

# Don't Look Like a Liar

## Nonverbal Cues That Show Credibility and Deception

By Patti Wood MA, CSP

[www.pattiwood.net](http://www.pattiwood.net)

In the most important interviews of their careers, Gary Condit sucked in his lips and stuck out his tongue, Bill Clinton touched his nose about every four minutes and Enron's Ken Lay overacted and was over-confident. In these public relations moments, they gave us nonverbal cues that they were lying. They lost their credibility. Maintaining credibility is what public relations is all about. Can you spot a liar? Do you know how to convey truthfulness and credibility?

Nonverbal Communication is the way the subconscious mind speaks. No matter how much you want to control it, it gives clues to how you truly feel. This makes it an ideal medium for detecting lies. Eyes, head, voice and hands leak cues of withholding and deception or they can establish credibility. Do you know when someone isn't telling the truth? Here's a quick test of your body language know-how. The answers follow.

- 1 When someone is a rehearsed liar rather than just nervous,
  - a. They will answer questions quickly and give longer answers.
  - b. They will spend less time gesturing.
  - c. They will have longer pauses and shorter answers.
- 2 The best way to look honest with your body language is to
  - a. Be relaxed.
  - b. Hold a steady posture without a lot of extraneous movement.
  - c. Have your body language match whatever you are saying.
3. What is the best way to hold your hands to show truthfulness when giving a presentation?
  - a. Loosely at your sides or with one hand in your pocket.
  - b. Clasped loosely in front of you.
  - c. Palms open.
4. Which of the following actions would make you look more honest?
  - a. Leaning toward the interviewer.
  - b. Leaning back, relaxed, with your hands clasped behind your head.
  - c. Wearing a suit and tie sitting behind a desk.
5. You can tell when someone is lying most accurately by reading
  - a. Facial expressions.
  - b. The body.
  - c. The eyes.
6. What should you do with your mouth if you want to hide the truth?
  - a. Hold it still.
  - b. Maintain a slight small smile.
  - c. Be careful of pursing or licking your lips.

Answers:

1. Answer C. Liars have longer pauses, shorter answers and longer times between a question and a response than someone who is merely nervous. The rest of the answer is tricky. If you lie spontaneously in the moment you will tend to spend more time gesturing with your hands and using adapters, such as scratching your body or playing with a pen than someone who is just nervous. A rehearsed or practiced liar will try to control gestures so as not to give himself away.
2. Answer C. Your body language needs to match what you're saying. If you are lying, often your subconscious will reveal it with a lack of synchronicity. Someone may say he agrees with you while shaking his head "no," or say the quarter report is great, while rubbing his nose as if it stinks. Deception is about trying to keep something hidden. The more a person moves her body or expresses with her voice, the more we can learn. But

- being overly relaxed or controlled can work against you. Gary Condit was coached to stay still in his television interview. So he kept his face inexpressive, his upper body stiff and his legs crossed. First, he looked frozen, and then he leaked out aggression cues such as finger pointing, grasping motions and sticking out his tongue.
3. Answer C. Keep your palms open. Rehearsed liars tend to keep their hands, especially the palms, hidden and still. They may stick them in their pockets, clench them together, or hold them behind their backs. Loosely at your sides wouldn't be horrible, but don't hide them in your pockets or look like you're holding your own hand for comfort.
  4. Answer A. Leaning toward the interviewer makes you appear open and interested. Liars tend to close entrances to the body to hide the truth. They may turn away from the person they are talking to, put objects or furniture such as a desk or podium between themselves and others and most simply fold the arms and legs. When you lean back with your arms behind your head, your elbows form a cape making your head symbolically look bigger and your folded hands on your head form a crown, making you look like a royal pain.
  5. Answer B. Since we send up to 10,000 body language cues in less than a minute, we can't control them all. Our faces and eyes hide the truth more easily than the rest of the body. Even a four year old can look Mom straight in the eye, and say he didn't eat the cookies while crumbs cling to his face. However, the body, especially the lower portion, is under less conscious control.
  6. Answer C. Be careful of pursing or licking your lips. Condit pursed his lips and sucked them inward more than 14 times in his television interview. This can indicate extreme anxiety, withholding information and withholding aggression. Tight lips indicate you may be planning to keep the truth in. If you actually suck the lips part way in, you may be withholding anger. When you are nervous, your mouth becomes dry, and you lick your lips and swallow as you struggle to find the right words to say. A smile is the most common facial expression to mask emotions. It is often used to mask displeasure and anger. A real smile changes the entire face. The eyes light up. The forehead wrinkles, the eyebrows and cheek muscles rise, skin around the eyes and mouth crinkles and finally the mouth turns up. In a masking smile, nothing moves but the corners of the mouth and often they curve up rather than down.

Knowing these cues can help you send out more accurate signals of credibility face to face, in a interview and when giving a presentation. And they'll help you decipher when someone else is being less than forthcoming. People say when your thinking badly of someone that, "Its all in your mind." Now you know. "It's all in your body." Don't look like a liar.