

Video Conference



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## 2

## VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

## CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- 2.1 Define verbal communication
- 2.2 Define nonverbal communication
- 2.3 Identify and define the codes of nonverbal communication
- 2.4 Discuss examples of how verbal and nonverbal communication are related
- 2.5 Apply the KEYS approach to conduct yourself with professional excellence through verbal and nonverbal communication in the workplace

Verbal and nonverbal communication have increasingly taken place in a digital environment. The use of emojis has long since been popular on social media, but their use has also started to become a common way to give feedback even in professional environments; for example, Zoom allows users to share various emojis such as clapping hands and thumbs up during a video conference. Today, you will look at emojis, memes, and GIFs and try to deduce if they are worth being a part of your social media marketing efforts as well as teach you a thing or two that will help you use these graphics without embarrassing yourself. We have seen a significant rise in their usage for marketing purposes only in the last couple of years. The main reason for that is actually quite simple; brands and businesses noticed that emojis are a great way to connect and engage with millennials and Generation Z. Additionally, these graphics are a form of visual content, and social media craves visual content (Supan, 2017). As you read this chapter, remember to reflect on how the internet and social media have altered the way you communicate both verbally and nonverbally in the social and professional environments.

## VERBAL COMMUNICATION

What is verbal communication? **Verbal communication** encompasses both our words and our verbal fillers (e.g., *um, like*). Verbal messages are created through language. Effective communication involves accurate interpretations of others' verbal messages as meaning is cocreated. Otherwise, the meanings of the words you communicate will not be understood. As a professional, you must make effective use of your language skills and improve your abilities to interpret other people's messages. Robinson and Robinson (1982) concluded that if speakers are to be consistently efficient at conveying verbally their intended meanings to listeners, they must understand that intended meanings may not be fully conveyed by a message and that many factors can lead to a listener's failure to understand what a speaker means.

The symbols communicators use are abstract, vague, and sometimes arbitrary. Because symbols can make things a bit off or fuzzy, we have to interpret the meaning. So we construct meanings as we interact with other people and by processing the information in our own heads (Duck, 1994; Keyton & Beck, 2010). This process of meaning construction is also symbolic, because we use words to think about what things mean (Keyton & Beck, 2010; Wood, 2009). In a series of growth models, words had a stronger effect on engagement skills whereas early gesture use predicted later development of social-emotional concepts. Therefore, even in early development, symbols serve as both communication tools and mental tools to construct understanding of the social-emotional world (Vallotton & Ayoub, 2009).



“You’re on mute!” Verbal communication in collaborative work groups is essential in both face-to-face and mediated contexts, but when verbally communicating over video conferencing tools such as Zoom, technology sometimes becomes an unexpected barrier.

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When you really think about it, it is an absolute miracle that we can communicate with one another at all. Really, think about it for a moment. We have selected a bunch of arbitrary symbols we call words and gestures to represent “things.” These can be things we have never seen or never can see, such as feelings. Nevertheless, we use those symbols to express our thoughts, desires, and emotions, and somehow communication does occur. Because of the need for interpretation of meaning, being an audience-centered communicator is a must for professional excellence. It is obvious that communication affects how we are perceived by our audience(s). Still today, some people believe that communication works like a pipeline (i.e., if you send a message, the target will no doubt be reached); if you said something and another person heard it, then effective communication occurred. We should know from experience that this simply is not the way it works. With little effort, you could give a dozen examples of times when you said something and the listener completely misunderstood the message.

Let’s look at an example from the retail industry to illustrate the point. A customer comes into a grocery store and asks for green beans. Trying to provide good customer service, a manager explains, “The green beans are on Aisle 8.” Twenty minutes later, the customer is still wandering around the store frustrated. Why? Because canned green beans are on Aisle 8, fresh green beans are on Aisle 1, frozen green beans are on Aisle 14, and the prepared green beans she wanted are in the deli across from Aisle 10. “Green beans” is an arbitrary symbol with various interpretations of meaning.

Verbal communication concerns **communication rules**—shared understanding of what communication means and what constitutes appropriate communication given the context. Two kinds of rules guide communication (Pearce et al., 1979). **Regulative rules** describe when, how, where, and with whom to talk about certain things. These same rules also dictate appropriateness. For instance, it might be appropriate for your boss to call you at home after hours, but would it be appropriate for you to do the same if you had a concern about your travel schedule?

What's appropriate for the person with power or control may not be appropriate for those serving in a subordinate role. To demonstrate professional and workplace excellence, you must be able to monitor your own appropriateness when communicating. In addition, **constitutive rules** define what communication means by prompting us to count certain kinds of communication. In other words, we learn what counts as paying attention (e.g., eye contact) and showing affection (e.g., kissing, hugging), as well as what counts as being inappropriate (e.g., interrupting conversations, rolling one's eyes; Duck, 2007; Wood, 2009).

Being aware of yourself can make the difference between losing your job and nurturing a promising career. We see examples of this in the news headlines and front-page stories of our favorite magazines and newspapers. In 2021, *Jeopardy!* executive producer and host Mike Richards stepped down as host after only hosting five episodes; he stepped down due to backlash after his past offensive remarks about women, Jewish individuals, and Haiti resurfaced. Two weeks later, *Jeopardy!* permanently severed ties with Richards (Yahr, 2021). What are the ethical considerations in this situation? What might you take from this story when considering your verbal communication in the workplace? Undoubtedly, the words we say are extremely important. Yet, of equal importance is what we communicate without words.

## STEP BACK AND REFLECT

### CONFIDENT CONNIE

*As you read this passage and answer the questions, step back and reflect on what went wrong in this professional situation.*

Connie works in the accounting department of a manufacturing company. She often complains to her family and friends that her coworkers do not like her and treat her differently than they do the other staff. She is not invited to lunch outings, and she notices that people walk away when she approaches. She considers herself a friendly, outgoing person and cannot figure out what she is doing wrong. Connie believes her coworkers may resent her because she is able to work well with all her clients and is skilled in accounts reconciliations, resulting in company savings of thousands of dollars each month. She is confident in her abilities and speaks proudly in meetings, providing guidance to her teammates about work issues. She enjoys sharing her success stories and has no apprehension about asking questions in meetings. She has been with the company longer than everyone, including her boss, and she often reminds him of the history of why things are done a certain way. Connie is confident that even if her coworkers are jealous of her abilities, her boss recognizes her value as an employee. However, when she receives her performance review, she is shocked by her supervisor's comments:

"Feedback has been shared with Connie several times on her engagement in team meetings. Connie constantly repeats points discussed and closed in meetings, which is a distraction for several analysts. It is evident that Connie is having a hard time following along in meetings, as points and topics are constantly being repeated for her to understand. Feedback has been shared with Connie on staying on point and not drifting off to other tangents. At times, Connie's body language, comments, and tone of voice during meetings seem aggressive and indicate that she disagrees with her manager. This has been shared with Connie and she has been asked to improve."

### Step Back and Reflect

1. What went wrong?
2. How could Connie use the KEYS approach to improve her communication interaction?
3. How can the KEYS process be a reflexive exercise for both Connie and her manager?



## NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

What is nonverbal communication? Put simply, **nonverbal communication** (also referred to as body language) includes all those ways we communicate without words. A more technical definition for nonverbal communication is communication other than spoken or written language that creates meaning for someone (Ivy & Wahl, 2019).

The literature provides considerable support for the effectiveness of nonverbal communication as a tool for conveying thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and meaning. Research indicates that about 55% of interpersonal messages are conveyed nonverbally (Lavan, 2002). This seems logical, because most human beings are visually dominant and live in a society dominated by visual images and are thus more inclined to believe the evidence of the eyes than that of the other senses (Sampson, 1995). In fact, a widely held viewpoint among scholars is that communication is optimized when verbal and nonverbal elements operate in an integrated fashion, producing a coordinated and synchronized effect (Jones & LeBaron, 2002; Laplante & Ambady, 2003). R. Harrison and Crouch (1975) suggested that verbal communication is only the tip of the communication iceberg and that “nonverbal communication precedes and perhaps structures all subsequent communication” (p. 77).

Nonverbal symbols are everywhere, even though we tend to use verbal forms for our most formal communications. In fact, the nonverbal system accounts for 65% to 93% of the total meaning of communication (Birdwhistell, 1970; Mehrabian, 1981). Nolan (1975) concluded that the many theories of language evolution had one important argument in common: “Nonverbal behavior precedes verbal behavior in the evolution of communication” (p. 101).

### ETHICAL CONNECTION TAKING THE SPOTLIGHT

*As you read this passage and answer the questions, consider how the way you communicate has an ethical dimension.*

Sheila and David work for an advertising firm and are partners assigned to work on a major advertising campaign. Sheila is a seasoned account manager, while David is a recent college graduate hired as a junior account executive. He is very enthusiastic and has several ideas that he shares excitedly with Sheila via email. Sheila never responds to the email. In a meeting with management to propose their ideas, however, Sheila takes the lead on presenting; as a result of her nonverbal and verbal communication, management concludes that she was responsible for the work. In fact, when commended on the ideas, she accepts the praise and makes no reference to David. David, by contrast, is afraid to say anything, and his bosses have no clue that the majority of the ideas were his.

#### Questions to Consider

1. What are the ethical considerations and dilemmas in this scenario?
2. What did Sheila communicate or not communicate during her presentation, and how?
3. How could David use his verbal and nonverbal skills in the future to keep this situation from happening?
4. What do you believe should be the appropriate, professional response in this situation?
5. Does communicator intent affect the ethics in situations such as this?
6. Do you believe the outcome of this situation would have changed if David had talked directly to Sheila instead of using email?

What kinds of behavior are included in the term *nonverbal communication*? Your “walk, stance, posture, and footsteps are a form of nonverbal communication. What you wear and how you look, move, and gesture, as well as your facial and eye expressions all count as nonverbal communication” (Ivy & Wahl, 2019). What are the purposes of nonverbal communication? Why is nonverbal communication important?

Argyle (1988) suggested that nonverbal behavior serves four purposes. The first function is to express emotion. Consider a moment when you may have had a conflict with a friend or family member. When that person asked you what was wrong, you probably responded, “Nothing,” but you could not control your facial expressions, which indicated otherwise. Displaying appropriate emotion is vital to professional excellence. One should show passion and drive but also demonstrate resilience and be able to triumph over day-to-day disappointments in the workplace. Could you imagine a classroom environment where students displayed extreme emotion each time they received a grade that was lower than expected? How do you think your productivity would be affected?



Does it ever feel like you spend forever choosing the right emoji when messaging somebody? Emojis can be an effective tool in nonverbal communication because they communicate attitudes and tone which can be difficult to convey through writing.

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The second function of nonverbal communication is to convey interpersonal attitudes. Being skilled in observing and interpreting the nonverbal behavior of others will give you an edge over other professionals. For example, a young woman competing for a promotion with another employee noticed that her coworker would always approach their boss with issues first thing in the morning. The coworker would then complain that he had to repeat himself and that their supervisor seemed to forget what he had been told. The young woman observed that

her supervisor always seemed rushed and distracted until he had his coffee and had checked and responded to pressing emails. She made sure always to approach him when he seemed more relaxed and focused. When he offered her the promotion, her supervisor said he appreciated her timing and how she always kept him in the loop.

The third function is to present one's personality, such as character, disposition, or temperament. Think about the different work environments you frequent during your week—the bank, the school library, restaurants, and so on. What are the character traits of employees at each of these establishments? Do you expect that the librarian will be as outgoing as a server in a crowded bar? Make a list of the top five jobs you have considered, and write down some of the personality traits that might be expected. How might your verbal and nonverbal communication vary between the positions?

Finally, the fourth purpose of nonverbal communication is to accompany verbal communication. Ekman (1965) specified the important ways that verbal and nonverbal behaviors interrelate during human communication. Nonverbal communication can simply *repeat* what is said verbally. It can also *conflict* with what is being said. Verbal and nonverbal communication can be incongruous, or in disagreement. Think of a time at home, work, or school when you experienced someone saying he or she was being truthful yet could not look you in the eye. Did you assume that person was being deceptive? Or think of a time when a loved one said, with a raised voice and tear-filled eyes, that nothing was bothering him or her. When verbal communication carries one message and body language a conflicting message, the result is likely to be communication failure (Jones & LeBaron, 2002; Laplante & Ambady, 2003).

Ekman (1965) also found that nonverbal communication can *complement* or accent a specific part of the verbal message. This can include placing emphasis on certain words by slowing down your speech or changing your tone. Nonverbal behavior can also be a *substitute* for a word or phrase within a verbal message. How many of you have ever nodded instead of saying yes when your professor asked you if you understood the curriculum? Or perhaps you have looked away to avoid eye contact instead of saying that you do not want to be called on to answer the question being asked.

Nonverbal communication may also *accent* (amplify) or *moderate* (tone down) parts of the verbal message. As well, nonverbal communication is distinct in its ability to *regulate* verbal behaviors by coordinating our verbal and nonverbal behavior in the production of our messages or those of our communication partner (Ekman, 1965). Imagine the last time you had a conversation with a roommate or friend. How did you determine whose turn it was to speak? Did you use eye contact to end the conversation or to let the other person know you were listening? What hand gestures or sounds might you have made to show your partner that you wanted to speak?

Recall the definition of human communication as presented earlier in the text: the process of understanding our experiences and the experiences of others through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages. In fact, in an effort to categorize the meaning associated with nonverbal behavior, Mehrabian (1981) identified three dimensions that indicate how we use nonverbal communication to make sense of things in both personal and professional contexts:

- *Immediacy*: We react to things by evaluating them as positive or negative, good or bad.
- *Status*: We perceive behaviors that indicate various aspects of status to us—for example, rich or poor, strong or weak, superior or subordinate.
- *Responsiveness*: We perceive activity as being active or passive. This signals the intensity of our feelings about a person or subject.



Remember that our cultural backgrounds can determine how physically close we get to others and how close we let others get to us.

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Knapp and Hall (2009) proposed that these three dimensions are basic responses to our environment and are reflected in the way we assign meaning to both verbal and nonverbal behavior.

Now that we have explored the value and importance of nonverbal communication and how we assign meaning, it is crucial that we examine the *components* of nonverbal communication to understand it on a deeper level. Although we focus on these nonverbal communication codes in Western culture, remember that perceptions or reactions to nonverbal communication can vary in other cultures.

## CODES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

The primary categories or **codes** of nonverbal communication include vocal expression; space, environment, and territory; physical appearance; body movement, gestures, and posture; facial and eye expressions; and touch (see Table 2.1; Ivy & Wahl, 2019).

### Vocal Expression

**Vocalics**, sometimes referred to as paralanguage, refers to how people use their voices to communicate and express themselves (Foley & Gentile, 2010; Ivy & Wahl, 2019). Vocalic cues include tone (quality) of voice, volume, articulation, pitch (highness or lowness), rate of speech, and use of silence. The voice reveals our emotions, our thoughts, and the relationships we have with others. A growing body of evidence from multidisciplinary research in acoustics, engineering, linguistics, phonetics, and psychology suggests that an authoritative, expressive voice can make a big difference in one's professional career. Scientific studies show that someone with authority characteristically speaks low, slow, and with vocal intonation (Louët, 2012). Vocalics provide



information about our self-confidence and knowledge and influence how we are perceived by others (Hinkle, 2001). Think about the direct impact that tone of voice can have in a professional setting. What does your voice say about you to others?

**TABLE 2.1 ■ Nonverbal Communication Codes: Consider the Professional Context**

Nonverbal Code	Consider the Professional Context
Kinesics (body movement, gestures, and posture)	How do you think gestures and body movement impact professional contexts?
Facial/eye behavior	Can you think of some examples of professional face and eye behavior? How can face and eye behavior lead to negative perceptions?
Vocalics (paralanguage)	What vocal qualities do you perceive as professional? Unprofessional?
Space/territory	How can space and territorial violations impact business and professional contexts?
Touch	Can you think of positive ways to use touch in professional contexts? In contrast, can you think of some negative uses of touch?
Environment	What are the qualities of a professional environment?
Physical appearance	In what ways does physical appearance impact business and professional communication?

## Space

The impact of space on communication is called **proxemics**, or how people create and use space and distance, as well as how they behave to protect and defend that space (Foley & Gentile, 2010; Hall, 1959, 1966; Ivy & Wahl, 2019). Violations of territory and our personal space can be detrimental in business and professional settings.

Have you ever been on a crowded elevator and been uncomfortable because it seemed as though people were invading your personal space? When you go to the library, how many of you place your backpacks on the table or chair next to you to claim your space? What would happen if someone sat down in that chair anyway? Violations can be alarming, possibly even threatening. Our relationships with others, power and status, and our cultural backgrounds determine how physically close we get to others and how close we let others get to us (Burgoon & Jones, 1976).

What preferences do you have related to space and distance? Edward T. Hall (1963) identified four zones of space in middle-class U.S. culture. The first is the *intimate zone* (0 to 18 inches). This is usually reserved for our significant others, family members, and closest friends. It is rare that a stranger can enter this space without making us feel violated. These interactions mostly occur in private and signify a high level of connection, trust, and affection. The *personal zone* (18 inches to about 4 feet) is reserved for personal relationships with casual acquaintances and friends. The *social zone* (4 to 12 feet) is the distance at which we usually talk to strangers or conduct business. If you went to your professor's office to discuss a grade, for example, you would most likely remain at a distance of 4 to 12 feet. The *public zone* (more than 12 feet) refers to the distance typical of large, formal, public events. In large lecture classrooms, campaign rallies, or public speeches, the distance between speaker and audience is usually more than 12 feet. Understanding these spatial zones is important to your everyday nonverbal communication competency.



People became increasingly aware of space and distance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Environment

The constructed or natural surroundings that influence your communicative decisions, attitude, and mood are termed the **environment** (Foley & Gentile, 2010; Ivy & Wahl, 2019). People are influenced by environmental factors such as architecture, design, doors, windows, color, lighting, smell, seating arrangements, temperature, and cleanliness (P. Harris & Sachau, 2005; Jackson, 2005). Take a moment to think about what preferences would be related to your work environment. How does the environment (e.g., temperature, lighting, color, furniture) impact your communication?

Consider other things in the environment that can serve as nonverbal cues about who you are. These environmental factors you create and control are what serve as nonverbal messages to others who enter the space. As one scholar put it, “People cannot be understood outside of their environmental context” (Peterson, 1992, p. 154). The environments we create for ourselves often speak volumes about those relationships we consider most important (Lohmann et al., 2003). For instance, negative emotions and aggressive behavior of employees are two noticeable reasons for increased organizational costs (e.g., poor productivity, high staff turnover, low organizational commitment; Alarcon, 2011; Banks et al., 2012).

The way we perceive our environment and the environments of others is an important factor in how we respond. Overall, we perceive the environment in six distinct ways (Knapp & Hall, 2006). The first is *formality*, which is an understanding people have of environment that relates to how comfortably they can behave, in light of their expectations. Sometimes it is more about the atmosphere of a certain place than the place itself. The second way we can perceive the environment is *warmth*. This means that the environment gives off a certain sense of warmth, comfort, or a welcoming context based on our past or current experience. Think of a favorite smell from your childhood, for example. Smells in an environment contribute to our perception of warmth.



People are influenced by their environments. What are the nonverbal messages in this professional office environment that could impact communication?

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*Privacy* is another way the environment can be perceived. Do you prefer a crowded and noisy restaurant or a peaceful and quiet one? Do you choose a seat in the back of a movie theater or in the middle next to many other moviegoers? Another perception we have is *familiarity*, which means that we tend to react cautiously when we meet new people or are confronted with an unfamiliar environment. Not knowing where we are and what to expect makes us feel less comfortable. We like knowing what to expect and how to behave in the environment.

Another perception of environment is that of *constraint*. Think about your living situation. Do you like sharing a room or home with another person? Whenever we feel that our personal space is being invaded, we feel constrained. Most of our perceptions of constraint are shaped by the amount of privacy and space available to us. The final perception of environment is *distance*. Our perceptions of distance in an environment pertain to physical arrangements. We like to know how far away the closest door is or how many people can fit into an elevator. We create distance by avoiding eye contact or taking a longer route to avoid saying hello to a person we find annoying. Review the tips focused on establishing an effective workspace in Tools for Professional Excellence 2.2.

**TABLE 2.2** ■ Tools for Professional Excellence. Setting Up an Effective Workspace

*To set up an effective workspace, take note of these useful tips:*

Key Points	Practical Tips
Think beyond the desk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incorporate movement into the office: A workspace that breaks the “bond between user and desk” can bring physical and psychological benefits to its employees.</li> <li>● Create work areas where employees can both sit and stand.</li> <li>● Bring in different sizes of tables, chairs, and even sofas for meetings or lunch breaks.</li> </ul>

(Continued)

**TABLE 2.2** ■ Tools for Professional Excellence (*Continued*)*To set up an effective workspace, take note of these useful tips:*

Key Points	Practical Tips
Your office is an extension of your culture and brand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider what you want your workspace to say about the culture of your company, which can help foster a sense of belonging in employees.</li> <li>Think carefully about what furnishings and décor items are used in the workspace.</li> <li>Don't be afraid of color: A workspace that is all white or gray can have negative health effects on employees, while a workspace that incorporates colors like blue or red can help keep employees productive and motivated.</li> </ul>
Include an area for meaningful play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate a play area to help employees break free from the monotony of email and phone calls.</li> <li>While something as simple as a couch or two will do, don't be afraid to get creative and incorporate games, such as ping-pong, into the play area.</li> <li>"Play means connection": Play areas can help employees build bonds with one another and fosters communication and success.</li> </ul>
Allow employees to design their own workspace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let employees have a say in the design process, especially when it comes to expressing who they are; doing so can boost employee morale, which further improves the company's productivity.</li> <li>Give employees some control in how the workspace should look by letting them pick the color, allowing them to personally decorate their section of the workspace, or inviting them to bring in their pets.</li> </ul>

Source: Vozza, S. (2013, March 11). Rethink your office design: Designing a more effective workspace. *Entrepreneur*. Retrieved and adapted from [www.entrepreneur.com/article/226034](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/226034)

## Physical Appearance

**Physical appearance** refers to the way our bodies and overall appearance nonverbally communicate to others and impact how we view of ourselves in everyday life (Ivy & Wahl, 2019). Physical appearance plays an important role in communication. Making the connection between physical appearance and nonverbal communication is important for two reasons: (1) The way we represent ourselves and our physical appearance reveal a lot about who we are, and (2) the physical appearance of other people influences our perception of them, how we talk to them, how approachable they are, how attractive or unattractive we think they are, and so on. Clothing is also a part of our physical appearance that is often critical to professional situations. Clothing helps you convey a sense of professionalism. Clothing and other appearance aspects, termed **artifacts** (e.g., jewelry, tattoos, piercings, makeup, cologne, eyeglasses), send nonverbal messages and help others form perceptions of us, both good and bad (Okoro & Washington, 2011; Roach, 1997). The nonverbal message sent by your clothing is a powerful part of professional excellence. Appearance is extremely important in our society. In fact, according to Armour (2005), employers also agree that physical appearance matters. An intranet software firm in the Northeast requires formal business attire on the job. Men must wear ties, cannot have beards, and cannot wear their hair past shoulder length. "Clients like to see a workforce that looks conservative," says the chief operating officer. That being said, many workplaces have embraced less formal dress codes after having their employees return to the office during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hartmans, 2021). If you are unsure about how to dress for your workplace, it is usually best to err on the conservative side and dress more formally. Although the criteria for what is acceptable in each environment might vary, physical appearance undoubtedly can affect one's perceived professional excellence.





When a large portion of the workforce started working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations' dress codes became less formal.

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## Body Movement

**Kinesics** is a general term for the study of human movement, gestures, and posture (Birdwhistell, 1970; Foley & Gentile, 2010; Ivy & Wahl, 2019). Kinesics provides valuable information about a person to others. Have you ever heard someone make reference to how a certain person carries themselves? Have you ever talked about a person who has a certain presence in the room? Perhaps you have said, "They walk like a leader." Some people carry themselves in ways that convey pride and confidence, while others have poor posture and seem to lack confidence. Ekman and Friesen (1969b) classified movement and gestures according to how they function in human interaction. The five categories of kinesics are emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adapters.

**Emblems** are specific, widely understood meanings in a given culture that can actually substitute for a word or phrase. An example of this would be placing your pointer finger in front of your lips to indicate to someone to be quiet. **Illustrators** are gestures that complement, enhance, or substitute for the verbal message. If you were describing the length of the biggest fish you ever caught, you might use your hands to illustrate the size. Or when you are giving directions, you might point to show which way to go. **Affect displays** are facial expressions and gestures that display emotion. A smile can be an affect display for happiness, while a scowl can display frustration. **Regulators** are gestures used to control the turn-taking in conversations. For example, you might make a hand motion to encourage someone or raise your own hand to get a turn at speaking. When we are eager to speak, we typically make eye contact, raise our eyebrows, open our mouths, take in a breath, and lean forward slightly. We do the opposite if we do not want to answer. Head nods, vocal expressions (such as *um*), facial expressions, body postures, and eye contact can be seen as connectors that keep the conversation together and make it coherent. When these sorts of nonverbal cues are absent from a conversation, it might trigger a negative reaction, and we could come to believe that our conversational partner is not listening at all. **Adapters** are gestures we use to release tension. Playing with your hands, poking, picking, fidgeting, scratching, and interacting nonverbally with your environment are all adapters that reveal your attempts to regulate situations and to make yourself feel more at ease and able to function effectively. Adapters can alert us that another person is uncomfortable in some way (Ekman & Friesen, 1969b).

## YOUR COMMUNICATION INTERACTION

### TO TWEET OR NOT TO TWEET

*As you read the passage below, consider what would be a more effective communication strategy in this situation.*

Ryan is the new digital media intern at a public relations firm. During one of his first meetings, members of the digital media team outline new hashtags they would like to test on the company's social media accounts, and get consumer feedback. Eager to show off his social media savvy, Ryan immediately logs on to his personal Twitter account and shoots off a series of tweets using the new hashtags. Later that day, Ryan receives an email from the head of the digital media team, reprimanding him for using a personal social media account while on the job.

#### Questions to Consider

1. Was Ryan justified when he tweeted during the meeting? Why or why not?
2. To promote the company, what other communication channel(s) could Ryan have used instead of his personal Twitter account?
3. When, if ever, is it acceptable to use a personal social media account while on the job?
4. If you were the head of the digital media team, how would you handle Ryan's situation?

### Facial Behavior

Facial expressions (including the study of eye behavior, called **oculesics**) are also critical codes that have been studied by nonverbal communication scholars (Ivy & Wahl, 2019). The face can be considered a gallery for our emotional displays (Gosselin et al., 1995). What does another person's face tell you about them? What emotion is the person expressing? How is the person feeling? Are your coworkers surprised to see you? Did your colleagues find your presentation to be entertaining, or were they disappointed? Your face and eye behavior play a huge role in the messages you send in business and professional contexts.

It is important not only to have a basic understanding of the emotions communicated by the face but also to be aware of how we manage our faces in daily interactions. Social norms and communication expectations in our culture set the rules for what kinds of emotional expressions are appropriate in certain situations. Facial management techniques are categories of behavior studied by Ekman and Friesen (1969a, 1969b) that determine the appropriate facial response for a given situation. The four most common techniques are neutralization, masking, intensification, and deintensification.

The process of using facial expressions to erase how we really feel is called **neutralization**. People who neutralize their facial expressions are often referred to as having a poker face. **Masking** means hiding an expression connected to a felt emotion and replacing it with an expression more appropriate to the situation. If we use an expression that exaggerates how we feel about something, it is called **intensification**. By contrast, if we reduce the intensity of our facial expression connected to a certain emotion, it is called **deintensification**.

A significant part of facial expressions involves use of the eyes. About 80% of the information in our everyday surroundings is taken in visually (Morris, 1985). Kleinke (1986) purports that eye contact and gaze functions provide information, regulate interaction, express intimacy, exercise social norms, and facilitate personal, situational, and relational goals. Evasive glances and limited-duration eye contact on the part of a communicator tend to reduce compliance with requests (Gueguen & Jacob, 2002). What can people tell about you by looking into your eyes?

## Touch

Touch, also called **haptics** in nonverbal research, is the most powerful form of nonverbal communication. However, it's also the most misunderstood and has the potential for severely negative consequences if not enacted appropriately (Ivy & Wahl, 2019). Several different systems for categorizing touch have been developed to help us better understand this complex code of nonverbal communication. One of the best means of classifying touch behavior was developed by Heslin (1974). The first, **functional/professional touch**, serves a specific function. These touches typically take place within the context of a professional relationship and are low in intimacy. An example would be the essence of greeting rituals in business situations, the *professional handshake* (Hlemstra, 1999). The handshake is critical to making a good first impression as a professional, although handshakes fell out of favor during the COVID-19 pandemic and were often replaced with elbow bumps to maintain better social distancing. As handshakes have made a return in many parts of the world, think about what you look for in a handshake. What does a professional handshake feel like?

**Social/polite touch** is connected to cultural norms, such as hugs or pats on the back. Once again, these touches convey relatively low intimacy within a relationship, whereas **friendship/warmth touch** is the type people use to show their platonic affection toward each other. Hugs and kisses on the cheek might be exchanged between two close friends, for example. **Love/intimacy touch**, by contrast, is highly personal and intimate. People communicate strong feelings of affection toward each other with these kinds of touches; in this case, hugs may last longer, and kisses may be on the lips. The last category involves **sexual arousal**. These touches are extremely intimate.

## FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Developing interpersonal, verbal, and nonverbal communication skills requires you to differentiate between the content and relational layers of messages. As you communicate with other people, your messages have two layers (Dillard et al., 1999; Watzlawick et al., 1967). The first is the content layer. The **content layer** consists of the “information being explicitly discussed” (Adler & Proctor, 2007, p. 16). The content layer may include descriptive information such as the time of a meeting, a project due date, or the names of the coworkers assigned to a team. You exchange content with others to function and retrieve basic information.

The second layer is relational. The **relational layer** reveals “how you feel about the other person; whether you like or dislike the other person, feel in control or subordinate, feel comfortable or anxious, and so on” (Adler & Proctor, 2007, p. 16). The relational layer may be communicated by your choice of words. For example, an executive may call her employees by their first names, while the employees are required to refer to the executive as Mrs. Villarreal. The difference in formality of names signifies a difference in control. The relational level can also be communicated nonverbally through tone of voice, use of space, and eye contact.

For example, Jason is really nervous about making a deadline, but he can't finish until Rachel completes the financial section of the project. Jason could ask Rachel, “What time will you be done with financials?” to retrieve a specific time reference, such as “Sometime this evening.” These words reflect the content layer. If Jason wants to send the message that he's annoyed with Rachel, he could add a negative tone: “What *time* will you be done with financials?” If Jason is indeed annoyed, then he has effectively communicated both the content and relational layers of his message. However, if Jason did not intend to express annoyance, then his message is ineffective on the relational level.

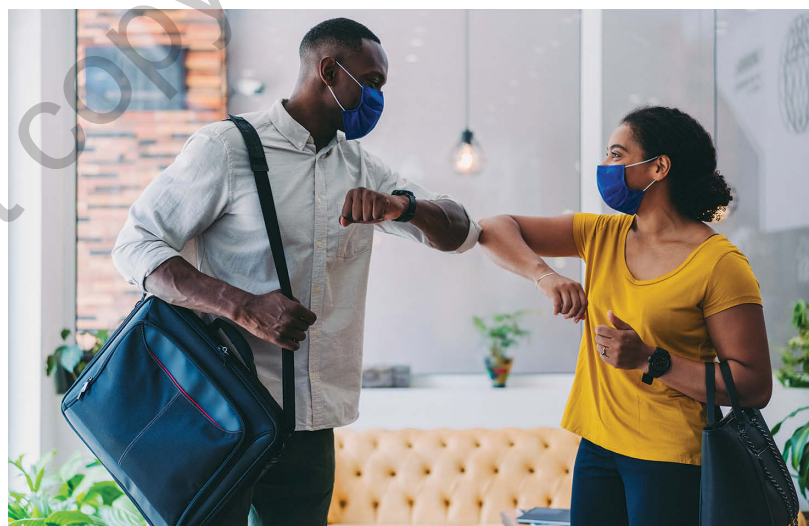
There are communicators out there who do not pay attention to the relational layer of their messages. As a result, they don't realize how they're coming across to others. To achieve professional excellence, you must think beyond the content layer of your messages and also assess the relational layer. This can be supported by using the KEYS process.

### Verbal and Nonverbal Communication and Their Impact on Professions

In this chapter, we have explored verbal and nonverbal communication—why they are important, their definitions, their principles, and their components. As you consider your professional goals, think about how you will use verbal and nonverbal communication to succeed in your career. We have included the following examples of the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication in a variety of industries. Even if your desired profession is not listed in the sections below, know that developing your professional excellence and communication competence is invaluable no matter what path you may take in life (see Table 2.3).

**TABLE 2.3** ■ Action Items. Skills for Observing Nonverbal Communication

Skill	Strategy	Application
Listen	Listen for different verbal inflections and tone of voice.	Watch a political speech and observe the ways that vocalics influence message reception.
Observe	Inspect nonverbal cues to determine how a person responds to verbal communication.	Pay attention to the body language of people as you give them either positive or negative reinforcement.
Understand	Gain data from multiple interactions with different people in an attempt to generalize your findings.	After several communication interactions, step back and reflect on whether there were any nonverbal cues that are reliable across contexts.



The handshake is critical to making a good first impression. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many people replaced handshakes with elbow bumps and greetings from afar to help maintain social distancing.

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### Customer Service and Sales

Recall the importance of proxemics, or the impact of space on communication. Manning and Reece (1989) found that success in productivity and sales was linked to the distance between sales representatives and prospects, salesperson posture, handshake techniques, facial expressions, arm movements, hand movements, and placement of the legs and feet. Those sales representatives who rely primarily on the spoken word to communicate with prospects may be neglecting an important tool for conveying their ideas. In addition, Leigh and Summers (2002) conducted an investigation that examined the effectiveness of nonverbal communication in a sales context. Using recorded presentations, they found that nonverbal cues (eye gaze, speech hesitations, gestures, clothing, and posture) influenced the experimental buyers' perceptions of the sales representative and their evaluation of the sales presentation.

### Journalism and Television Broadcasting

Those in the public eye must demonstrate effective nonverbal and verbal communication. How many times have you seen a clip of an on-camera flub being played over and over again on TikTok, YouTube, or the local news? In the opinion of some scholars, as well as television commentators, arrogant body language on the part of many journalists in the United States has led to low public respect and esteem for them (Lehrer, 1998).

### Public Service

Individuals who work in environments such as libraries or government offices (e.g., Department of Motor Vehicles, utility companies) are sometimes criticized for their communication and viewed as distant and unhelpful. Evidence indicates that individuals who are trained in nonverbal communication can replace negative perceptions of themselves with positive ones (Sampson, 1995).

### Hospitality Management

Customer service is especially important in the hotel and restaurant industries. A number of hotel and restaurant managers have improved their organizations' image among guests by providing client services employees (e.g., hosts, servers, desk clerks, bellhops) with training in verbal and nonverbal communication (Jafari & Way, 1994). In restaurants, eye contact, facial expression, body position, and posture of the staff, including servers and cashiers, affect how customers rate the value of the service (W. B. Martin, 1986).

### Medical Professions

Many people can probably share a story about an unpleasant experience at the doctor's office. As physicians compete to attract and retain a strong client base, their services can be interpreted positively by potential patients through correct body language on the part of the physicians and their employees. Patients often choose a physician based on their perceived image of the doctor, as revealed by verbal and nonverbal communications (Hill & Garner, 1991).

### Teaching Professions

There is evidence that the nonverbal communication of teachers influences the evaluation direction (positive or negative) and level of performance they receive from their students (Babad et al., 2003). Consider the different teaching and communication styles of your current professors. What do you find are the common communication traits of the professors you enjoy most?



Companies within the service and food industries often compete to provide the best products and service to their customers. Chick-fil-A is well known for its focus on customer service. What does good customer service look and sound like?

iStockphoto/ivanastar

### Legal Professions

A study has indicated that lawyers can project a favorable impression of themselves and their firms for prospective clients through sustained eye contact and other forms of body language, such as an erect but relaxed sitting position and close proximity to the clients (Clarke, 1989).



Television shows like NBC's *Law and Order* can shape our general perception of various professional roles. In your view, do you think the verbal and communication skills (or a lack of them) portrayed by characters in television shows influence our expectations of medical as well as other professionals?

iStockphoto/MattGush

## Accounting and Finance

In the same vein as lawyers, accountants can benefit through the technique of maintained and appropriate eye contact, good posture, and close proximity to clients (Pickholz & Zimmerman, 2002).

## Management (Private and Public)

Managers in both business and not-for-profit organizations can more effectively convey ideas to their employees through correct use of nonverbal communication (Hancock, 1999). Further, job evaluations of employees by their supervisors have been found to correlate with smiling, gaze, hand movement, and body orientation (DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999). In a similar vein, managers can effectively convey impressions of empathy and power through body language (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000).

## KEYS TO EXCELLENCE IN VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

In the opening of this chapter, we discussed the ways verbal and nonverbal communication can be conveyed in different communication contexts. Do you believe that this also affects your business communication? Think about how using the KEYS strategies can positively affect your nonverbal communication with others. The first step, *know yourself*, asks you to inventory the types of nonverbal cues you display to others. This can be difficult, but try to be aware even of the small, unconscious nonverbal cues you create. Sometimes the worst nonverbal cues we display are the ones we are not even aware of making.

The next step, *evaluate the professional context*, requires that you assess what nonverbal signals are considered acceptable in your workplace. Are your meetings informal, or is there a set decorum on how people interact? Notice how both your coworkers and superiors convey nonverbal cues during workplace interactions, and gauge how your nonverbal cues line up with those of others in your company.

The third step, *your communication interaction*, involves taking an immediate reflexive inventory of both your nonverbal communication and your partner's. How do you react to your partner's nonverbal signals? How do they react to yours? Think about what sets you at ease when communicating with others, and try to accomplish the same goal when talking with customers, employees, or superiors. The more open people feel when talking with you, the more likely they are to disclose information more honestly and comfortably.

The final task, *step back and reflect*, requires you to analyze your communication after the interaction has ended. Did you walk away feeling satisfied with your nonverbal communication? Did your communication partner seem at ease when talking with you? Assess what seemed to be the most effective nonverbal cues and which ones appeared to create a negative perception.

### EVALUATE THE PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

#### A DAY WITH THE CHIEF

*As you evaluate the passage below, consider whether this behavior is appropriate for this professional context.*

Mark is a top-performing salesperson at a pharmaceutical supply company. As a reward for his performance, he is treated to a trip to the corporate office in California

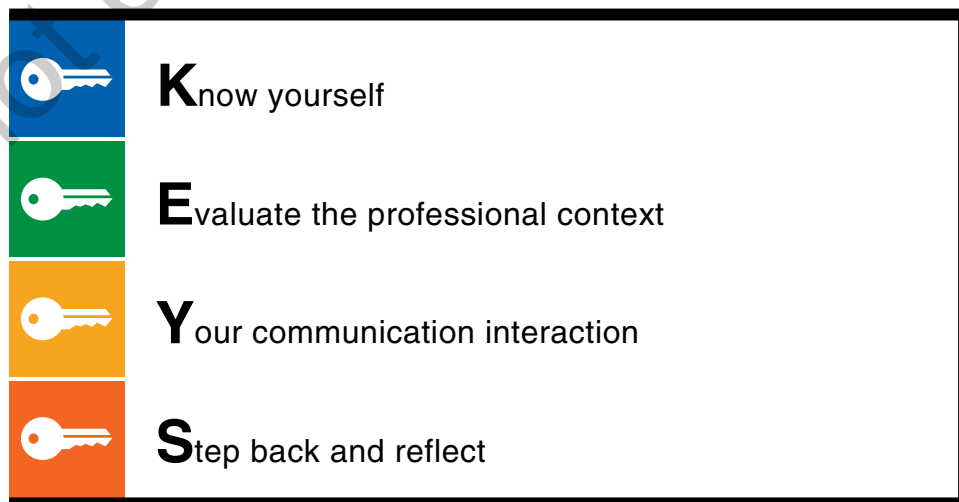
to meet the CEO, Ms. Mills. Ms. Mills has a reputation for being harsh, stern, and hard to work with. Mark's coworkers warned him about interacting with her, stating that she rarely makes eye contact, never smiles, and dislikes being approached unless she initiates the conversation. Although he is excited to travel, he is also nervous about what he and Ms. Mills might talk about. He prepares by thinking about how he can share his sales strategies and techniques. On the day of the meeting, he waits patiently for Ms. Mills's assistant to call him into her office. When he is escorted in to meet her, he is shocked by welcoming and personable behavior from Ms. Mills. He approaches, shakes her hand, and waits for her permission to sit. Ms. Mills is nothing like her reputation indicated. The meeting is going well and Ms. Mills asks Mark several thoughtful questions about why he is successful, ways the staff can be supported, and how the company fits in with his professional goals. Mark feels more and more comfortable as she leans forward to listen intently to what he is saying. Mark loosens his tie, crosses his legs, and begins sharing stories of how he feels his immediate supervisor has dropped the ball on more than one occasion and that the team would be better if more money were allocated to incentives and bonuses. Mark immediately sees Ms. Mills's eyes begin to squint and her brow furrow. She stands up abruptly and says in a gruff voice that their time is up and that her assistant will show him out.

### Questions to Consider

1. Given the professional context, what would you have done the same and/or differently if you were in Mark's position?
2. Do you think Mark accurately evaluated the context? Why or why not?
3. What communication factors led to the change in the CEO's disposition?
4. How could the KEYS process help Mark improve his communication skills?

Much like the relationships between traditional and new media, new venues for business communication can help or hinder your professional career. Remember that nonverbal communication does take place in digital contexts, and learn how to use nonverbal cues appropriately. This can lead to better (and more honest) communication and allow you to practice professional excellence in the workplace.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ The KEYS Process





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now that you have finished reading this chapter, you should be able to

### Define verbal communication:

- Verbal communication is both our words and verbal fillers (e.g., *um, like*). Verbal messages are created through language. Effective communication involves accurate interpretations of others' verbal messages as meaning is cocreated.

### Define nonverbal communication:

- Nonverbal communication (also referred to as body language) includes all those ways we communicate without words.

### Appraise your verbal and nonverbal communication skills:

- Developing interpersonal, verbal, and nonverbal communication skills requires you to differentiate between the content and relational layers of messages. As you communicate with other people, your messages have two layers.
- The content layer consists of the “information being explicitly discussed” (Adler & Proctor, 2007, p. 16). The content layer may include descriptive information such as the time of a meeting, a project due date, or the names of the coworkers assigned to a team.
- The relational layer reveals “how you feel about the other person; whether you like or dislike the other person, feel in control or subordinate, feel comfortable or anxious, and so on” (Adler & Proctor, 2007, p. 16). The relational layer may be communicated by your choice of words.

### Discuss examples of how verbal and nonverbal communication are related:

- Some communicators do not pay attention to the relational layer of their messages. As a result, they don't realize how they're coming across to others. To achieve professional excellence, you must think beyond the content layer of your messages and also assess the relational layer.

### Apply the KEYS approach to conduct yourself with professional excellence through verbal and nonverbal communication in the workplace:

- The first step, know yourself, asks you to inventory the types of nonverbal cues you display to others. This can be difficult, but try to be aware even of the small, unconscious nonverbal cues you create. Sometimes the worst nonverbal cues we display are the ones we are not even aware of making.
- The second step, evaluate the professional context, requires that you assess what nonverbal signals are considered acceptable in your workplace. Are your meetings informal, or is there a set decorum for how people interact? Notice how both your coworkers and superiors convey nonverbal cues during workplace interactions, and gauge how your nonverbal cues line up with those of others in your company.
- The third step, your communication interaction, involves taking an immediate reflexive inventory of both your nonverbal communication and your partner's. Think about what sets you at ease when communicating with others, and try to accomplish the same goal when talking with customers, employees, or superiors. The more open people feel when

talking with you, the more likely they are to disclose information more honestly and comfortably.

- The final task, step back and reflect, requires you to analyze your communication after the interaction has ended. Did you walk away feeling satisfied with your nonverbal communication? Did your communication partner seem at ease when talking with you? Assess what nonverbal cues seemed the most effective and which ones appeared to create a negative perception.

### EXPLORE

1. Write down a few examples of times in which you saw an emoji, GIF, or meme used inappropriately in a professional or academic setting. If you cannot think of any specific examples, identify situations when it would be appropriate and inappropriate to use an emoji, GIF, or meme in professional or academic settings.
2. Observe a social gathering, and compare and contrast the nonverbal displays present versus what you would see in a business or professional setting. Are there significant nonverbal communication differences when people are relaxing or at work? List several examples that support or refute this claim.
3. Watch any video of your choosing that features someone giving a speech or presentation to a group of people. In what ways does the speaker blend verbal and nonverbal communication? Write a brief statement describing how nonverbal cues can both enhance and hurt verbal communication.

### REVIEW

1. Define *verbal* and *nonverbal communication*.
2. Explain the difference between regulative rules and constitutive rules.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to how people use their voices to communicate and express themselves.
4. The impact of space on communication, or how people create and use space and distance, is known as \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The constructed or natural surroundings that influence your communicative decisions, attitude, and mood refer to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. List and briefly describe the six different perceptions of environment.
7. The general term for the study of human movement, gestures, and posture is \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Identify the four facial management techniques that determine the appropriate facial response for a given situation.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What two rules guide communication? Why is appropriateness important when communicating? Share an example of a time when you experienced inappropriate communication. Who was the communicator? Why was it inappropriate?

2. Ethical consideration: In a workplace, when, if ever, is it appropriate to verbally communicate something that is not true? Does this apply to your personal relationships? Ask three people this same question, and note their responses.
3. What are the principles of nonverbal communication? Discuss at least two nonverbal communication codes. Which codes discussed in this chapter are the most important to you as a professional?
4. Name three reasons why nonverbal communication is important. Work through a personal example of a time when you needed to improve your verbal or nonverbal communication. What changes would you have made in the situation?
5. Step back and reflect on a time when you received criticism at work or school. How did you respond verbally? How did you respond nonverbally? How did the environment contribute to your communication?

### Know Yourself

#### Nonverbal Communication

As you read the index below and answer the questions, think about how this knowledge can help you be a better communicator.

#### Nonverbal Immediacy Scale—Observer Report

This measure will allow you to assess your own nonverbal immediacy behaviors.

*Directions:* The following statements describe the ways some people behave while talking with or to others. Please indicate in the space at the left of each item the degree to which you believe the statement applies to [fill in the target person's name or description]. Please use the following 5-point scale:

1 = *never*; 2 = *rarely*; 3 = *occasionally*; 4 = *often*; 5 = *very often*.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I use my hands and arms to gesture while talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I touch others on the shoulder or arm while talking to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I use a monotone or dull voice while talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I look over or away from others while talking to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I move away from others when they touch me while we are talking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I have a relaxed body position when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I frown while talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I avoid eye contact while talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I have a tense body position while talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I sit close or stand close to people while talking with them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. My voice is monotonous or dull when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I use a variety of vocal expressions when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I gesture when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I am animated when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I have a bland facial expression when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I move closer to people when I talk to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I look directly at people while talking to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I am stiff when I talk to people.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I have a lot of vocal variety when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I avoid gesturing while I am talking to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I lean toward people when I talk to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I maintain eye contact with people when I talk to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I try not to sit or stand close to people when I talk with them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I lean away from people when I talk to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I smile when I talk to people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I avoid touching people when I talk to them.

Scoring for Nonverbal Immediacy Scale—Observer Report:

Step 1. *Start with a score of 78. Add the scores from the following items:*

1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25.

Step 2. *Add the scores from the following items:*

3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18, 20, 23, 24, and 26.

*Total score = Step 1 minus Step 2.*

*Source:* Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., & Johnson, A. E. (2003). Development of the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale (NIS): Measures of self- and other-perceived nonverbal immediacy. *Communication Quarterly*, 51, 502-515.

How did you score? What surprised you about your score? You can also try the measure on others. Simply fill out the measure with another person's behaviors in mind. For instance, you might find it interesting to fill out the survey for your least and most favorite professors to determine whether their nonverbal immediacy might play some role in the degree to which you like them. Do you notice differences in their use of nonverbal immediacy behaviors? Did you learn more in one class? What class did you enjoy more?

## TERMS TO REMEMBER

adapters (p. 33)  
 affect displays (p. 33)  
 artifacts (p. 32)  
 codes (p. 28)  
 communication rules (p. 23)  
 constitutive rules (p. 24)  
 content layer (p. 35)  
 deintensification (p. 34)  
 emblems (p. 33)  
 environment (p. 30)  
 friendship/warmth touch (p. 35)  
 functional/professional touch (p. 35)  
 haptics (p. 35)  
 illustrators (p. 33)  
 intensification (p. 34)

kinesics (p. 33)  
 love/intimacy touch (p. 35)  
 masking (p. 34)  
 neutralization (p. 34)  
 nonverbal communication (p. 25)  
 oculosics (p. 34)  
 physical appearance (p. 32)  
 proxemics (p. 29)  
 regulative rules (p. 23)  
 regulators (p. 33)  
 relational layer (p. 35)  
 sexual arousal (p. 35)  
 social/polite touch (p. 35)  
 vocalics (p. 28)