

Appearance: Dress and Posture

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn more about how to present yourself professionally when giving a speech. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. First Impressions
2. Dress
 - a. Tips for the Speaker
3. Posture
 - a. Closed Posture
 - b. Open Posture
 - c. Tips for the Speaker

1. First Impressions

First impressions of a speaker are important. The audience may judge the person on their appearance and not really listen to what is being said.

Considering the effect that dress and posture have on the response to a speech is important for public speaking.

2. Dress

Dress is considered an aspect of non-verbal communication and has social significance for the audience. Dress also includes the things that people wear such as jewelry, ties, handbags, hats and glasses. Clothing conveys nonverbal clues about a speaker's personality, background and financial status. Your clothing style can demonstrate your culture, mood, level of confidence, interests, age, authority, values and sexual identity.

Consider how clothing style might send a negative message. A sloppy appearance, messy hair and wrinkled clothes sends the message, "I don't care," while appropriate attire demonstrates the importance of the occasion. A tight dress with a low-cut neckline might appear attractive but not convey the right message for a serious public speaking event. Appropriate dress changes based on the occasion and has changed over history.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The "liberated" attire of the suffragette campaigning for voting rights in the early 1900s seems formal and "unliberated" today, but was a daring statement at the time.

Dress codes have built-in rules about the message sent by what a person wears and how they wear it. By showing positive aspects of yourself through dress, attire and grooming, you can inspire confidence in your abilities.

As a general rule, attire should be chosen according to the type of audience, the event and the purpose. Audience should be considered before choosing attire. Dress should be comfortable without looking overdressed. Additionally, making a fashion statement is not always helpful for a public speaker because it can detract from the substance of the speech.



TERM TO KNOW

Dress Code

Dress codes are written and, more often, unwritten rules with regard to clothing. Like other aspects of human physical appearance, clothing has a social significance, with different rules and expectations being valid depending on circumstance and occasion.

2b. Tips for the Speaker

1. Dress for the occasion. Consider what dress is appropriate for the event and the culture of the audience.
2. Different societies and cultures have different dress norms and understanding the norms of culture helps with public speaking, though Western business styles are commonly accepted in many countries today.

3. Posture

If you are speaking to an audience in person, the audience will respond to your **posture**.

Posture is one means of communication. Body movements convey information about interpersonal relations and personality traits such as confidence, submissiveness and openness.

The speaker may display an open or closed body position. Those two positions communicate different messages to the audience and can be desirable or undesirable based on the type of visual delivery that is desired.



TERM TO KNOW

Posture

The way someone holds and positions their body.

3a. Closed Posture

Closed posture often gives the impression of detachment, disinterest and hostility. Behaviors that represent closed posture include arms crossed on the chest or abdomen, hands clasped in front of the body and crossed legs.

Clothing may also signal closed posture, such as a buttoned suit or a handbag or briefcase held in front of the

person. Showing the back of hands or clenched fists can represent a closed posture. Hands clasped behind the back may also signal closed posture even though the front is exposed because it can give the impression of hiding something or resisting closer contact.

3b. Open Posture

Open posture communicates a friendly and positive attitude. The feet are spread wide and the head is straight and raised, looking at the audience.

An important element of open posture of the body are the hands. Showing the palms of the hands can be a signal of open posture, especially if the hand is relaxed.

3c. Tips for the Speaker

1. In an in-person, co-located speaking situation where the audience can see your body, the audience responds and it is important to maintain an open body posture.
2. The physical attitude to be taken before the audience really depends, not on mechanical rules, but on the spirit of the speech and the occasion. A person in a hot political argument never has to stop to think about what gesture to use to emphasize a point.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **first impressions** matter, as the audience may judge the person on their appearance and not really listen to what is being said. Clothing can demonstrate your culture, mood, level of confidence, interests, age, authority, values and sexual identity. Different societies and cultures have different **dress** norms and understanding the norms of culture helps with public speaking, though Western business styles are now commonly accepted in many countries. An important **tip for speakers** is to consider what dress is appropriate for the occasion and culture of the audience.

You also learned that your **posture** communicates a message to the audience. Crossed arms, clasped hands and crossed legs signal **closed posture**, giving the impression of detachment, disinterest and hostility. Open and relaxed hands, a wide stance and looking up demonstrate an **open posture** and communicate a friendly and positive attitude.

Source: Boundless. "Appearance: Dress and Posture." Boundless Communications Boundless, 14 Mar. 2017. Retrieved 31 May. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/delivering-the-speech-12/effective-visual-delivery-65/appearance-dress-and-posture-259-4168/>



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