

Six ways to improve your nonverbal communications



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SIX WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR NONVERBAL COMMUNICATIONS By Vicki Ritts, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley and James R. Stein, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. It is not only what you say in the classroom that is important, but it's how you say it that can make the difference to students. Nonverbal messages are an essential component of communication in the teaching process.

Teachers should be aware of nonverbal behavior in the classroom for three major reasons: •An awareness of nonverbal behavior will allow you to become better receivers of students' messages. You will become a better sender of signals that reinforce learning. •This mode of communication increases the degree of the perceived psychological closeness between teacher and student. Some major areas of nonverbal behaviors to explore are: •Eye contact •Facial expressions •Gestures •Posture and body orientation •Proximity •Paralinguistics •Humor Eye contact: Eye contact, an important channel of interpersonal communication, helps regulate the flow of communication. And it signals interest in others. Furthermore, eye contact with audiences increases the speaker's credibility.

Teachers who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth and credibility. Facial expressions: Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits: •Happiness •Friendliness •Warmth •Liking •Affiliation Thus, if you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm and approachable. Smiling is often contagious and students will react favorably and learn more. Gestures: If you fail to gesture while speaking, you may be perceived as boring, stiff and unanimated. A lively and animated teaching style captures students' attention, makes the

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material more interesting, facilitates learning and provides a bit of entertainment. Head nods, a form of gestures, communicate positive reinforcement to students and indicate that you are listening.

Posture and body orientation: You communicate numerous messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates to students that you are approachable, receptive and friendly. Furthermore, interpersonal closeness results when you and your students face each other. Speaking with your back turned or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided; it communicates disinterest to your class. **Proximity:** Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with students.

You should look for signals of discomfort caused by invading students' space. Some of these are: •Rocking •Leg swinging •Tapping •Gaze aversion Typically, in large college classes space invasion is not a problem. In fact, there is usually too much distance. To counteract this, move around the classroom to increase interaction with your students. Increasing proximity enables you to make better eye contact and increases the opportunities for students to speak.

Paralinguistics: This facet of nonverbal communication includes such vocal elements as: •Tone •Pitch •Rhythm •Timbre •Loudness •Inflection For maximum teaching effectiveness, learn to vary these six elements of your voice. One of the major criticisms is of instructors who speak in a monotone. Listeners perceive these instructors as boring and dull. Students report that

they learn less and lose interest more quickly when listening to teachers who have not learned to modulate their voices.

Humor: Humor is often overlooked as a teaching tool, and it is too often not encouraged in college classrooms. Laughter releases stress and tension for both instructor and student. You should develop the ability to laugh at yourself and encourage students to do the same. It fosters a friendly classroom environment that facilitates learning. (Lou Holtz wrote that when his players felt successful he always observed the presence of good humor in the locker room.) Obviously, adequate knowledge of the subject matter is crucial to your success; however, it's not the only crucial element.

Creating a climate that facilitates learning and retention demands good nonverbal and verbal skills. To improve your nonverbal skills, record your speaking on video tape. Then ask a colleague in communications to suggest refinements

THE TRUE TEACHER ACCEPTS ALL STUDENTS By Ernest O. Melby from *The Teacher and Learning*

A teacher says: " I can accept my good students, those who behave and do good work, but I can't accept those who do not work, who have the wrong attitude and who cause me trouble. " They forget that it's the acceptance of all that gives power to the teacher. In fact, it is in relation to students who are difficult that the teacher's true qualities are demonstrated.

We all find it easy to accept those who lend themselves to our designs. It is in their relationship to those who cause them trouble, who are dirty and poorly dressed, and who fail to achieve that teachers prove their beliefs. It is the essence of the point of view here presented that only a complete gift of

oneself makes the teacher an artist. Teaching is a jealous profession; it is not a sideline. This is not only because of the problem of time, nor because of the impact of lesser efforts on pupils: it is because of the effect on the teacher himself.

It is only as we give fully of ourselves that we can become our best selves. Thus halfway measures and attitudes of whatever kind reduce our effectiveness. When we ask the teacher to give himself fully to his students, to his colleagues, to his community, and to humanity, we are thus only asking him to be maximally effective. Moreover, it is only as he gives himself that he can experience completely the joys and satisfactions of being a teacher. In this situation he is in the same position as any artist. Frustrated artists are often those who for one reason or another are unable or unwilling to make a complete gift of themselves to their art.

Similarly, the unhappiest teachers are those who bemoan the weaknesses of their pupils and the conditions under which they work and who fail to sense that it is their own half-hearted efforts that defraud them. One measure of the teacher's willingness to give of himself is his accessibility to his students, his willingness to spend time with them. One difficulty here is the narrow conception that often prevails about what it means to teach. To teach means more than to lecture or explain before a group of students.

The best teachers influence their students more in their personal, individual contacts with them than in strict classroom situations. If teaching and learning are complementary processes, if the teacher is to teach by learning and if his teaching is to be directed toward an individual, he must know that

individual. And how is he to know that individual if he spends little or no time with him alone? Another illusion defeats us. It is that there is some magic in lecturing and in the hearing of recitations.

We want as much time for this as possible. We begrudge taking time to work with individual pupils. Yet we know very little about the actual effectiveness of what we do. Is it not at least possible that our classroom work would be greatly increased in effectiveness if only we spent more time with our pupils as individuals? We seem to be obsessed with teaching. We know that no one can educate another person, that all of us must educate ourselves.

The teacher's role is that of a helper in this process. The question is: How can we best help? GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MOTIVATION Basic principles of motivation exist that are applicable to learning in any situation. 1. The environment can be used to focus the student's attention on what needs to be learned.

Teachers who create warm and accepting yet business-like (appropriate) atmospheres will promote persistent effort and favorable attitudes toward learning. This strategy will be successful in children and in adults. Interesting visual aids, such as booklets, posters, or practice equipment, motivate learners by capturing their attention and curiosity. 2. Incentives motivate learning.

Incentives include privileges and receiving praise from the instructor. The instructor determines an incentive that is likely to motivate an individual at a particular time. In a general learning situation, self-motivation without rewards will not succeed. Students must find satisfaction in learning based <https://assignbuster.com/six-ways-to-improve-your-nonverbal-communications/>

on the understanding that the goals are useful to them or, less commonly, based on the pure enjoyment of exploring new things. .

Internal motivation is longer lasting and more self-directive than is external motivation, which must be repeatedly reinforced by praise or concrete rewards. Some individuals — particularly children of certain ages and some adults — have little capacity for internal motivation and must be guided and reinforced constantly. The use of incentives is based on the principle that learning occurs more effectively when the student experiences feelings of satisfaction. Caution should be exercised in using external rewards when they are not absolutely necessary.

Their use may be followed by a decline in internal motivation. 4. Learning is most effective when an individual is ready to learn, that is, when one wants to know something. Sometimes the student's readiness to learn comes with time, and the instructor's role is to encourage its development.

If a desired change in behavior is urgent, the instructor may need to supervised directly to ensure that the desired behavior occurs. If a student is not ready to learn, he or she may not be reliable in following instructions and therefore must be supervised and have the instructions repeated again and again. . Motivation is enhanced by the way in which the instructional material is organized. In general, the best organized material makes the information meaningful to the individual. One method of organization includes relating new tasks to those already known.

Other ways to relay meaning are to determine whether the persons being taught understand the final outcome desired and instruct them to compare <https://assignbuster.com/six-ways-to-improve-your-nonverbal-communications/>

and contrast ideas. None of the techniques will produce sustained motivation unless the goals are realistic for the learner. The basic learning principle involved is that success is more predictably motivating than is failure. Ordinarily, people will choose activities of intermediate uncertainty rather than those that are difficult (little likelihood of success) or easy (high probability of success). For goals of high value there is less tendency to choose more difficult conditions.

Having learners assist in defining goals increases the probability that they will understand them and want to reach them. However, students sometimes have unrealistic notions about what they can accomplish. Possibly they do not understand the precision with which a skill must be carried out or have the depth of knowledge to master some material. To identify realistic goals, instructors must be skilled in assessing a student's readiness or a student's progress toward goals. 1. Because learning requires changed in beliefs and behavior, it normally produces a mild level of anxiety.

This is useful in motivating the individual. However, severe anxiety is incapacitating. A high degree of stress is inherent in some educational situations. If anxiety is severe, the individual's perception of what is going on around him or her is limited. Instructors must be able to identify anxiety and understand its effect on learning. They also have a responsibility to avoid causing severe anxiety in learners by setting ambiguous or unrealistically high goals for them.

2. It is important to help each student set goals and to provide informative feedback regarding progress toward the goals. Setting a goal demonstrates

an intention to achieve and activates learning from one day to the next. It also directs the student's activities toward the goal and offers an opportunity to experience success.

3. Both affiliation and approval are strong motivators. People seek others with whom to compare their abilities, opinions, and emotions. Affiliation can also result in direct anxiety reduction by the social acceptance and the mere presence of others. However, these motivators can also lead to conformity, competition, and other behaviors that may seem as negative.

4. Many behaviors result from a combination of motives. It is recognized that no grand theory of motivation exists. However, motivation is so necessary for learning that strategies should be planned to organize a continuous and interactive motivational dynamic for maximum effectiveness. The general principles of motivation are interrelated.

A single teaching action can use many of them simultaneously. Finally, it should be said that an enormous gap exists between knowing that learning must be motivated and identifying the specific motivational components of any particular act. Instructors must focus on learning patterns of motivation for an individual or group, with the realization that errors will be common.

MOTIVATING STUDENTS By Barbara Gross Davis, University of California, Berkeley.

From Tools for Teaching, Some students seem naturally enthusiastic about learning, but many need-or expect-their instructors to inspire, challenge, and stimulate them: " Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability ... to maintain the interest that brought students to the

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course in the first place” (Ericksen, 1978, p. 3). Whatever level of motivation your students bring to the classroom will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens in that classroom.

Unfortunately, there is no single magical formula for motivating students. Many factors affect a given student’s motivation to work and to learn (Bligh, 1971; Sass, 1989): interest in the subject matter, perception of its usefulness, general desire to achieve, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as patience and persistence. And, of course, not all students are motivated by the same values, needs, desires, or wants. Some of your students will be motivated by the approval of others, some by overcoming challenges. Researchers have begun to identify those aspects of the teaching situation that enhance students’ self-motivation (Lowman, 1984; Lucas, 1990; Weinert and Kluwe, 1987; Bligh, 1971).

To encourage students to become self-motivated independent learners, instructors can do the following:

- Give frequent, early, positive feedback that supports students’ beliefs that they can do well.
- Ensure opportunities for students’ success by assigning (appropriate) tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult.
- Help students find personal meaning and value in the material.
- Create an atmosphere that is open and positive.
- Help students feel that they are valued members of a learning community.

Research has also shown that good everyday teaching practices can do more to counter student apathy than special efforts to attack motivation directly (Ericksen, 1978). Most students respond positively to a well-organized course taught by an enthusiastic instructor who has a genuine interest in students

and what they learn. Thus activities you undertake to promote learning will also enhance students' motivation. General Strategies Capitalize on students' existing needs. Students learn best when incentives for learning in a classroom satisfy their own motives for enrolling in the course.

Some of the needs your students may bring to the classroom are the need to learn something in order to complete a particular task or activity, the need to seek new experiences, the need to perfect skills, the need to overcome challenges, the need to become competent, the need to succeed and do well, the need to feel involved and to interact with other people. Satisfying such needs is rewarding in itself, and such rewards sustain learning more effectively than do grades. Design assignments, in-class activities, and discussion questions to address these kinds of needs. Source: McMillan and Forsyth, 1991) Make students active participants in learning.

Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, solving. Passivity dampens students' motivation and curiosity. Pose questions. Don't tell students something when you can ask them. Encourage students to suggest approaches to a problem or to guess the results of an experiment. Use small group work.

See "Leading a Discussion," "Supplements and Alternatives to Lecturing," and "Collaborative Learning" for methods that stress active participation. (Source: Lucas, 1990) Ask students to analyze what makes their classes more or less "motivating. Sass (1989) asks his classes to recall two recent class periods, one in which they were highly motivated and one in which their motivation was low. Each student makes a list of specific aspects of the

two classes that influenced his or her level of motivation, and students then meet in small groups to reach consensus on characteristics that contribute to high and low motivation. In over twenty courses, Sass reports, the same eight characteristics emerge as major contributors to student motivation:

- Instructor's enthusiasm
- Relevance of the material
- Organization of the course
- Appropriate difficulty level of the material
- Active involvement of students
- Variety
- Rapport between teacher and students
- Use of appropriate, concrete, and understandable examples.

Incorporating Instructional Behaviors That Motivate Students Hold high but realistic expectations for your students. Research has shown that a teacher's expectations have a powerful effect on a student's performance. If you act as though you expect your students to be motivated, hardworking, and interested in the course, they are more likely to be so. Set realistic expectations for students when you make assignments, give presentations, conduct discussions, and grade examinations.

Realistic" in this context means that your standards are high enough to motivate students to do their best work but not so high that students will inevitably be frustrated in trying to meet those expectations. To develop the drive to achieve, students need to believe that achievement is possible - which means that you need to provide early opportunities for success.

(Sources: American Psychological Association, 1992; Bligh, 1971; Forsyth and McMillan, 1991 -1 Lowman, 1984) Help students set achievable goals for themselves. Failure to attain unrealistic goals can disappoint and frustrate students. Encourage students to focus on their continued improvement, not just on their grade on any one test or assignment.

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Help students evaluate their progress by encouraging them to critique their own work, analyze their strengths, and work on their weaknesses. For example, consider asking students to submit self-evaluation forms with one or two assignments. (Sources: Cashin, 1979; Forsyth and McMillan, 1991) Tell students what they need to do to succeed in your course. Don't let your students struggle to figure out what is expected of them. Reassure students that they can do well in your course, and tell them exactly what they must do to succeed. Say something to the effect that " If you can handle the examples on these problem sheets, you can pass the exam.

People who have trouble with these examples can ask me for extra help. " Or instead of saying, " You're way behind," tell the student, " Here is one way you could go about learning the material. How can I help you? " (Sources: Cashin, 1979; Tiberius, 1990) Strengthen students' self-motivation. Avoid messages that reinforce your power as an instructor or that emphasize extrinsic rewards.

Instead of saying, " I require," " you must," or " you should," stress " I think you will find. . . " or " I will be interested in your reaction. " (Source: Lowman, 1990) Avoid creating intense competition among students. Competition produces anxiety, which can interfere with learning.

Reduce students' tendencies to compare themselves to one another. Bligh (1971) reports that students are more attentive, display better comprehension, produce more work, and are more favorable to the teaching method when they work cooperatively in groups rather than compete as individuals. Refrain from public criticisms of students' performance and from

comments or activities that pit students against each other. (Sources: Eble, 1988; Forsyth and McMillan, 1991). Be enthusiastic about your subject.

An instructor's enthusiasm is a crucial factor in student motivation. If you become bored or apathetic, students will too. Typically, an instructor's enthusiasm comes from confidence, excitement about the content, and genuine pleasure in teaching. If you find yourself uninterested in the material, think back to what attracted you to the field and bring those aspects of the subject matter to life for your students. Or challenge yourself to devise the most exciting way to present the material, however dull the material itself may seem to you.

Structuring the Course to Motivate Students Work from students' strengths and interests. Find out why students are enrolled in your course, how they feel about the subject matter, and what their expectations are. Then try to devise examples, case studies, or assignments that relate the course content to students' interests and experiences. For instance, a chemistry professor might devote some lecture time to examining the contributions of chemistry to resolving environmental problems. Explain how the content and objectives of your course will help students achieve their educational, professional, or personal goals. (Sources: Brock, 1976; Cashin, 1979; Lucas, 1990) When possible, let students have some say in choosing what will be studied.

Give students options on term papers or other assignments (but not on tests). Let students decide between two locations for the field trip, or have them select which topics to explore in greater depth. If possible, include

optional or alternative units in the course. Sources: Ames and Ames, 1990; Cashin, 1979; Forsyth and McMillan, 1991; Lowman, 1984).

Increase the difficulty of the material as the semester progresses. Give students opportunities to succeed at the beginning of the semester. Once students feel they can succeed, you can gradually increase the difficulty level. If assignments and exams include easier and harder questions, every student will have a chance to experience success as well as challenge.

(Source: Cashin, 1979) Vary your teaching methods. Variety reawakens students' involvement in the course and their motivation.

Break the routine by incorporating a variety of teaching activities and methods in your course: role playing, debates, brainstorming, discussion, demonstrations, case studies, audiovisual presentations, guest speakers, or small group work. (Source: Forsyth and McMillan, 1991) De-emphasizing Grades Emphasize mastery and learning rather than grades. Ames and Ames (1990) report on two secondary school math teachers. One teacher graded every homework assignment and counted homework as 30 percent of a student's final grade. The second teacher told students to spend a fixed amount of time on their homework (thirty minutes a night) and to bring questions to class about problems they could not complete.

This teacher graded homework as satisfactory or unsatisfactory, gave students the opportunity to redo their assignments, and counted homework as 10 percent of the final grade. Although homework was a smaller part of the course grade, this second teacher was more successful in motivating students to turn in their homework. In the first class, some students gave up

rather than risk low evaluations of their abilities. In the second class, students were not risking their self-worth each time they did their homework but rather were attempting to learn.

Mistakes were viewed as acceptable and something to learn from.

Researchers recommend de-emphasizing grading by eliminating complex systems of credit points; they also advise against trying to use grades to control nonacademic behavior (for example, lowering grades for missed classes) (Forsyth and McMillan, 1991; Lowman 1990). Instead, assign ungraded written work, stress the personal satisfaction of doing assignments, and help students measure their progress. Design tests that encourage the kind of learning you want students to achieve. Many students will learn whatever is necessary to get the grades they desire.

If you base your tests on memorizing details, students will focus on memorizing facts. If your tests stress the synthesis and evaluation of information, students will be motivated to practice those skills when they study. (Source: McKeachie, 1986) Avoid using grades as threats. As McKeachie (1986) points out, the threat of low grades may prompt some students to work hard, but other students may resort to academic dishonesty, excuses for late work, and other counterproductive behavior.

Motivating Students by Responding to Their Work Give students feedback as quickly as possible. Return tests and papers promptly, and reward success publicly and immediately. Give students some indication of how well they have done and how to improve. Rewards can be as simple as saying a student's response was good, with an indication of why it was good, or

mentioning the names of contributors: “ Cherry’s point about pollution really synthesized the ideas we had been discussing.

” (Source: Cashin, 1979) Reward success. Both positive and negative comments influence motivation, but research consistently indicates that students are more affected by positive feedback and success. Praise builds students’ self-confidence, competence, and self-esteem. Recognize sincere efforts even if the product is less than stellar. If a student’s performance is weak, let the student know that you believe he or she can improve and succeed over time. (Sources: Cashin, 1979; Lucas, 1990) Introduce students to the good work done by their peers.

Share the ideas, knowledge, and accomplishments of individual students with the class as a whole:

- Pass out a list of research topics chosen by students so they will know whether others are writing papers of interest to them.
- Make available copies of the best papers and essay exams.
- Provide class time for students to read papers or assignments submitted by classmates.
- Have students write a brief critique of a classmate’s paper.
- Schedule a brief talk by a student who has experience or who is doing a research paper on a topic relevant to your lecture.

Be specific when giving negative feedback. Negative feedback is very powerful and can lead to a negative class atmosphere. Whenever you identify a student’s weakness, make it clear that your comments relate to a particular task or performance, not to the student as a person. Try to cushion negative comments with a compliment about aspects of the task in which the student succeeded. (Source: Cashin, 1979) Avoid demeaning comments.

Many students in your class may be anxious about their performance and abilities. Be sensitive to how you phrase your comments and avoid offhand remarks that might prick their feelings of inadequacy.