

## **What to Do with Your Hands During Presentations**

### **Keep hand movements descriptive**

"When really charismatic leaders use hand gestures, the brain is super happy," consultant Vanessa Van Edwards says. "Because it's getting two explanations in one, and the brain loves that." Impactful gestures are like a nonverbal highlighter. Do what comes naturally, and think about using your hands to "give people the video" versus "audio" alone. Talking about a small thing? Pinch your fingers momentarily. To indicate a larger number, outstretch both hands on the horizontal to show the amount. Think about the content. How would you "sign" to your audience the meaning of the content?

### **Open palm gestures build the audience's trust**

As much as possible, avoid closed body language. Everything from the handshake to the "hands up" gesture people give to police provides proof that you have nothing to hide. Open body language helps you appear accessible and build rapport with your audience. You persuade and best influence others if you convey openness.

### **Don't hold objects, which take on a (fidgety) life of their own**

Hold a pen while you talk and before you know it, you are clicking the pen's top or otherwise fidgeting with that object the entire talk. Avoid similar behavior when holding a remote. Some people rustle papers or drum their thumbs on a table or podium. Such distracting movements are read by the audience as nerves. "That's why I always say 'don't have anything in your hands,'" says TED speaker coach Gina Barnett. "People fidget, and they're often clueless to what they're doing." Be vigilant about leaving pens or other objects aside before speaking. Monitor your use of a remote to convey a still quality in how you hold it.

### **Don't draw attention to the wrong places**

If your hands form a fig leaf over the groin area, guess where the audience's attention will go? Avoid distracting your audience with such closed gestures, which furthermore don't even add congruent meaning to your content. Instead, drop your arms to the side for a few moments, before doing a more open, deliberate gesture that adds meaning.

### **Avoid Pointing and the Spider Hands**

Pointing can look aggressive, unwelcoming and off-putting to audiences. Instead, try extending an open palm, which looks more confident and engaging. Spider hands (with fingertips touching) before the torso appear tense and closed. Often, presenters stay stuck there, looking static and visually monotonous. For business presenters, better to use an open palm. You'll simply look more calm and approachable.