

# What is verbal and non-verbal communication?

Of course we know that any kind of communication needs a message to be sent, but depending on how it sends we can define our process of communication in verbal or non-verbal. If the information is exchanged through words (oral or written) we are talking about a verbal communication process, such as conversations, group discussions, interviews, radio, letters, emails, notes, chats, etc.

On the other hand, if the message is exchanged without the use of words, we are in a non-verbal communication process which is a very important aspect to take in consideration in face-to-face communications. Why? Because whether the message is wordless or not, there is still a big amount of information sent (consciously or unconsciously) through the body, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, physical proximity, etc.

Besides the no-use of words, non-verbal communication has some other characteristics:

- Is culturally determined: each culture has their own gestures, and even each family of neighborhood. So understanding all of them correctly is a challenge!
- Can have different meanings: depending on the gestures or body language, emotions, perception, attention, context...
- It's sometimes imprecise: is quite vague and the receiver may not understand a clear meaning.
- It may create a conflict: you can express a verbal message and then directly contradict it with a non-verbal message.
- It's unconscious: it's usually not planned nor rehearsed, like an automatic response.
- It shows feelings and attitudes: all your gestures and body/facial expressions will for sure communicate your emotional state or position towards a situation.

Both types of communication are very important, specially when the sender and the receiver of the message are looking to each other or even if one of them is watching the other on a screen. But, according to Professor Mehrabian's theory, the verbal aspect of communication is actually only 7% and the non-verbal one 93% (body language 55% and tone of voice 33%). So, this means that we have to pay extra attention to the lecture we do of our message sender before responding, because there is maybe more information to be understood than the actual words.

Why is non-verbal communication that important? Because if we take in consideration that theory we can avoid possible misunderstandings among our colleagues and friends. And although there are some tips to interpret the body language in a more a less correct way, we have to think about the cultural backgrounds (that we may ignore at the moment of having a conversation with someone) and context, both ours and of the others. So it's good to know the meaning of the different gestures and expressions but it's also recommended not to judge in the first place and try to solve the possible misunderstanding before responding or taking a position. A clear and honest communication will always be the best way to solve troubles!

## Time to practice

**1. Do you remember any situation in your life in which the non-verbal communication wasn't matching the verbal message? How did you get the true information? Describe!**



Therefore, our 'actions speak louder than words', and could be telling more about how we are and what we feel even if our words don't. But there is no reason to be worry, just aware in how we can use this tool in order to give a clearer message, emphasize our ideas or express our points of view.

**2. What does the gestures and body language mean to you? Fill the next chart and reflect on what you perceive when you are in a conversation:**

N°	Action	Interpretation
1	Smiling	
2	Rolling eyes with a smile	
3	Stretching your arms sideways while speaking	
4	Winking at a friend	
5	Crossing arms while taking feedback	
6	Scratching your head when asked a question	
7	Cracking fingers while at work	
8	Hands with palm facing down while explaining	
9	Looking elsewhere when someone talks to you	
10	Looking down while saying something	

## 3. Let's know more about gestures! Match the gesture with its meaning!

### Chin Pointing Up

Signifies disappointment in the effort. It also means 'no' in taking opinions on something.

### Pointing Thumb Downwards

Signals trust. It means the person likes what you are saying to him/her and believes your words. However, doing it while resting it on the hand will give an exactly opposite idea.

### Looking to Left

Means people are either tired, sleepy or are in disbelief of what you are saying to them. It also signals frustration and irritation.

### Rubbing Eyes

This is the 'Okay' sign and signifies that everything is fine and meets your requirement. This was made famous by the US president, Martin Van Buren during his presidential campaign.

### Crossing of Arms

Signifies arrogance and defying orders. Children who think they are being wrongly blamed for starting a fight often defy orders and words of their parents with a stiff.

### Index Finger Touching Thumb

This stance gives the impression that you have already taken your decision and you are going to defend it no matter what. It's hostile and discourages discussion.

### Tilting Head Down

If someone does it in direction to the ground while talking signifies that is recollecting facts. If the head is straight it means the speaker is having a self-conversation before re-engaging in a debate or conversation.