



# Interviews: Body of Evidence

*Don't let poor body language kill your interview.*

## Why be fluent in body language?

Studies show that body-language, a.k.a. non-verbal cues, accounts for over 50% of our in-person communication, more than words and tone of voice combined. In fact, just roll your eyes and you'll send a silent but very clear message. Conscious or not, body language often reveals what we are thinking and feeling, something smart detectives—and interviewers—notice. Your résumé may be filled with credentials, but are you as impressive in person as you are in print?

## Beyond the firm handshake.

You know the drill: Clean finger nails; show up on time for the interview; give a proper introduction; and answer questions succinctly. However, just as vital is knowing what non-verbal communication and behavior can undermine your candidacy.

**Limp or lethal?** Avoid dead fish handshakes that make you seem weak. No bone-crushers either; it's an introduction, not an altercation. Handshakes should be your only physical contact.

**Don't slouch.** It suggests lack of interest, nervousness, unpreparedness, low self-esteem, lack of enthusiasm. Instead, sit up, chin up, and lean forward slightly to convey alertness and interest. Don't, however, sit on the edge of the seat and appear tense and stiff.

**Never cross your arms.** Unless you're interviewing to be a bouncer, crossed arms convey a closed, defensive attitude, arrogance, or detachment. Also, gentlemen, putting your hands in your pants pockets when standing looks sloppy and makes you seem complacent and too casual.

**Hands off.** Keep hands away from your face, nose, and neck. Don't scratch your head, twirl your curls, rub your neck, shrug, clean your nails, or touch your nose. These movements can project uncertainty, nervousness, even dishonesty.

**No charades.** Excessive gesturing is distracting. Less movement can convey a quiet confidence and steadiness. Rest hands on your knees, in your lap on your portfolio, or relaxed at your sides. Don't

play with jewelry. Use hands only to emphasize a point. And no pointing with your index finger.

**Stay grounded.** Men, crossing your legs, especially resting an ankle on a knee suggests complacency and arrogance. Keep both feet on the ground. Women, it's okay to cross your ankles, just keep your knees together. Also, avoid pointing your feet or leaning toward the door; it suggests a desire to disengage and leave.

**Blink!** It's not a game of chicken. Maintain eye contact, but don't stare; it can be unnerving for the other person. Equally, lack of eye contact can suggest dishonesty. Don't stare out the window; you may appear uninterested and bored or distracted. Thinking? Look down, or risk being mistaken for rolling your eyes.

**Keep your distance.** Literally. Do not invade your interviewer's space. In the U.S. keep at least 20"– 24" apart. Never sit or lean on their desk, either.

**Don't shake, rattle, or roll.** Or fidget, tap, shuffle your feet, and drum your fingers.

**No fumbling.** Have your papers ready and in order to avoid rummaging. Clip together any handouts for easy access.

## Awareness. Acceptance. Action.

Perception is everything. Give an interviewer the wrong impression and you may cross the line from appearing confident to arrogant, and sabotage your job search.

Also, it can take work to appear relaxed and poised, so practice answering questions in front of a mirror or video yourself in a mock interview. You might be surprised by your bad habits and tics. However, once you're aware of them, accept the need for change and act accordingly.

Body language: Actions do speak louder than words. And the interviewer is listening.



## i n a nutshell:

Show the interviewer how well you handle pressure:

- **Maintain eye contact and good posture**
- **Lean forward, listen attentively**
- **Gesture only when needed**
- **Smile sincerely**
- **Mirror, but don't mimic, the interviewer's body movements**
- **Be mindful of the interviewer's body language**
- **Close confidently and politely, even after a poor interview**

You have the credentials. Create rapport with the interviewer and your body language may have the final word in your job search success.