

Business Etiquette: Carrying Yourself with Dignity

Lesson Plan:

- Sit and Be at Ease
- Stand and Impress: Look At All That Good Posture Can Do
- Walk and Command Respect

Review

Quiz

Carrying Yourself with Dignity

Let us be poised, and wise, and our own, today.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ever plant yourself in the middle of a busy public thoroughfare, relax, and just watch the people who go by? If you do, you'll notice some are sitting down, others are slouching, and still others are leaning against an object. Some will be walking and pushing to get where they're going in a hurry; others will be walking slowly, carefully, and purposefully. Some probably will be old and possibly need the help of a cane or a walker. Maybe there will be kids running around and dodging in and out among people walking. Study them all. Then, ask yourself what first impressions you have of them based on what you see. Now, which of them would you like to sit, stand, walk, and move like?

Yes, there are proper ways to sit, stand, walk, and move our bodies when we're in public. People used to call this behavior *comportment*. Today, people call it *body language* or *poise*.

Why does this matter?

How you move your body actually affects your mood, your confidence, whether you have physical pain, and your energy level. The body is our outer house, and, generally, it's a rather accurate indicator of what's going on inside. If we learn to carry our bodies as if they are deserving of respect, slowly this will begin to transform the way we think and feel about ourselves inside. We will begin to believe we are deserving of respect and our inner house will match our outer house.

Our most common movements are sitting, standing, and walking. With each, we can project grace and confidence or self-loathing and indifference. So pay attention to your body language, because whether you know it or not, it's speaking to others for you.

Like all the other rules of good manners, how we use our body is a part of our personal appearance. If we think of the way we move as part of how we look to other people, we can easily identify the best ways to carry and conduct ourselves.

Learning Moment: Take some time and have students observe how their classmates sit, stand, and walk. Ask for three different volunteers—one to demonstrate each. Ask everyone else to watch the volunteer's movements and then describe them. These should be descriptions, only, of what they did and how they moved, not evaluations. The point is to focus their attention on what actions people actually take when they sit, stand, and walk—movements that most of us take for granted and rarely give thought to how we do them. Write down the things they observe.

SIT AND BE AT EASE



Do you straddle your chair instead of sitting in it? Do you leap into the air, landing with a bounce or a thud before coming to rest on the furniture? Do you think about how you sit, or do you just plop down into your chair? Believe it or not, how you sit can affect the way others view you. Are you disrespectful or too casual? Do you hold a low view of your self-worth? Well, sitting in a manner that reveals too much of your body or that displays too much familiarity with those in your surroundings can lead others to have a poor view of you.

At home and at the homes of your very close friends, it may be OK to drape yourself across the couch or a chair or to lie on the floor with your elbows propped up. Although this kind of carefree posture may be relaxing to you, realize that, generally, it also says, "I don't care about how I look to you or whether you're comfortable with how I'm sitting." If you're in a familiar environment where this is OK, then do it. But do it consciously, not as a matter of habit. So how should you sit in most situations?

First, whenever possible, choose a chair that is the right height for you—one that will allow you to sit up straight with both feet flat on the floor and nearly together. To sit down, approach the chair, pull it out if necessary, and then placing your back to the chair while keeping your back straight and your head up, back into it. Lean forward slightly from your hips and extend your arms forward. As you begin to sit down, let your thighs shoulder most of the work of guiding you into your seat. When seated, your behind should touch the back of your chair.

Cross your legs at the ankle and in front of you—not to the side of you. If you're wearing a dress, this will also keep your knees from spreading apart and parading your underwear for others. Crossing your legs at the knee, or otherwise sitting in a forced or twisted position, puts stress on your spine and knees and will become uncomfortable quickly. This position also takes up a lot of space when you're sitting with others. Further, in some cultures, it's also considered rude because it shows the sole of your shoe to other people.

It should go without saying, but don't wear clothing that makes sitting comfortably difficult. Value yourself and your comfort more than the attention you think you may gain by wearing something that is stylish but painful.

Jiggling your legs, twitching your feet, and fidgeting are all nervous—generally unconscious—habits, but they are very apparent to other people and make them uncomfortable. So relax.

Now, relax your hands and rest them in your lap. Hold yourself upright but not stiff or strained. That's it. Most people can sit this way quite comfortably for a long time.

Activity:



Practice sitting. Get comments on what students noticed now that they are paying attention to how they sit down. Are the changes they're making comfortable? Do they feel natural?

STAND AND IMPRESS: LOOK AT ALL THAT GOOD POSTURE CAN DO

History often speaks of people “taking a stand” for what is right and, in the process, changing some small part of the course of human events. The term *taking a stand* refers to planting your feet, standing tall, and commanding respect for your position. *Standing* implies drawing upon the full power of our personal presence and strength. People who stand tall, exhibiting good posture, attract our attention because they impress us with their confidence.

Now let's stand up. Standing with good posture is one of the healthiest habits we can develop. Good posture correctly aligns your bones and joints so that body uses your muscles properly. This protects you against backaches, headaches, tension in your neck and shoulder, knee pain, muscular aches, and fatigue because when your muscles are used properly, they use up less energy.

With standing, what looks best is also what's healthiest for your body. So we can see readily what good standing posture looks like:

- Stand comfortably upright with your feet slightly apart.
- Hold your head straight with your chin parallel to the floor.
- Balance your body's weight evenly over both feet. Don't tilt forward or backward.
- Hold your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
- Don't force them backward too far or leave them slumped forward.
 - Imagine a line is pulling from the base of your backbone, up through your stomach and your neck, and out the top of your head.
 - Keep your stomach pulled in and your bottom tucked under but relaxed.
 - Let your arms fall freely at your sides with your elbows slightly bent.



But you didn't think standing was all that complicated did you? Actually, it's not. The idea is to stand tall and straight while being relaxed.

Let's practice standing this way. At first, it will take a few seconds to do correctly, and it will feel a little forced, but soon, it will be natural and habitual. And that's what we're after—the good habit of standing straight and tall.

Activity:



Have everyone practice standing. Verbally walk through the steps with students as they practice the movements. Ask them to comment on what they noticed and whether they noted doing anything differently from the way they normally stand.

An alternative exercise is to have students work in pairs. First, ask one of the pair to stand as he or she normally would while the other person watches and notes these actions. Next, have this student practice standing as you call out the proper steps. Then, have the partner who is watching give feedback to the other on what he or she noticed was done differently. Then, switch and repeat for the second member of the pair.

WALK AND COMMAND RESPECT

Do you walk with your head held down? When you walk, is your best view of your feet and the sidewalk or of the wonderful and ever-changing world all around you? Do you have the easy, purposeful stride of someone who is confident? People who walk with their heads held high command respect.

People who walk with confidence walk with a sense of purpose. They notice everything and everyone around them. As people approach them, they often make eye contact with them and smile.

Are you feeling a little down or low? Then, get up and put some pep into your step. Walking with confidence is one of the quickest ways to alter and uplift your own spirit. Walking is motion, and motion creates energy and gets your blood pumping all over your body. So you don't just think you're feeling better, you really do!

Walking, like standing, is natural, but graceful, purposeful walking takes a little practice. So how can you walk with purpose, commanding others' respect while pumping up your own energy and mood?

- Stand up straight and tall, as we have just described.
- Keeping your feet only slightly apart, step out with one foot and then the other.
- Keep your knees slightly bent.
- Swing your arms gently, and keep your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
- Keep your hands with your palms turned in toward your sides, and don't rock or swing your hips.

Remember, learning to walk as the body intended not only makes you look attractive and confident, it protects your body against painful injuries caused by misaligning your spine.

Activity:



Have everyone stand and, on the count of 3, begin walking in an organized circle around your classroom. Ask them to first pay attention only to their own movements as they walk. Have them walk as they normally would. What do they notice? Do they normally walk with their heads held high, or do they stare at the ground? How is their pace? Do you they walk slowly, rapidly, or purposefully? Do they walk on the balls, the heels, or the sides of their feet? What do they do with their arms and hands when they walk?

Next, have each student focus on the walk of the person in front of him or her. Ask them to notice everything about the other person's walk—body alignment, pace, arm movement. Let everyone continue walking in this circle up to a minute. Then, have students stop and give feedback to the person they were watching.

Once they exchange feedback, have everyone begin walking again, but this time they will change at least one of the things cited by the reviewer. Let everyone practice their changes for up to a minute. Then have everyone sit and discuss the changes they made and what they learned. What did they notice about how their body felt? Did they notice any change in their energy level or mood?



REVIEW

- When you're sitting for long periods of time, sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor. If you continue to practice this, it will become a habit that feels very natural to you.
- When sitting, cross your legs at the ankles or keep them flat on the floor.
- Make certain your clothing is appropriate for sitting; for example, short skirts can be too revealing.
- Your posture reveals how you feel about yourself. It shows you have self-confidence.
- Correct standing posture is demonstrated by having your head and chin up, shoulders back, and feet flat on the ground:
 - ✓ Stand comfortably upright with your feet slightly apart.
 - ✓ Hold your head straight with your chin parallel to the floor.
 - ✓ Balance your body's weight evenly over both feet. Don't tilt forward or backward.
 - ✓ Hold your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
 - ✓ Don't force them backward too far or leave them slumped forward.
 - ✓ Keep your stomach pulled in and your bottom tucked under but relaxed.
- Walking, like standing, is natural, but graceful walking takes a little practice. So, how do you do it?
 - ✓ Stand up straight and tall.
 - ✓ Swing your arms gently, and keep your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
 - ✓ Keep your hands with your palms turned in toward your sides, and don't rock or swing your hips.
- Always check behind you when entering and exiting a door. If someone is behind you be sure to hold the door open for him or her, whether the person is a male or a female.
- Whenever possible, men should hold doors open for women and enter after them, unless the door is particularly heavy; then, the man should enter first and hold the door open for the woman.
- Both genders should allow the elderly and the physically challenged to enter a room or door before them. If the person is in a wheelchair, again, you enter first and hold the door open for him or her.
- Allow people with rank, such as your teacher, to enter and exit first.
- On sidewalks, escalators, walkways, and stairs, you should walk or stand to the right, leaving plenty of room for people to pass by.
- When you pass by others on the sidewalk, do so carefully, without shoving or touching. If they do not see you, excuse yourself as you move around them.



1. What is *comportment*? What does it say about you?

Comportment is a term for describing one's personal bearing, conduct, demeanor, posture, walk, or behavior.

2. What are the steps you can take to ensure a proper stance?

- Stand comfortably upright with your feet slightly apart.
- Hold your head straight with your chin parallel to the floor.
- Balance your body's weight evenly over both feet. Don't tilt forward or backward.
- Hold your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
- Don't force them backward too far or leave them slumped forward.
- Imagine a line is pulling from the base of your backbone, up through your stomach and your neck, and out the top of your head.
- Let your arms fall freely at your sides with your elbows slightly bent.

3. Why is good posture important?

Good posture helps protect the back and the spine from injuries. It reduces stress on your spine and helps keep your muscles balanced and your joints working properly. All of this works to protect you from pain, including headaches, tension in your neck and shoulder, and knee and back pain.

4. How does it look to others if you slouch or have bad posture?

It makes you look as though you have low self-esteem or no self-confidence.

5. What is the proper way to sit?

- Approach the chair, pull it out if necessary, and then placing your back to the chair while keeping your back straight and your head up, back into it.
- Lean forward slightly from your hips and extend your arms forward.
- As you begin to sit down, let your thighs guide you into your seat. When seated, your behind should touch the back of your chair.
- Cross your legs at the ankle and in front of you—not to the side of you.

6. What steps can you take to develop a graceful walk?

- Stand up straight and tall.
- Keeping your feet only slightly apart, step out with one foot and then the other.
- Keep your knees slightly bent.
- Swing your arms gently, and keep your shoulders up, back, and relaxed.
- Keep your hands with your palms turned in toward your sides, and don't rock or swing your hips

7. What should you always do when entering a door?

Always check to see if other people are coming in the door behind you and, if so, hold the door for them. Never let a door slam in someone's face. It's rude and potentially dangerous.

8. What is the correct order to enter and exit a building?

- Men and boys should hold the door open for women and girls.
- Everyone should allow the elderly and the physically challenged to enter first.

9. Why should you let people of importance, age, or higher rank enter first?

It shows respect.

10. What is the proper way to pass others when walking?

Move around them carefully, while saying, "Excuse me, please." Make sure you don't touch or shove them as you pass.