sure you avoid any nonverbal cues that suggest you are disinterested.

Although it is good to know that you are not overrunning, it is best not to keep checking

the clock. Likewise, try not to yawn or rub your eyes. These indicate a restless mind.

6. Positive Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are a compelling way to communicate with someone visually.

According to body language expert and author **Patti Wood**, a person can swap more than 10,000 nonverbal cues in under a minute. Think about how many that is in a one-hour interview.

Even the slightest relaxation of the jaw, flicker of an eyebrow or nod of the head will show positive engagement.

7. Vocal Tone

Keep an even tone to your voice within the workplace unless you are delivering a presentation or sales pitch where you will want to be more animated.

It is imperative to have a consistent tone, especially when answering **situational interview questions**.

Remember, too loud and you will appear overbearing, too quiet and you will come across as shy or not a great communicator.

If you are unsure how you sound, practice with a friend or family member.

8. Use Your Body to Reinforce Communication

Gestures help us to clearly articulate what we have to **communicate**. Most often made by the hands and face, they help crystallize our thoughts.

Most of us subconsciously use our right hand to show that we are providing information and our left hand to show we have received information. Unless you are left-handed, in which case the reverse may be true.

Our best advice for an interview is to make sure that your hands are free. However, try to keep your movements natural and not too animated, as it can be a distraction.

9. Maintain Personal Space

While this may seem like an odd one to include, how we converse with people is primarily defined by personal space.

It is one of the most important types of nonverbal communication to master.

Some people are tactile and enjoy sitting close to their colleagues, where others are horrified at the thought of contact. After all, everyone is different.

When speaking with a colleague or meeting your potential employer for the first time, it is best to keep outside of their personal space. As a rule, intimate space is up to 18 inches and personal space up to 4 feet.

10. Professional Appearance

How you **present yourself** in the workplace is an important aspect of nonverbal communication. It reflects on you as an individual and also the company as a whole.

If you are dressed too casually, it can suggest that you do not care about rules and expectations or do not take your responsibilities seriously.

If you are going for an **interview**, it is always best to dress formally. At work, dress according to the **corporate culture**; usually, this is **business casual**, but some industries require much more formal attire.

How Can You Improve Your Nonverbal Communication Skills?

To improve your nonverbal communication, you must first understand where you may be falling short.

Given that most of us make thousands of conscious, semiconscious and unconscious nonverbal cues every day, you will need to enlist the support of friends and possibly your current coworkers to help you do this.

For example, you might think that you make good eye contact, but your friends struggle to hold your gaze. Or maybe you are overly expressive with your hands.

Ensure your friend is aware of the nonverbal communication definition and refer to the examples in this article. A good friend will offer you a tactful critique. They will also be able to let you know the types of nonverbal communication that you use well.

However you choose to express yourself, it is always good to show initiative. Be the first person to offer your hand as an introduction, make eye contact, enter a room confidently and offer a solution to a challenge.

Final Thoughts

The best advice is to be the best version of yourself. If you feel confident and are in a good mental space, your body will convey this.

With this in mind, try not to overthink the types of nonverbal communication you use. It is great to be self-aware, but you will want to keep things natural.

A good night's sleep the night **before an interview** will stop you from fidgeting or accidentally misfiring on your nonverbal cues.

Oh, and do not forget your nonverbal communication as you exit the interview. End with a good handshake and say goodbye to everyone you spoke with, including any coworkers you met.