

Tips for Positive Body Language

Performance Learning PLUS #25

Your gestures, stance, position, and movement in the classroom can all convey a sense of openness to students depending on how you use them. Here are several tips for using positive body language in your classroom:

- **Make broad hand and arm gestures.**
Tight, close-to-the-body gestures communicate that you are closed off from students. Broad gestures are nonverbal cues that invite students to participate in learning and encourage them to feel safe in your classroom.
- **Limit arm-folding.**
Folded arms communicate distance and create a barrier between you and your students. Though you may simply fold your arms as a relaxed way to stand or to keep yourself warm, the gesture can be distancing to your students no matter what the intention.
- **Limit hands-on-hips.**
Hands-on-hips can be a threatening or confrontational gesture. Standing that way occasionally while smiling is of little concern. If done a lot, students might see it differently.
- **Stand still when stressing a point.**
Movement can upstage words. If you move while you talk, some students will be distracted by the movement and miss the point of what you're saying. So when making an important point, stand still. The rhythm of your presentation can be: make a point and then move, make a point and then move, and so on.
- **Use hand and arm gestures to give students visual clues about what you're studying.**
For example, when discussing a particular subject of study, you can gesture the visual images of wide, tall, short, and so on. When discussing numbers, you can illustrate what you're saying using your fingers.
- **Use props to set the tone and reinforce learning.**
The right prop can set the tone of your classroom or illustrate an important point. For example, to set the stage for a warm, informal class discussion, you can move your chair from behind your desk to the front of the classroom, so you're sitting close to your students and at their level. Or to illustrate the importance of students' taking special care of their books, you can hold a book tenderly, stroking it as you would a pet.
- **When choosing props, make sure they support your instruction rather than hinder it.** Excessive use of any one prop, such as holding a book in front of you for every lesson, can create a barrier between you and your students. Other props can upstage you, such as a coffee cup balanced precariously on the edge of your podium.
- **Avoid finger-pointing.**
This gesture is traditionally a reprimand, an accusation, a way of targeting the culprit. Instead, gesture to students with an open, upturned palm.

Source: The above concepts are based on the PLS graduate course *PRIDE: Professional Refinements in Developing Effectiveness*™. *

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