

Wolverhampton Speakers Club

Gestures - Speaking With Your Body



I like using gestures!

Don't be rude!!!

You know what I mean ...



What are gestures?

Gestures are movements that add meaning and emphasis to your speech. They illustrate, emphasise and heighten the spoken word. Remember that we comprehend speech by what we see as well as by what we hear, so the way you look and sound is as important as what you say. So gestures must have a purpose and be appropriate.

Don't just think that gestures are only about using your hands – you can gesture with your whole body, with your face and with your eyes.

Along with pauses, modulation, pronunciation, pace & pitch, gestures can enliven and add point and interest to your speech.



How to do them

We are all different and have different styles of speaking, and a gesture needs to fit comfortably with the individual. Ideally a gesture should not look contrived or distracting, nor should your speech be overloaded with gestures.

Your gestures should be well-timed to emphasise a particular phrase, word or syllable and they should be appropriate to what you are saying.

The gestures should be proportionate to the speech and fit your personality. Gestures should be well thought out and (unless deliberately needed) not be jerky but be smooth and flowing, perhaps involving the whole arm or part of the body.

Vary your gestures and don't favour one hand.

Use your eyes



Eye contact is a gesture and is vital. You need to show every member of the audience (including the Chair) that you are speaking to them personally, and this you do by scanning (not staring) around the audience as you speak.

This will most likely involve moving your head to show what you are doing – rather like using the mirror on your driving test!

How not to do them



Gestures are really useful - but you've got to do them properly!

You're right Jasmine - you can look silly if you don't



Don't telegraph your gestures or use them in the wrong place.

Don't make sudden gestures unless they are required by the speech.

Some members of an audience don't like pointing.



Don't clasp your hands or grasp the lectern, this restricts your ability to do gestures, and they look artificial - and they can also restrict your breathing.



Do too many gestures and you may look like a jester.

How to practise them

If you are new to gestures try practising a few simple ones, not necessarily to do with a speech, in front of a mirror. You could try descriptions of things.

When you do a speech, decide where in your script you think gestures are appropriate and, again, practise them in front of a mirror.

Try to observe other people making gestures – maybe senior members of the club, public figures or politicians. If you turn off the sound on your TV you can easily see the impact of gestures.

Gestures in speeches

Remember that gestures include the face and head as well as the rest of the body.

Choosing suitable gestures will help you to bind the whole speech together – things that might include demonstration or emotion. Good gestures can add sparkle to your speech.

For any speech our suggestion would be that once you have prepared your speech you look through it to see where gestures can be put. Where will they be to the best advantage? They should appear as a natural part of the whole speech and need to be appropriate for the circumstances; then practice to get the flow of the words and gestures to run together.

'Smile please ...'



Smiling is a gesture

A nice smile at the audience before you start speaking is a sure way to beginning to get rapport with your audience - you put them, and yourself, at ease straight away.

Obviously, if you are speaking on a solemn occasion this might not be appropriate - but try to appear sympathetic.