



Nonverbal Communication Tips & Tricks

Nonverbal Communication: Why is it Important In Presenting?

While the performance of public speaking greatly focuses on the words a speaker chooses, multiple other factors also influence how an audience perceives us, attends to us, and evaluates us while we give speeches and presentations. Our audiences, whether large or small, can make inferences on our personality traits, trustworthiness, and competence in less than one tenth of one second based on nonverbal cues (Willis & Todorov, 2006). In order to ensure that we don't lose our audience before our presentation begins, it's important to pay attention to our nonverbals and tweak those that may be detrimental.

Important Nonverbals

While presenting, it's important to pay attention to all nonverbal cues to which an audience may attend and evaluate, including:

- Posture
- Gestures
- Verbal Tone and Pace
- Filler Words and Phrases
- Eye Contact

Nonverbal Pointers

- **Keep both feet fully planted on the ground.** Leaning on one leg can lead to the speaker swaying while speaking, leading to audience perceptions of an unconfident and incompetent speaker.
- **Avoid filler speech, a.k.a. “likes” and “umms.”** We use these in speaking because we're accustomed to conversational turntaking and are uncomfortable when we finish speaking and nobody responds (Cohen, 2015). SILENCE IS OKAY. It allows us to gather our thoughts and catch our breath.
- **Make eye contact.** Ignoring your whole audience while speaking can lead to a loss of interest. Speakers should keep audiences engaged at all times, so we should, at least, look at them. Some recommend a 60/40 rule in terms of eye contact versus no eye contact.
- **Slow it down.** The recommended speech rate in order to enhance coherence and understanding is 100-110 words per minute. When we're nervous, we tend to speak faster in order to leave the stressful situation as soon as possible. Slow your speech down while presenting; your audience will appreciate it.
- **How to gauge your nonverbals: PRACTICE.** Practicing your speech as close to the context in which you'll be graded is best. Having actual audience members can allow for feedback on awkward body positioning, gestures, fidgeting, eye contact, and more. If you don't have access to an audience, practice in front of a mirror.

Cohen, S. D. (2015). *Tips on public speaking: Eliminating the dreaded “um.”* Retrieved from <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/inside-extension/tips-public-speaking-eliminating-dreaded-um>.

Willis, J. & Todorov, A. (2006). First impressions: Making up your mind after a 100-ms exposure to a face. *Psychological Science, 17*(7),592-598.