



What Should I Do With My Hands?

Many people mistakenly believe that hand gestures negatively impact their speaking and that it's best if their hands are still or out of sight. They sometimes hide them under a podium, clasp them behind their back, or keep them tightly at their sides.

However, the best thing you can do with your hands while speaking is to use them to naturally convey the enthusiasm you have for your topic. "Talking with your hands" isn't necessarily a bad practice.

To figure out what your hands should be doing in front of an audience, pay attention to how you use them when you think no one is watching. How are they moving when you're talking to a friend one-on-one? What about when you're on the phone? Keep your natural movements--and these tips--in mind to help you give a relaxed and engaging presentation.

You should avoid:

- Moving your arms about wildly, or in too grand of a motion.
- Making hand gestures that have no purpose.
- Repeating the same gesture over and over again.
- Fiddling with or wringing your hands, among other nervous gestures.
- Keeping your hands in any one tense position for too long.
- Putting your hands in your pockets.
- Folding your hands over your crotch (known as the "fig leaf position") or in other embarrassing positions.
- Touching your face.
- Keeping your hands very close to your body.
- Letting your fingers hang loose.

Instead, you should try:

- Observing and using gestures that come naturally to you.
- Keeping gestures above the waist (but below the shoulders) and directing them outward for visibility and influence.
- Punctuating key thoughts and words with gestures.
- Using a variety of influential arm and hand positions.
- Using finger enumeration to designate points: one, two, three.
- Resting one hand lightly on the podium or lectern while you gesture with the other hand.

Above all else, *be natural*. Don't just stand there, but also don't plan your movements - you will end up looking robotic.

Compiled from UMW Speaking Center consultants, 2014 and Laurie Schloff and Marcia Yudkin. *Smart Speaking: Sixty-Second Strategies*, 1991.

If you want more information, check out the following
UMW Speaking Center Handouts:

[Effects of Body Language](#)
[Posture and Body Stance](#)