



The Definitive Book of Body Language

Allan and Barbara Pease

ALSO BY ALLAN & BARBARA PEASE

Why Men Don't Listen and

Women Can't Read Maps

Why Men Lie and Women Cry

Why Men Can Only Do One Thing at a

Time and Women Never Stop Talking

The Little Book of Men and Women

The Definitive Book of
BODY LANGUAGE

Allan & Barbara Pease

BANTAM BOOKS

This book is dedicated to all people who have good eyesight but who cannot see.

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Introduction

*By a man's fingernails, by his coat-sleeve, by
his boots,*

*by his trouser-knees, by the calluses of his
forefinger and*

thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs, by his

*movements—by each of these things a man's
calling is plainly
revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten
the
competent enquirer in any case is almost
inconceivable.*

SHERLOCK HOLMES, 1892

As a young boy, I was always aware that what people said was not always what they meant or were feeling and that it was possible to get others to do what I wanted if I read their real feelings and responded appropriately to their needs. At the age of eleven, I began my sales career selling rubber sponges door-to-door after school to make pocket money and quickly worked out how to tell if someone was likely to buy from me or not. When I knocked on a door, if someone told me to go away but their hands were open and they showed their palms, I knew it was safe to persist with my presentation because, despite how dismissive they may have sounded, they weren't aggressive. If someone told me to go away in a soft voice but used a pointed finger or closed hand, I knew it was time to leave.

I loved being a salesperson and was excellent at it. As a teenager, I became a pots-and-pans salesperson, selling at night, and my ability to read people earned me enough money to buy my first piece of property. Selling gave me the opportunity to meet people and study them at close range and to evaluate whether they would buy or not, simply by watching their body language. This skill also proved a bonanza for meeting girls in discos. I could nearly always predict who would say yes to a dance with me and who wouldn't.

I joined the life insurance business at the age of twenty, and went on to break several sales records for the firm I worked for, becoming the youngest person to sell over a million dollars' worth of business in my first year. This achievement qualified me for the prestigious Million Dollar Round Table in the U.S.A. As a young man, I was fortunate that the techniques I'd learned as a boy in reading body language while selling pots and pans could be transferred to this new area, and was directly related to the success I could have in any venture involving people.

All Things Are Not What They Seem

The ability to work out what is really happening with a person is simple—not easy, but simple. It's about matching what you see and hear in the environment in which it all happens and drawing probable conclusions.

Most people, however, only see the things they think they are seeing. Here's a story to demonstrate the point:

Two men were walking through the woods when they came across a big deep hole.

“Wow... that looks deep,” says one. “Let's toss a few pebbles in and see how deep it is.”

They threw in a few pebbles and waited, but there was no sound.

“Gee—that is a *really* deep hole. Let's throw one of these big rocks in. That should make a noise.”

They picked up two football-sized rocks and tossed them into the hole and waited, but still they heard nothing.

“There's a railway sleeper over here in the weeds,” said one. “If we toss that in, it's *definitely* going to make some noise.” They dragged the heavy sleeper over to the hole and heaved it in, but not a sound came from the hole.

Suddenly, out of the nearby woods, a goat appeared, running like the wind. It rushed toward the two men and ran right between them, running as fast as its legs could go. Then it leaped into the air and disappeared into the hole. The two men stood there, astonished at what they'd just seen.

Out of the woods came a farmer who said, “Hey! Did you guys see my goat?”

“You bet we did! It was the craziest thing we've ever seen! It came running like the wind out of the woods and jumped into that hole!”

“Nah,” says the farmer. “That couldn't have been my goat. My goat was chained to a railway sleeper!”

How Well Do You Know the Back of Your Hand?

Sometimes we say we know something “like the back of our hand” but experiments prove that less than 5 percent of people can identify the back of their hands from a photograph. The results of a simple experiment we conducted for a television program showed that most people are generally not good at reading body-language signals, either. We set up a large mirror at the end of a long hotel lobby, giving the illusion that, as you entered the hotel, there was a long corridor going through the hotel and out the back of the lobby. We hung large plants from the ceiling to a distance of five feet above the floor so that, as each person entered the lobby, it looked as if another person was entering at the same time from the other end. The “other person” was not readily recognizable because the plants covered their face, but you could clearly see their body and movement. Each guest observed the other “guest” for five to six seconds before turning left to the reception

desk. When asked if they had recognized the other “guest,” 85 percent of men answered no. Most men had failed to recognize themselves in a mirror, one saying, “You mean that fat, ugly guy?” Unsurprisingly, 58 percent of the women said it was a mirror and 30 percent said the other “guest” looked “familiar.”

*Most men and nearly half of all women
don't know what they look like from the neck down.*

How Well Can You Spot Body-Language Contradictions?

People everywhere have developed a fascination with the body language of politicians because everyone knows that politicians sometimes pretend to believe in something that they don't believe in, or imply that they are someone other than who they really are. Politicians spend much of their time ducking, dodging, avoiding, pretending, lying, hiding their emotions and feelings, using smoke screens or mirrors and waving to imaginary friends in the crowd. But we instinctively know that they will eventually be tripped up by contradictory body-language signals, so we love to watch them closely, in anticipation of catching them out.

*What signal alerts you that a politician is lying?
His lips are moving.*

For another television show, we conducted an experiment with the cooperation of a local tourist bureau. Tourists entered the bureau to ask for information about local sightseeing and other tourist attractions. They were directed to a counter where they spoke with a tourism officer, a man with blond hair, a mustache, wearing a white shirt and tie. After a few minutes discussing possible itineraries, the man bent down out of sight below the counter to get some brochures. Then another man with a clean-shaven face, dark hair, and wearing a blue shirt appeared from beneath the counter holding the brochures. He continued the discussion from exactly where the first man had left off. Remarkably, around half the tourists failed to notice the change and men were twice as likely as women to completely miss the change, not only in body language but in the appearance of a completely new person! Unless you have an innate ability or have learned to read body language, the chances are you're missing most of it, too. This book will show you what you've been missing.

How We Wrote This Book

Barbara and I have written *The Definitive Book of Body Language* using my original book, *Body Language*, as our base. Not only have we considerably expanded on that one, we have also introduced research from new scientific disciplines such as evolutionary biology and evolutionary

psychology, as well as technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), which shows what happens in the brain. We have written it in a style that means it can be opened and read on almost any page at random. We've kept the content mainly to the movement of the body, expressions, and gestures, because these are the things you need to learn to get the most out of every face-to-face encounter. *The Definitive Book of Body Language* will make you more aware of your own nonverbal cues and signals, and will show you how to use them to communicate effectively and how to get the reactions you want.

This book isolates and examines each component of body language and gesture in simple terms to make it accessible to you. Few gestures are made in isolation of others, however, so we have also, at the same time, tried to avoid oversimplifying things.

There will always be those who throw up their hands in horror and claim that the study of body language is just another means by which scientific knowledge can be used to exploit or dominate others by reading their secrets or thoughts. We feel, however, that this book seeks to give you greater insight into communication with your fellow humans, so that you can have a deeper understanding of other people and, therefore, of yourself. Understanding how something works makes living with it easier, whereas

ignorance and lack of understanding promote fear and superstition and make us more critical of others. A bird-watcher doesn't study birds so that he can shoot them down and keep them as trophies. In the same way, the knowledge and skills in body language serve to make every encounter with another person an exciting experience.

For the purpose of simplicity, and unless otherwise stated, the use of “he” or “him” will apply equally to both genders.

Your Body-Language Dictionary

The original book was intended as a working manual for salespeople, managers, negotiators, and executives, but this one can be used for any aspect of your life, be it at home, on a date, or at work. *The Definitive Book of Body Language* is the result of over thirty years of our cumulative knowledge and involvement in this field and we give you the basic vocabulary you need to read attitudes and emotions. This book will give you answers to some of the most puzzling questions you've ever had about why people use some of the behaviors they do, and it will change forever your own behavior. It will seem as if you've always been in a dark room and, while you could always feel the furnishings, the wall hangings, and the door, you've never actually seen what they look like. This book will be like turning on the lights to see what was always there. But now, you'll know

exactly what things are, where they are, and what to do about them.

Allan Pease



Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING

THE BASICS

This is “good” to Westerners, “one” to Italians,
“five” to Japanese, and “up yours” to the Greeks

Everyone knows someone who can walk into a room full of people and within minutes give an accurate description about the relationships between those people and what they are feeling. The ability to read a person's attitudes and thoughts by their behavior was the original communication system used by humans before spoken language evolved.

Before radio was invented, most communication was done in writing through books, letters, and newspapers, which meant that ugly politicians

and poor speakers such as Abraham Lincoln could be successful if they persisted long enough and wrote good print copy. The radio era gave openings to people who had a good command of the spoken word, like Winston Churchill, who spoke wonderfully but may have struggled to achieve as much in today's more visual era.

Today's politicians understand that politics is about image and appearance, and most high-profile politicians now have personal body-language consultants to help them come across as being sincere, caring, and honest, especially when they're not.

It seems almost incredible that, over the thousands of years of our evolution, body language has been actively studied on any scale only since the 1960's and that most of the public has become aware of its existence only since our book *Body Language* was published in 1978. Yet most people believe that speech is still our main form of communication. Speech has been part of our communication repertoire only in recent times in evolutionary terms, and is mainly used to convey facts and data. Speech probably first developed between two million and five hundred thousand years ago, during which time our brain tripled its size. Before then, body language and sounds made in the throat were the main forms of conveying emotions and feelings, and that is still the case today. But because we focus

on the words people speak, most of us are largely uninformed about body language, let alone its importance in our lives.

Our spoken language, however, recognizes how important body language is to our communication. Here are just a few of the phrases we use:

Get it off your chest. Keep a stiff upper lip.

Stay at arm's length. Keep your chin up.

Shoulder a burden. Face up to it.

Put your best foot forward. Kiss my butt.

Some of these phrases are hard to swallow, but you've got to give us a big hand because there are some real eye-openers here. As a rule of thumb, we can keep them coming hand over fist until you either buckle at the knees or turn your back on the whole idea. Hopefully, you'll be sufficiently touched by these phrases to lean toward the concept.

In the Beginning...

Silent-movie actors like Charlie Chaplin were the pioneers of body-language skills, as this was the only means of communication available on the screen. Each actor's skill was classed as good or bad by the extent to which he could use gestures and body signals to communicate to the audience. When talking films became popular and less emphasis was placed on the nonverbal aspects of acting, many silent-movie actors faded into

obscurity and only those with good verbal and nonverbal skills survived.

As far as the academic study of body language goes, perhaps the most influential pre-twentieth-century work was Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, published in 1872, but this work tended to be read mainly by academics. However, it spawned the modern studies of facial expressions and body language, and many of Darwin's ideas and observations have since been validated by researchers around the world. Since that time, researchers have noted and recorded almost a million nonverbal cues and signals. Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer researcher of body language in the 1950's, found that the total impact of a message is about 7 percent verbal (words only) and 38 percent vocal (including tone of voice, inflection, and other sounds) and 55 percent nonverbal.

*It's how you looked when you said
it, not what you actually said.*

Anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell pioneered the original study of nonverbal communication—what he called “kinesics.” Birdwhistell made some similar estimates of the amount of nonverbal communication that takes place between humans. He estimated that the average person actually speaks words for a total of about ten or eleven minutes a day and that the

average sentence takes only about 2.5 seconds. Birdwhistell also estimated we can make and recognize around 250,000 facial expressions.

Like Mehrabian, he found that the verbal component of a face-to-face conversation is less than 35 percent and that over 65 percent of communication is done nonverbally. Our analysis of thousands of recorded sales interviews and negotiations during the 1970's and 1980's showed that, in business encounters, body language accounts for between 60 and 80 percent of the impact made around a negotiating table and that people form 60 to 80 percent of their initial opinion about a new person in less than four minutes. Studies also show that when negotiating over the telephone, the person with the stronger argument usually wins, but this is not so true when negotiating face-to-face, because overall we make our final decisions more on what we see than what we hear.

Why It's Not What You Say

Despite what it may be politically correct to believe, when we meet people for the first time we quickly make judgments about their friendliness, dominance, and potential as a sexual partner—and their eyes are *not* the first place we look.

Most researchers now agree that words are used primarily for conveying information, while body language is used for negotiating interpersonal

attitudes and, in some cases, is used as a substitute for verbal messages. For example, a woman can give a man a “look to kill” and will convey a very clear message to him without opening her mouth.

Regardless of culture, words and movements occur together with such predictability that Birdwhistell was the first to claim that a well-trained person should be able to tell what movement a person is making by listening to their voice. Birdwhistell even learned how to tell what language a person was speaking, simply by watching their gestures.

Many people find difficulty in accepting that humans are still biologically animals. We are a species of primate —*Homo sapiens*— a hairless ape that has learned to walk on two limbs and has a clever, advanced brain. But like any other species, we are still dominated by biological rules that control our actions, reactions, body language, and gestures. The fascinating thing is that the human animal is rarely aware that its postures, movements, and gestures can tell one story while its voice may be telling another.



How Body Language Reveals Emotions and Thoughts

Body language is an outward reflection of a person's emotional condition. Each gesture or movement can be a valuable key to an emotion a person may be feeling at the time. For example, a man who is self-conscious about gaining weight may tug at the fold of skin under his chin; the woman who is aware of extra pounds on her thighs may smooth her dress down; the person who is feeling fearful or defensive might fold their arms or cross their legs or both; and a man talking with a large-breasted woman may consciously avoid staring at her breasts while, at the same time, unconsciously use groping gestures with his hands.

Prince Charles finds a bosom buddy

The key to reading body language is being able to understand a person's emotional condition while listening to what they are saying and noting the

circumstances under which they are saying it. This allows you to separate fact from fiction and reality from fantasy. In recent times, we humans have had an obsession with the spoken word and our ability to be



conversationalists. Most people, however, are remarkably unaware of body-language signals and their impact, despite the fact that we now know that most of the messages in any face-to-face conversation are revealed through body signals. For example, France's President Chirac, U.S.A.'s President Ronald Reagan, and Australia's Prime Minister Bob Hawke all used their hands to reveal the relative sizes of issues in their mind. Bob Hawke once defended pay increases for politicians by comparing their salaries to corporate executive salaries. He claimed that executive salaries had risen by a huge amount and that proposed politicians' increases were relatively smaller. Each time he mentioned politicians' incomes, he held his hands a yard apart. When he mentioned executive salaries, however, he held them

only a foot apart. His hand distances revealed that he felt politicians were getting a much better deal than he was prepared to admit.

President Jacques Chirac—measuring the size of an issue or simply boasting about his love life?

Why Women Are More Perceptive

When we say someone is “perceptive” or “intuitive” about people, we are unknowingly referring to their ability to read another person's body language and to compare these cues with verbal signals. In other words, when we say that we have a “hunch” or “gut feeling” that someone has told us a lie, we usually mean that their body language and their spoken words don't agree. This is also what speakers call “audience awareness,” or relating to a group. For example, if an audience were sitting back in their seats with their chins down and arms crossed on their chest, a “perceptive” speaker would get a hunch or feeling that his delivery was not going across well. He would realize that he needed to take a different approach to gain audience involvement. Likewise, a speaker who was not “perceptive” would blunder on regardless.

Being “perceptive” means being able to spot the contradictions between someone's words and their body language.

Overall, women are far more perceptive than men, and this has given

rise to what is commonly referred to as “women's intuition.” Women have an innate ability to pick up and decipher nonverbal signals, as well as having an accurate eye for small details. This is why few husbands can lie to their wives and get away with it and why, conversely, most women can pull the wool over a man's eyes without his realizing it.

Research by psychologists at Harvard University showed how women are far more alert to body language than men. They showed short films, with the sound turned off, of a man and woman communicating, and the participants were asked to decode what was happening by reading the couple's expressions. The research showed that women read the situation accurately 87 percent of the time, while the men scored only 42 percent accuracy. Men in “nurturing” occupations, such as artistic types, acting, and nursing, did nearly as well as the women; gay men also scored well. Female intuition is particularly evident in women who have raised children. For the first few years, the mother relies almost solely on the nonverbal channel to communicate with the child and this is why women are often more perceptive negotiators than men, because they practice reading signals early.

What Brain Scans Show

Most women have the brain organization to outcommunicate any man

on the planet. Magnetic Resonance Imaging brain scans (MRI) clearly show why women have far greater capacity for communicating with and evaluating people than men do. Women have between fourteen and sixteen areas of the brain to evaluate others' behavior versus a man's four to six areas. This explains how a woman can attend a dinner party and rapidly work out the state of the relationships of other couples at the party—who's had an argument, who likes who, and so on. It also explains why, from a woman's standpoint, men don't seem to talk much and, from a man's standpoint, women never seem to shut up.

As we showed in *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps* (Orion), the female brain is organized for multi-tracking—the average woman can juggle between two and four unrelated topics at the same time. She can watch a television program while talking on the telephone plus listen to a second conversation behind her, while drinking a cup of coffee. She can talk about several unrelated topics in the one conversation and use five vocal tones to change the subject or emphasize points. Unfortunately, most men can only identify three of these tones. As a result, men often lose the plot when women are trying to communicate with them.

Studies show that a person who relies on hard visual evidence face-to-face about the behavior of another person is more likely to make more

accurate judgments about that person than someone who relies solely on their gut feeling. The evidence is in the person's body language and, while women can do it subconsciously, anyone can teach themselves consciously to read the signals. That's what this book is about.

How Fortune-Tellers Know So Much

If you've ever visited a fortune-teller you probably came away amazed at the things they knew about you—things no one else could possibly have known—so it must be ESP, right? Research into the fortune-telling business shows that operators use a technique known as “cold reading,” which can produce an accuracy of around 80 percent when “reading” a person you've never met. While it can appear to be magical to naive and vulnerable people, it is simply a process based on the careful observation of body-language signals plus an understanding of human nature and a knowledge of probability statistics. It's a technique practiced by psychics, tarot-card readers, astrologists, and palm readers to gather information about a “client.” Many “cold readers” are largely unaware of their abilities to read nonverbal signals and so also become convinced that they really must have “psychic” abilities. This all adds to a convincing performance, bolstered by the fact that people who regularly visit “psychics” go with positive expectations of the outcome. Throw in a set of tarot cards, a crystal ball or

two, and a bit of theater, and the stage is perfectly set for a body-language-reading session that can convince even the most hardened skeptic that strange, magical forces must be at work. It all boils down to the reader's ability to decode a person's reactions to statements made and to questions asked, and by information gathered from simple observation about a person's appearance. Most “psychics” are female because, as women, as discussed previously, they have the extra brain wiring to allow them to read the body signals of babies and to read others' emotional condition.

The fortune-teller gazed into her crystal ball and then started laughing uncontrollably. So John punched her on the nose. It was the first time he'd ever struck a happy medium.

To demonstrate the point, here now is a psychic reading for you personally. Imagine you've come to a dimly lit, smoke-filled room where a jewel-encrusted psychic wearing a turban is seated at a low, moon-shaped table with a crystal ball:

I'm glad you've come to this session and I can see you have things that are troubling you because I am receiving strong signals from you. I sense that the things you really want out of life sometimes seem unrealistic and you often wonder whether you can achieve them. I also sense that at times you are friendly, social, and outgoing to others, but that at other times you

are withdrawn, reserved, and cautious. You take pride in being an independent thinker, but also know not to accept what you see and hear from others without proof. You like change and variety, but become restless if controlled by restrictions and routine. You want to share your innermost feelings with those closest to you, but have found it unwise to be too open and revealing. A man in your life with the initial “S” is exerting a strong influence over you right now and a woman who is born in November will contact you in the next month with an exciting offer. While you appear disciplined and controlled on the outside, you tend to be concerned and worried on the inside, and at times you wonder whether or not you have made the right choice or decision.

So how did we do? Did we read you accurately? Studies show that the information in this “reading” is more than 80 percent accurate for any person reading it. Throw in an excellent ability to read body-language postures, facial expressions, and a person's other twitches and movements, plus dim lighting, weird music, and a stick of incense, and we guarantee you can even amaze the dog! We won't encourage you to become a fortune-teller, but you'll soon be able to read others as accurately as they do.

Inborn, Genetic, or Learned Culturally?

When you cross your arms on your chest, do you cross left over right or

right over left? Most people cannot confidently describe which way they do this until they try it. Cross your arms on your chest right now and then try to quickly reverse the position. Where one way feels comfortable, the other feels completely wrong. Evidence suggests that this may well be a genetic gesture that cannot be changed.

*Seven out of ten people cross
their left arm over their right.*

Much debate and research has been done to discover whether nonverbal signals are inborn, learned, genetically transferred, or acquired in some other way. Evidence has been collected from observation of blind people (who could not have learned nonverbal signals through a visual channel), from observing the gestural behavior of many different cultures around the world, and from studying the behavior of our nearest anthropological relatives, the apes and monkeys.

The conclusions of this research indicate that some gestures fall into each category. For example, most primate babies are born with the immediate ability to suck, showing that this is either inborn or genetic. The German scientist Eibl-Eibesfeldt found that the smiling expressions of children born deaf and blind occur independently of learning or copying, which means that these must also be inborn gestures. Ekman, Friesen, and Sorenson

supported some of Darwin's original beliefs about inborn gestures when they studied the facial expressions of people from five widely different cultures. They found that each culture used the same basic facial gestures to show emotion, which led them to the conclusion that these gestures must also be inborn.

Cultural differences are many, but the basic body-language signals are the same everywhere.

Debate still exists as to whether some gestures are culturally learned and become habitual, or are genetic. For example, most men put on a coat right arm first; most women put it on left arm first. This shows that men use their left brain hemisphere for this action while women use the right hemisphere. When a man passes a woman in a crowded street, he usually turns his body toward her as he passes; she instinctively turns her body away from him to protect her breasts. Is this an inborn female reaction or has she learned to do this by unconsciously watching other females?

Some Basic Origins

Most of the basic communication signals are the same all over the world. When people are happy, they smile; when they are sad or angry, they frown or scowl. Nodding the head is almost universally used to indicate “yes” or affirmation. It appears to be a form of head lowering and is

probably an inborn gesture because it's also used by people born blind.

Shaking the head from side to side to indicate “no” or negation is also universal and appears to be a gesture learned in infancy. When a baby has had enough milk, it turns its head from side to side to reject its mother's breast. When the young child has had enough to eat, he shakes his head from side to side to stop any attempt to spoon-feed him and, in this way, he quickly learns to use the Head-Shaking gesture to show disagreement or a negative attitude.

The Head-Shaking gesture signals “no”

and owes its origin to breastfeeding.

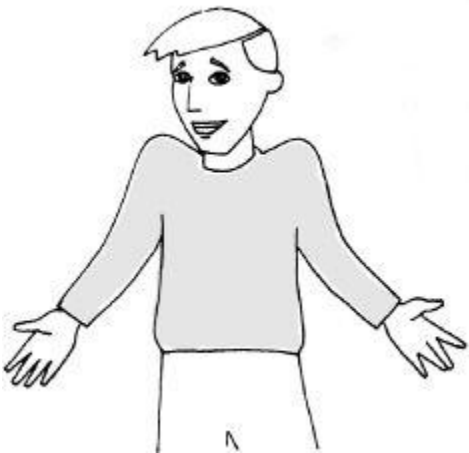
The evolutionary origin of some gestures can be traced to our primitive animal past. Smiling, for example, is a threat gesture for most carnivorous animals, but for primates it is done in conjunction with nonthreatening gestures to show submission.

Baring the teeth and nostril flaring are derived from the act of attacking and are primitive signals used by other primates. Sneering is used by animals to warn others that, if necessary, they'll use their teeth to attack or defend. For humans, this gesture still appears even though humans won't usually attack with their teeth.



Human and animal sneering—you wouldn't want to go on a date with either of these two

Nostril flaring allows more air to oxygenate the body in preparation for fight or flight and, in the primate world, it tells others that backup support is needed to deal with an imminent threat. In the human world, sneering is caused by anger, irritation, when a person feels under physical or emotional threat, or feels that something is not right.



Universal Gestures

The Shoulder Shrug is also a good example of a universal gesture that is used to show that a person doesn't know or doesn't understand what you are

saying. It's a multiple gesture that has three main parts: exposed palms to show nothing is being concealed in the hands, hunched shoulders to protect the throat from attack, and raised brow, which is a universal, submissive greeting.

The Shoulder Shrug shows submission

Just as verbal language differs from culture to culture, so some body-language signals can also differ. Whereas one gesture may be common in a particular culture and have a clear interpretation, it may be meaningless in another culture or even have a completely different meaning. Cultural differences will be covered later, in Chapter 5.

Three Rules for Accurate Reading

What you see and hear in any situation does not necessarily reflect the real attitudes people may actually have. You need to follow three basic rules to get things right.

Rule 1. Read Gestures in Clusters

One of the most serious errors a novice in body language can make is to interpret a solitary gesture in isolation of other gestures or circumstances. For example, scratching the head can mean a number of things—sweating, uncertainty, dandruff, fleas, forgetfulness, or lying—depending on the other gestures that occur at the same time. Like any spoken language, body

language has words, sentences, and punctuation. Each gesture is like a single word and one word may have several different meanings. For example, in English, the word “dressing” has at least ten meanings including the act of putting on clothing, a sauce for food, stuffing for a fowl, an application for a wound, fertilizer, and grooming for a horse. It's only when you put a word into a sentence with other words that you can fully understand its meaning. Gestures come in “sentences” called “clusters” and invariably reveal the truth about a person's feelings or attitudes. A body-language cluster, just like a verbal sentence, needs at least three words in it before you can accurately define each of the words. The “perceptive” person is the one who can read the body-language sentences and accurately match them against the person's verbal sentences.

*Scratching the head can mean uncertainty,
but it's also a sign of dandruff.*



So always look at gesture clusters for a correct reading. Each of us has one or more repetitive gestures that simply reveal we are either bored or feeling under pressure. Continual hair touching or twirling is a common example of this, but in isolation of other gestures, it's likely to mean the person is feeling uncertain or anxious. People stroke their hair or head because that's how their mother comforted them when they were children. To demonstrate the point about clusters, here's a common Critical Evaluation gesture cluster someone might use when they are unimpressed with what they are hearing:

You're losing points with this man

The main Critical Evaluation signal is the hand-to-face gesture, with the index finger pointing up the cheek while another finger covers the mouth and the thumb supports the chin. Further evidence that this listener is having critical thoughts about what he hears is supported by the legs being tightly crossed and the arm crossing the body (defensive) while the head and chin are down (negative/hostile). This body language “sentence” says something like, “I don't like what you're saying” or “I disagree” or “I'm holding back negative feelings.”



Hillary Clinton uses this cluster when she's not convinced

Rule 2. Look for Congruence

Research shows that nonverbal signals carry about five times as much impact as the verbal channel and that, when the two are incongruent, people—especially women—rely on the nonverbal message and disregard the verbal content.

If you, as the speaker, were to ask the listener shown above to give his opinion about something you've said and he replied that he disagreed with you, his body-language signals would be congruent with his verbal sentences, that is, they would match. If, however, he said he *agreed* with what you said, he would more likely be lying, because his words and gestures would be incongruent.

When a person's words and body language are in conflict, women ignore what is said.

If you saw a politician standing behind a lectern speaking confidently