

Communicating with **CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE**

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Communicating with Clarity and Confidence

Confidence is a key component in creating a strong, capable professional image. When communicating in a professional setting, projecting confidence can make or break an interaction and have a significant impact on how others perceive your character and professional abilities. Those who appear confident are often assumed to be more capable in their jobs and more worthy of trust and respect. While a lucky few may naturally project a confident air, the majority of us must work to develop this skill. This e-book will provide you with the tools you need to craft a strong, confident image that will help you to achieve your professional goals.

In this e-book, we break down the myriad factors that contribute to confident communication, and guide you through how to use each aspect to your advantage. First, we'll discuss body language, and the ways in which your non-verbal communication affects others' perception of you. Our second section delves into the ways in which you can modify your speaking style itself to create an air of confidence.



Part I: Body Language

Often people are so focused on what it is they're saying that they lose sight of the fact that the way they move and hold themselves can communicate just as much as their words. In fact, according to studies, up to 93% of communication is non-verbal. Your listener is able to gain a great deal of information simply by observing the way that you move, gesture, and hold your body. By paying attention to your body language, you can craft an image that projects confidence and professionalism.



Posture

One critical aspect of body language is posture. The way in which you hold yourself can speak volumes about how you perceive yourself and the value of your message. Unfortunately, posture is often a deeply engrained habit formed over many years, which makes it particularly challenging to change. However, with some conscious effort, you can gradually modify your posture and use it to project a strong, confident professional image.

So what exactly is the ideal posture? Rounded shoulders and slouching can make you appear unsure of yourself or unprofessional. On the other hand, standing too rigidly can make you appear ill at ease and tense. The goal is to achieve a posture that falls between these two extremes. To do this, start by standing straight with your shoulders held slightly back. Orient your head so that your chin is level with the floor—you should be looking neither up nor



down at your listener, but straight at them. You should also face your listener with your hips and chest so as to appear fully engaged in the conversation. In order to maintain this position, imagine a string running from your tailbone, through your spine, and emerging from the top of your head. Now, imagine a force from above gently pulling on that string until you are perfectly aligned.

When standing and speaking with someone, it's not only your posture that affects your image, but your stance as well. Stand with your feet roughly shoulder width apart, with your weight evenly distributed. Maintain an even stance, and avoid shifting your weight from foot to foot. Fidgeting or leaning against an object can make you appear to be overly casual and unprofessional.

Putting conscious thought into your posture can help achieve an ideal position, but it can also feel and look unnatural when too much thought is employed. Simultaneously improving your posture and remaining natural requires some practice. Once you've found your best posture, take a moment to relax while remaining in the position. Avoid muscle tension and keep your breathing even. Finding a balance between conscious effort and relaxation will help you to maintain a natural posture which projects confidence and self-assurance.

If you feel that your posture is an area of weaknesses for you and needs serious work, take some time and practice achieving the ideal alignment in the mirror, both standing and sitting. Once you feel that you look strong but natural, close your eyes and take note of how your body *feels*. Focus on the positioning of your body parts in relation to one another. By mentally recording the physical sense of strong posture, you can more easily achieve it when you don't have a mirror to provide that visual feedback.

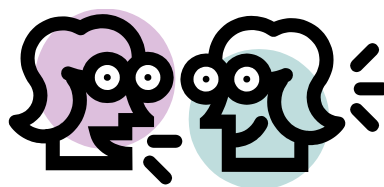
Breaking deeply engrained habits of posture can be a challenge, but taking the time to consciously change your physical presentation is worth the effort. With continued practice, your new, more confident posture will eventually become second nature.



Eye Contact

How you meet your speaking partner's gaze in conversation can play a huge role in how they perceive you. Developing the right pattern of eye contact is crucial in projecting confidence. The most effortless way to improve your eye contact is to truly listen to what your conversation partner is saying. When you are genuinely absorbed in a conversation, proper eye contact becomes natural. However, in some situations, especially those that are stressful or emotional, you may need to put in some effort to achieve a good level of eye contact.

When it comes to the amount and intensity of eye contact in an interaction, it's important to try to strike a balance. Failing to make steady eye contact and frequently averting your eyes from the person you are speaking with can project insecurity, boredom, or even submissiveness. However, if you stare too intently into another person's eyes, you can appear overly intense and uncomfortable. Instead, aim for direct eye contact approximately 80% of the time. This equates to briefly shifting your gaze for one second after every four seconds of eye contact. The way in which you shift your gaze is also important. As you look away, look up or to the side rather than down. Looking down is a sign of insecurity. By looking up or sideways, you'll appear to be thinking about what is being said rather than averting your gaze purposefully.



You can also use eye contact to project confidence when speaking to a group or giving a presentation. When speaking in front of a group, many people will simply gaze above their audience's heads or focus on an object in the distance. However, this creates a lack of connection with your audience and gives the impression that you are uneasy. Instead, occasionally make eye contact with individual members of the audience for about three seconds per person. Vary this so that you're looking at people in different parts of the room, so that the entire group feels as though they've connected with you. Every so often, allow your eyes to sweep across the crowd. The combination of individual and group attention will help to create a feeling of intimacy combined with professionalism.



Gesture

The ways in which you use your hands in conversation can make or break the image you project to others. Study after study has suggested that gestures can play an enormous role in what your listener receives from your message. For example, in one study, people who gestured with their palms facing upward were judged to have a sense of openness and honesty. Those who subtly made a prayer position with their hands (palms together, fingers facing upward) when making a request were perceived to be more sincere and



were more likely to receive what they were asking for. While not all of your gestures need be so specific or calculated, this does tell us that what you do with your hands can greatly impact your message. Be aware of how you are gesturing while you speak and whether or not your gestures are consistent with the message you are trying to get across.

The way in which you use your hands should vary depending on your role within the conversation. While listening, it's best to let your hands rest comfortably, either at your sides or on the table in front of you. Often people fidget—twirling their hair, toying with jewelry, playing with items on their desk—without even realizing it. This can create the impression that you are nervous or disinterested. Check in with yourself every so often in conversation and take note of how your hands are behaving.

When speaking, you should be using your hands to gesture naturally, complimenting your speech and projecting an air of confidence and control. Often people are uncomfortable using their hands when they speak and fall into default positions that limit their movement. While this may be suitable on occasion, continually lapsing into a fixed position will make you appear immobile and insecure. In particular, the following habits can be particularly harmful:



-Sitting with your chin in your hands: This casual posture makes you look overly relaxed. Since it's also a position often associated with childhood, you may appear inexperienced or unprofessional in comparison with those around you.

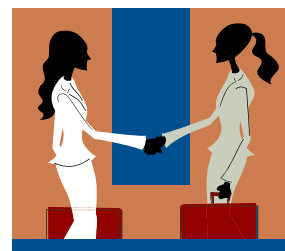
-Folding your arms: The person who takes up the most physical space in a contained group setting is generally perceived to be dominant over his or her peers. Habitually folding your arms creates the impression you're trying to take up as little space as possible and fade into the background. This creates an air of passivity and uncertainty.

Instead of allowing yourself to fall into a fixed posture like those above, become comfortable utilizing gestures. Not only do natural gestures make you appear confident and at ease, they can also be used to draw attention to important points in your speech. Making subtle but definite gestures during key moments will help your listener focus on these points. One movement that works particularly well is gesturing toward your listener with your palm facing upwards. The forward motion signals strength and security, while your upturned palm projects openness and honesty.

To get a good sense of how you gesture on a regular basis, ask a friend or close coworker to keep an eye on how you move during a typical interaction and provide feedback. Once you're aware of your personal patterns, it's much easier to shape them to the image you want to project.

Shaking Hands

It is said that one establishes their opinion of another person within the first five seconds of meeting them. One critical action that takes place during this time is the introductory handshake. What does your handshake say about you and how can you improve it?



One important rule is to make verbal contact before you make physical contact. You should never shake hands silently. As you reach for the person's hand, introduce yourself (e.g. "Hi, I'm Mike."). Or, if someone else has made the introduction for you, offer a word of greeting (e.g. "Nice to meet you," or "It's a pleasure meeting you.").

Another important aspect of the perfect handshake is the grip. No one likes to shake a limp hand—it comes across as passive and disinterested. However, too firm of a handshake may seem aggressive or uncomfortable. Practice lightly squeezing your own forearm to gauge how strong of a grip is comfortable and how it feels to you. Strive for pressure that is firm, but relaxed.

It is also vital that a handshake last for the right amount of time. A typical handshake should last approximately three to four seconds. This allows enough time to make a connection, but doesn't last long enough to feel awkward. During this time, you also want to achieve the right motion. Don't simply hold the other person's hand; lightly pump their hand up and down two to three times, leading from the elbow. Again, moderation is key: remaining motionless is awkward, but aggressively pulling your partner's hand up and down is equally uncomfortable.

Finally, *always* look your partner in the eye as you shake their hand. You aren't simply performing a gesture; you are making a connection with another human being. Avoiding eye contact makes the handshake seem insincere and meaningless. Maintaining eye contact, allows you to appear confident and amiable.

Multicultural Considerations

While this section has discussed various aspects of non-verbal communication, it's important to remember that these rules can vary from culture to culture. For example, strong eye contact is considered a sign of respect and friendship in some Middle Eastern cultures, but can be viewed as rude in Asian cultures. Similar differences exist in what is appropriate for



volume, gesture, and physical distance from your listener. If you will be speaking to a person or group from a different country, take the time to do a little research as to what is appropriate in that culture.



Reading Others' Body Language

Once you've cultivated your own non-verbal communication to reflect confidence and professionalism, there's still another aspect of non-verbal communication to consider: reading the body-language of others. In addition to being mindful of your own non-verbal communication, you should closely monitor that of your listener as well. If your conversation partner is confused, bored, or upset, he may not say so directly, but his body language will usually do the talking for him.

When gauging another person's non-verbal communication, it's crucial to consider all of the different aspects of their body language as a whole. For example, crossed arms may indicate a variety of emotions, but if you take other body language into account, it's easier to determine what your communication partner is feeling. For example, crossed arms and a downward or sideways gaze often indicate discomfort with the topic or situation at hand. However, if crossed arms are accompanied by direct, somewhat intense eye contact, feelings of hostility are likely.

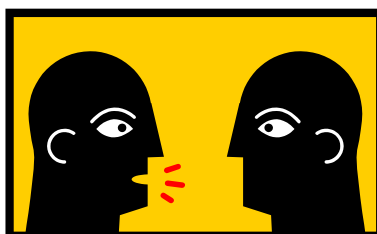
Use your conversation partner's body language to your advantage. Pay close attention to facial expressions and body language to see how your message is being received and then tailor your speech and message accordingly. Reading between the lines can go a long way towards fixing communication problems before they begin.



Part II: Speaking Confidently

In Part I, we discussed how different facets of non-verbal communication can help you to project confidence in your interpersonal communication. Part II will take these ideas to the next level—modifying the way you actually speak in order to appear as confident as possible in your communication.

Changing the way you speak is one of the first and most important steps in achieving an air of confidence and success. Your tone of voice, rate of speech, and other non-verbal cues often say more about your message than your words themselves. Subtle changes in your voice and presentation create a significant difference in how your message is received. The speed at which you talk, the intonation you use, and how loudly you speak can all contribute to how your message is received. Part II of this e-book will guide you through ways in which you can modify each of these aspects to maximize the confidence you project through your speech.



Rate of Speech

One key aspect of speech that can be modified to project confidence is how quickly you speak. There is a variety of information conveyed in an individual's rate of speech, including how confident they are in their message.

Many people, when nervous or excited, tend to speak too quickly. Rushing through your words not only makes it difficult for others to understand you, but also makes it seem as though you are nervous and trying to get speaking over with as quickly as possible. Be aware of this pitfall, and concentrate on using a controlled, even rate of speech. This will help you to appear confident and knowledgeable about the topic on which you're speaking, and give your



listener the impression that what you have to say has value and is worth taking the time to listen to. It also creates a sense that you are calm and in control. In addition, speaking at an easy, relaxed rate, gives others the chance to absorb each point of your message as you speak.

While you want to avoid rushing your words, it's also important to make sure that your rate of speech doesn't slow to the point of dragging. Speech that is overly slow and plodding can cause you to lose your listener's attention. For maximum communication and confidence, find the middle ground between a rushed rate of speech and one that is sluggish and dull. The best way to do this is to pay attention to your listeners' reactions as you speak. Take note of



their facial expressions and body language to get a measure of how your message is being received. Does your listener look confused or overwhelmed? You may need to slow down a bit. Do they appear bored, disinterested, or irritable? You may be speaking too slowly.

If you still feel that finding a moderate, appropriate rate of speech is a challenge, there are other, more direct ways of obtaining feedback. One method is to choose a short passage, and videotape yourself reading it aloud at several different paces. Then, watch the recording with a friend or colleague who is able to provide honest feedback, and ask them for their opinion on the given rates. Once you have found one that is comfortable, clear, and confident, practice speaking aloud and reading at that pace, using the given recording for reference. With practice and patience, you can achieve the perfect rate of speech for projecting confidence and professionalism while holding the full attention of your listeners.

Pausing

One powerful tool for regulating your rate of speech is the pause. When we're speaking quickly, we often neglect too pause and allow our speech to come out in a flood of words. This often causes the speaker to lose much of the vocal variety that makes speech powerful and interesting to the listener. Inserting



a well-timed pause can help to restore a natural flow, and give more power to your speech.

However, it's not just enough to pause; you want to make sure you're pausing in the most powerful places possible. Usually this is either right before or after an important point to which you want to draw your listener's attention. Pausing before an important point allows the listener to fully focus and builds anticipation. Pausing immediately after you make an important point allows your listener to absorb the information and react to it. When properly used, silence can be worth a thousand words.

How long of a pause you should take will depend on the circumstances. For example, you might pause briefly between sentences, but may take a longer, more obvious pause when shifting topics or emphasizing an important point. Pausing occasionally while speaking will not only help you to slow down, but will give your audience a chance to fully process the information. Taking the time to pause will also help you to control your breath support. Each time you take a significant pause, take a deep breath. Maintaining strong breath support will help you to maintain a steady powerful volume and tone, helping you to come across as clear and confident.



Speech Patterns and Intonation

Everyone has particular speech habits that characterize the way they communicate. Often these are neither good nor bad, but simply personal hallmarks of an individual's speech. However, certain speech quirks can convey a lack of confidence and professionalism.

One pattern that can be particularly damaging is speaking with a rising intonation at the end of each sentence so that statements sound like questions. This gives off an air of insecurity and makes it seem that you are



unsure of yourself and seeking your listener's approval. Avoid this pattern at all costs, and end each sentence authoritatively.

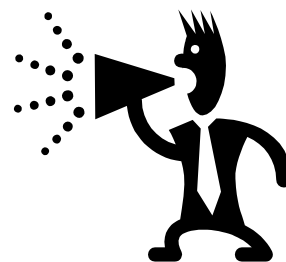
Another common speech pattern that can betray a lack of confidence is overusing question words such as “right?”, “okay?”, or “you know?” at the end of sentences. Although these phrases are warranted in certain situations, using them consistently makes it seem as though you are not fully confident in your message and require constant validation from others. .

Varying intonation is also important. Some people mistakenly equate a lack of intonation variety with professionalism, thinking it makes them sound more sober and serious. However, the result is more often dull, monotone speech. This type of speech conveys disinterest and a lack of enthusiasm for the topic. Speaking with varied intonation keeps your listener engaged and makes your speech far more interesting to listen to.

Volume

Nothing conveys confidence quite like a strong voice. Projecting your voice makes you sound authoritative and like a natural leader. While you don't want to shout, speaking with a strong volume gives others the impression that you are saying something worth listening to. Speaking too quietly can make it seem as though you're not fully sure of what it is you're saying, or that you don't feel it's really important.

While it's important to have a strong speaking voice, the same volume is not uniformly appropriate for every situation. Many factors can influence the volume of speech you may use. Outside factors may play a role: the number of people you are speaking to, the size of the room you're in, the presence of background noise. Communicative factors can play a part too. What sort of emotion do you wish to convey? What is your purpose in communicating? Are you hoping to influence your listener? Intimidate? Charmingly convince?



In order to use your vocal volume to communicate to the best of your ability, you must first be able to manipulate it effectively. One way to learn this is by vocal exercises. Choose a neutral phrase, for example, “My name is John.” To begin, simply practice saying the phrase at varying volumes, starting at a whisper, and gradually building to a shout. Then, take a moment and jot down a few different situations in which you may need to monitor your volume—for example, speaking quietly to a colleague at their cubicle, calling to a friend across a crowded cafeteria, whispering to the person next to you during a meeting, or speaking with your boss one-on-one at their desk. Then, practice saying your neutral phrase as though you were in each of these situations. Continue to modify your volume until you feel you’ve reached a comfortable level for each situation, and mentally note how that volume sounds and feels. With practice, volume modification will become second nature.

Enunciation

Enunciation, or the precise pronunciation of speech sounds, is critical to projecting professionalism and confidence. One common mistake in business communication is not separating your day-to-day speech from your professional speech. When talking casually in everyday situations, we tend to run our words together as we speak. For example, “would’ve” and “should’ve” become “wudda” and “shudda”. “Want to” and “going to” become “wanna” and “gonna.” Although this manner of speaking may be acceptable among friends and acquaintances, professional business speech should be more clear and enunciated. Asking a friend, “Didjeet?” (*Did you eat?*) may be completely acceptable. However, when speaking with a business contact, “Have you eaten?” sounds much more professional and polished.

It’s remarkable how much more intelligent and professional speech can sound when properly enunciated. Slurring your words together and omitting syllables creates an impression of sloppiness and laziness. Take some time and honestly evaluate how clear and crisp your speech is. It may help to tape record yourself the next time you are on a business call. As you replay the recording, listen to your speech, and decide if you are pronouncing each sound



of each word. If the answer is no, you may need to put some time into refining your manner of speaking. Take note of some phrases you typically use on a day-to-day basis, and practice saying them when you are alone, taking care to produce each sound and syllable. Developing clear speech will take time and effort, but the results are well worth it.

Fillers

Another speech habit that can be fatal to projecting confidence is the use of “filler” words. People often pepper their speech with words such as “um”, “uh”, or “you know” which contain no content, add nothing to the message, and interrupt the flow of speech. Some of the most common filler patterns include:

- Using “you know” in rapid or spontaneous speech
- Ending sentences with, “Okay?” “Right?” “See?” or “You know what I mean?”
- Using “Umm” at the beginning of sentences, when transitioning from one thought to another, or before a list of items

These filler patterns can make you sound inexperienced, or even unintelligent.

Learning to speak without fillers is a difficult task, but one worth undertaking. Use the following four-steps to identify and eliminate filler words from your speech:

Step 1: Awareness

Before you can take steps to reduce your filler words, you must first be aware of them. One great way to do this is to record yourself as you speak. Use a tape recorder and speak about a topic on which you are comfortable and knowledgeable. For example, talk about what you do in a typical day of work or where you went and what you did on your last vacation. Try to speak as naturally as possible, as though you were speaking to a colleague. Tape record yourself for one to two minutes.



As you listen to your recording, count how many filler words you used. You should be using no more than one filler word per minute; if you use filler words more frequently than this, you risk distracting your audience and confusing your message. After you've identified your filler words, take a moment and jot down the sentences in which they were used. Then take a moment to say these sentences aloud with the filler words removed. Note the difference between the two sentences, and how the sentence with no filler words sounds stronger, more professional, and more confident.

Step 2: Recognizing your personal patterns.

Each person has a particular pattern when it comes to filler words. In reducing your reliance on fillers, it helps to be aware of which filler words you use most often. The same recording created in Step 1 can be used in this step as well. Listen to the recording again, write down the specific fillers you used, then tally them to see which fillers you use most often. For example, you may find that you interject the word “like” several times in each sentence, or that you say “umm” whenever there’s a break in the flow of your speech.

Once you have recognized which filler words you use most often, try to identify the situations in which you are most likely to use them. For example, many people find that they use filler words most often when feeling anxious or excited. Being intimidated by the situation or the person to whom you are speaking is another common situation in which fillers increase. Once you have recognized which situations you are more likely to use fillers in, you can take extra care to monitor your speech in those situations.

Step 3: Anticipate

Using the information you gathered from Steps 1 and 2, you should now be able to anticipate when you will most likely use filler words as well as which ones you most commonly use. This anticipation is a key tool in filler word reduction. In order to use it to your advantage, begin by choosing a specific time in your daily routine in which you will be particularly conscious of your filler word usage. For example, you may choose a meeting with your colleagues or the time in which you return your voicemails. Whichever



situation you select, during this period, closely monitor your speech and take note of when you feel tempted to use a filler word.

Step 4: Pause

Once you have noted that you are tempted to use a filler word, simply pause instead. Most people feel self-conscious using silence in a conversation, but a well-timed pause sounds far more professional and confident than filling the silence with fillers like “umm” and “well”. When you are tempted to use a filler word, simply stop for a moment. This will give you the opportunity to gather your thoughts. In addition, it gives your listener the chance to process your message, helping to make your speech more comprehensible.

Using filler words is a difficult habit to break for many speakers, but it is worth the time and effort to lessen your dependence on them. Fillers can completely derail the confident image that you have worked so hard to perfect. Using this four-step process, you can reduce your filler word usage and improve the fluency and professionalism of your speech.



Congratulations!

By reading this e-book you've taken the first step to increasing your professional prowess and communicating with clarity and confidence! Like any other skill, mastering the art of confident communication takes practice. In order to develop and maintain the skills you've learned in this book, we suggest a combination of direct and indirect practice:

Direct Practice: Direct practice involves time exclusively dedicated to honing your communicative skills. It may include some of the suggestions that have been put forth throughout this book; for example, video or audiotaping yourself and reviewing the material or asking others to provide feedback. Direct practice may also involve drills or exercises designed to systematically improve your skills. Direct practice is usually most effective in the early stages of learning a new skill.

Indirect Practice: Indirect practice involves integrating practice into your day-to-day life. Once you've pinned down the basics through direct practice, indirect practice provides the opportunity to generalize your skills to your everyday interactions and utilize them in a more functional context. One way to integrate indirect practice into your life, is to choose a specific time or event in your daily routine and consciously use it to work on your targeted skill. You will want to choose a time that involves good communicative opportunities (e.g. a meeting or returning phone calls). You will most likely want to avoid overly stressful communication exchanges (e.g. one-on-one meetings with your boss or high-stakes presentations). Although you clearly want to utilize good communication techniques during these events, using them as a time to consciously focus on communicative skills may take your mental focus away from the content of your message.

Using these practice techniques will help you to master the art of confident communication and allow it to become a natural part of your day-to-day life.



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Finally, although instructional materials such as this e-book can be helpful, many people feel that they learn best with direct guidance and feedback. Having a professional provide one-to-one instruction and advice tailored to your personal strengths and challenges can offer unique benefits and increase performance. If you feel that you may benefit from more direct guidance in communication skills and techniques, contact Corporate Speech Solutions at 212-308-7725 or visit us on the web at www.corporatespeechsolutions.com and allow our team of corporate speech-language pathologists to help you become the best communicator you can be and develop your speech to be your strongest business tool.

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Thanks for reading, and best of luck on your journey in confident communication!

