



## Body Language & Eye Contact



### **1. First impressions**

It may not be fair, but **most of us make judgments of others within the first few seconds** of meeting them. Research shows that first impressions may be made in as little as three seconds and most likely less than 10.

Don't sabotage yourself with a poor first impression. That means dressing professionally, walking confidently, smiling sincerely and learning the art of a good handshake.

## 2. Handshake Etiquette

Upon entering the interviewer's office, the first thing you have to deal with is the handshake.

**A firm handshake is a must**, but don't try to bring the interviewer to his knees. Keep the grip to two or three seconds before relaxing, then releasing. Release sooner if you feel the interviewer relaxing his or her grip.

If your interviewer's grip seems excessive or aggressive, try to match it within reason without turning it into a contest.

Pumping the handshake is a no-no. Shake and keep the motion subtle and limited to once or twice.

There are two schools of thought on whether to wait for the hirer or HR agent to extend his or her hand first or whether you make the first move. Pouncing across the room with an outstretched hand may be too aggressive.

As you enter the room and approach the interviewer, who should be moving toward you, **make initial eye contact**, allowing just a second for him to make the first move.

**Don't wait too long** or you'll end up standing there with your hands at your side. In most cases, you'll see that the motion into a handshake is virtually simultaneous.

## 3. Stand Up or Be Seated

If the interviewer enters the room where you are seated, get to your feet quickly without betraying a sense of urgency.

**Rising from your seat** reflects enthusiasm for the job and courtesy to the interviewer. Just don't knock over the furniture doing it.

If you are entering the office or interviewing room, you should **wait to be seated at the hirer's direction**. She will likely gesture you toward a nearby chair. Otherwise, stay on your feet until directed.

If the hirer has greeted you in front of his desk, he may return there before directing you to sit.

Once you are seated, position your briefcase within reach. Your portfolio may be comfortably in your lap or on the table in front of you for easy reference.

## 4. While You're Sitting

Your **posture in your chair should be relaxed but not slouching** to one side or the other. A slouch signals a lack of interest or even meekness.

A **posture that is too stiff and upright signals anxiety**, possibly intractability. Sit with a slight forward lean, as if happily anticipating the ensuing conversation.

If you are a guy, feet planted straight ahead is good, as is crossed at the ankles. The latter is best for a woman. Take your cue from the interviewer.

If he is seated facing you with no desk between., it's **best to keep your knees in a neutral position and not too wide**.

In general, **body language should reflect confidence and interest**. Avoid crossed arms, which can look defensive. Steer clear of the "fig leaf," when you hold your hands in front of you as if unconsciously protecting yourself.

Rocking in the chair, jiggling your legs, or and fidgeting your feet can be disconcerting to an interviewer and convey nervousness.

However, casual and occasional shifting is fine and keeps you from tightening up. Body movement is less disconcerting when talking than when listening.

**Your hands should not be drawing attention**. Natural, confident hand gestures are ideal. Don't tap or fidget your hands or grip them too tightly.

You may rest your hands comfortably on the tabletop or on the chair's armrests. If you have no other place to put them, keep your hands loosely folded in your lap.

If it makes you feel more comfortable to have a pen and notepad for note taking, that's fine.

Just don't let the note taking become a distraction that detracts from making eye contact and connecting with the interviewer.

When in doubt, leave the notepad in your briefcase. It's just one more thing to worry about if you're nervous.

## 5. The Eyes Have It

**Eye contact is very important in a job interview.** You should smile and **make natural eye contact for at least a few seconds** at a time throughout the interview. Glance away occasionally to consider your answers.

If you are not holding eye contact for several seconds at a time, you risk darting eye movement, which **may signal timidity** and even shiftiness.

The opposite is holding eye contact for too long, or staring, which can be construed as threatening, overly aggressive or just plain creepy.

Eye contact says you are **offering not only your attention, but your respect.** It also shows that you have the **basic interpersonal skills** needed to thrive in most business environments.

If you are uncomfortable holding eye contact, one trick is to focus on the spot between the eyebrows or the bridge of the nose as long as you don't lock in. Obvious staring at the interviewer's nose is definitely a no-no.

**Smiling is also a must,** but not everyone finds it easy to flash a wide, disarming grin. Keep it natural, attuned to your personality.

If you're a guy and the interviewer is a woman, remember to keep your sight line from the shoulders up.

You **absolutely don't** want to get caught glancing anywhere south of the neckline. If you are going to glance elsewhere, pick a couple of objects in the room and alternate.