

Public Speaking Toolbox: A Guide to Gestures

- **Symbolic Gestures** communicate words, numbers, position.

For example:

- A raised hand signals for a stop
- A thumbs-up showing you agree
- Three fingers for the number three
- Pointing to show a position – up, down, behind, beside.

- **Descriptive Gestures** communicate an idea or movement.

For example:

- Spreading hands apart to show length
- Using hands to show a shape.
- Swaying hands to show a flow of movement.

- **Emotional Gestures** suggest feelings.

For example:

- A clenched fist to show anger. It is hostile and threatening. It could also convey the sense you are hiding something.
- Hands clasped to show pleading.
- Using a pointed finger. This makes you look accusatory, even if that wasn't your intent.

Gestures to Avoid:

- **Hands on hips** = condescending, parental, overbearing
- **Crossed arms** = cutting off, disagreeing, wanting to protect
- **Hands crossed in front** (fig leaf) = feeling weak, timid, needing protection.
- **Hands joined behind your back** = you're on parade
- **Hands in pockets** = nervousness.