

What's in a gesture?

Have participants number their papers from 1 to 10. Make each gesture and ask them to write down what they think it means. Participants should also indicate if they think the gesture is considered rude in the United States? Have group discuss how body language influences communication between cultures.

- 1. Beckon with index finger.**
- 2. Point at something in the room.**
- 3. Make a "V" sign.**
- 4. Smile.**
- 5. Sit with sole of feet or shoe showing.**
- 6. Form a circle with fingers to indicate "O.K."**
- 7. Hold up the right "pointer" finger with hand folded and facing away from body.**
- 8. Pass an item to someone with one hand.**
- 9. Wave hand with palm facing outward to greet someone.**
- 10. Nod head up and down to say "Yes."**

What's in a Gesture-Answer Key

1. Beckon with index finger. This means "Come here" in the U.S. To use the finger(s) to call someone is insulting in many cultures. Expect a reaction when you beckon to a student from the Middle or Far East; Portugal, Spain, Latin America, Japan, Indonesia and Hong Kong. It is more acceptable to beckon with the palm down, with fingers or whole hand waving.

2. Point at something in the room. It is impolite to point with the index finger in the Middle and Far East. Use an open hand or your thumb (in Indonesia)

3. Make a "V" sign. This means "Victory" in most of Europe when you make this sign with your palm facing away from you. If you face your palm in, the same gesture means "Shove it."

4. Smile. This gesture is universally understood. However, in various cultures there are different reasons for smiling. The Japanese may smile when they are confused or angry. In other parts of Asia, people may smile when they are embarrassed. People in other cultures may not smile at everyone to indicate "Hello." A smile may be reserved for friends.

5. Sit with soles shoes showing. In many cultures this sends a rude message. In Thailand, Japan and France as well as countries of the Middle and Near East showing the soles of the feet demonstrates disrespect. You are exposing the lowest and dirtiest part of your body so this is insulting.

6. Form a circle with fingers to indicate "O.K." Although this means "O.K." in the U.S. and in many countries around the world, there are some notable exceptions:

- In Brazil and Germany, this gesture is obscene.
- In Japan, this means "money."
- In France, it has the additional meaning of "zero" or "worthless."

7. Hold up the right "pointer" finger with hand folded and facing away from body. In non-British countries of Europe, it can mean two of something. They start counting with the thumb. In Japan it would mean "four," as the Japanese start counting with the pinkie.

8. Pass an item to someone with one hand. - In Japan this is very rude. Even a very small item such as a pencil must be passed with two hands. In many Middle and Far Eastern countries it is rude to pass something with your left hand which is considered "unclean."

9. Wave hand with the palm facing outward to greet someone. In Europe, waving the hand back and forth can mean "No." To wave "good-bye," raise the palm outward and wag the fingers in unison, This is also a serious insult in Nigeria if the hand is too close to another person's face.

10. Nod head up and down to say "Yes." In Bulgaria and Greece, this gesture means "No."

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