



'Don't just stand there!' Non-verbal communication for oral presentations



Hi there! It can be very challenging trying to look relaxed in front of a group of people when giving an oral presentation. You spend so much time on preparing what to say, but when you get up to speak, your body freezes or does things you don't even know you're doing! (Here's me the first time I had to give a presentation. I didn't even want anyone to see me!) Now, with the aid of a few friends, I want to show you how body language and hand gestures can help you give great oral presentations.

Body Language

- First, think about how you're going to stand when you're talking to your audience.

💡 Whose body language looks the most professional?

A



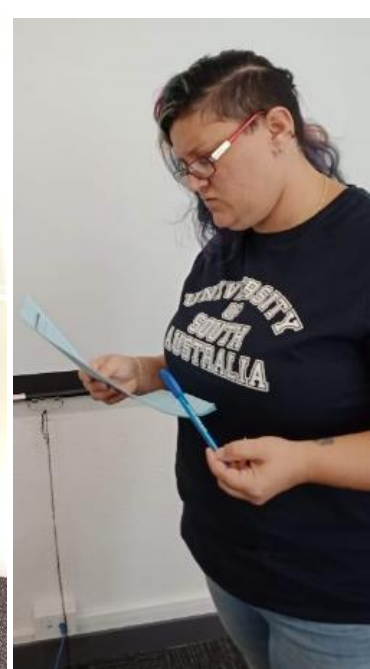
B



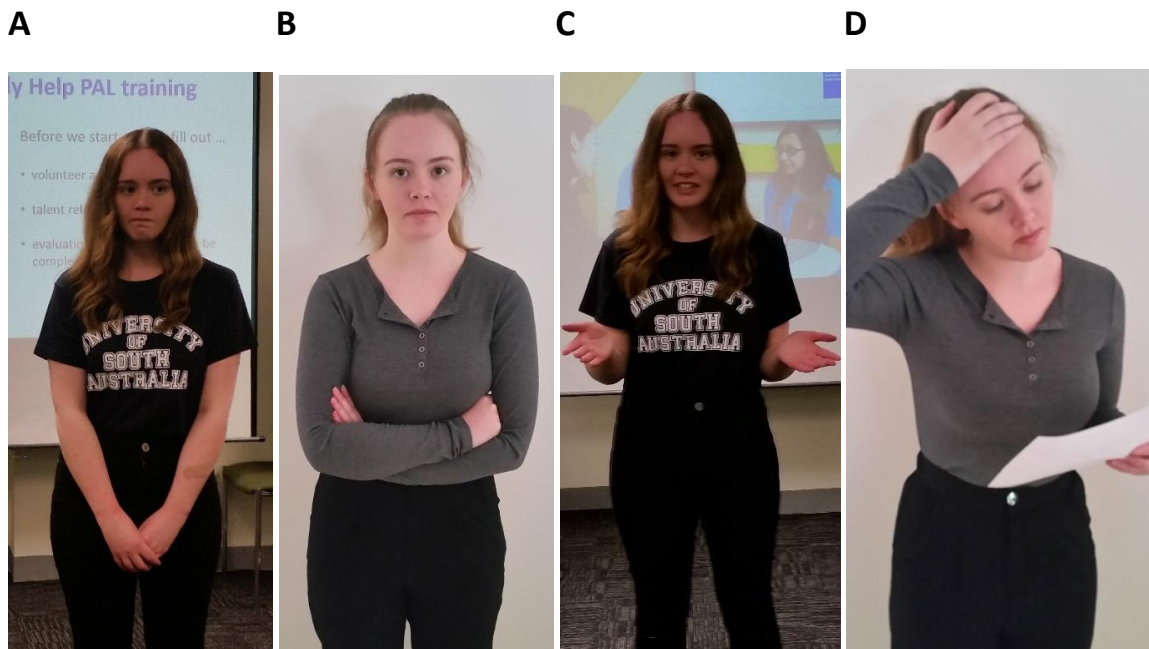
C



D



- That's right. None of them! Avoid crossing your arms or legs (**A & B**) or putting your hands in your pockets (**C**). Also, you don't need to hold a pen or anything else that's not used in your presentation (**D**).
 - If you have notes, transfer them to cue cards that are easy to hold rather than printing out your presentation. You need to know your presentation so well that you don't have to concentrate so hard on reading your notes that you don't even look at your audience (like me there in **D**).
 - It's important to show your audience that you're open, relaxed, and prepared.
- 💡 Okay, let's try again. Which of these positions do you think looks the most professional?



- The presenter in **C** is able to engage her audience with eye contact, open hand gestures, and a friendly facial expression. Practise your presentation so that you can use hand gestures freely:





- Remember to avoid turning to look at your slides on the data projector screen when you're talking about them. This interrupts the eye contact you have established with your audience.
- Practise delivering your presentation so that you can remember what's on your slides.

Hand gestures

- Let's now look using hand gestures to help you highlight key content from your presentation.

💡 What gestures could you use to emphasise these statements?

1. "We need to bring these two principles together now"
2. "On the one hand, the design is very simple. On the other, it's revolutionary"
3. "But there's one thing you need to know first"
4. "This latest version is the thinnest in the world"

💡 Now, can you match the hand gestures to the sentences they were used with?

A

B

C

D





1. “We need to bring these two principles together now” **B**
2. “On the one hand, the design is very simple. On the other, it’s revolutionary” **D**
3. “But there’s one thing you need to know first” **A**
4. “This latest version is the thinnest in the world” **C**

Getting started



- Once you’ve finalised the content of your presentation, create a set of cue-cards with the key points.
- Now stand up and imagine you are speaking a group of people.
- Check out how you’re standing and take a few slow breaths to get you settled.
- Make any adjustments so that you are standing evenly on both feet.

- It’s normal if it feels uncomfortable to begin with. Just don’t give up.
- Keep practising until it feels natural to use your hands to illustrate or reinforce the meaning of what you are saying.
- Try practising in front of a mirror.
- Try videoing yourself or ask a friend or family member to watch you instead.

Additional resources

- Search the UniSA website for [3MT \(Three Minute Thesis\)](#) and watch PhD candidates presenting on their research in just 3 minutes.
- Visit [Study Help](#) for resources on preparing to give an oral presentation
- Watch the [ComCoach video tutorials](#) hosted by The Cain Project in Engineering and Professional Communication at Rice University.

A big thanks to our Study Help PAL Leaders, Teri (Whyalla), Caitlyn (City East), and Harry (City East) for their assistance in developing this resource.