

Guess the meaning of the British body language and gestures

Choose the correct meaning for each the gestures below. They are given in order of how likely they are to be misunderstood by people from other countries. Some also have other meanings, but only one of the options below is true in the UK.

The V sign

Hold up the index finger and middle finger of your right hand in a V shape with your palm towards you and the back of your hand facing the person that you are talking to

- a) Bugger off/ Sod off/ Eff off/ F**k off/ F**k you
- b) Peace
- c) Two
- d) Victory

Polishing your fingernails

Blow hot air once or twice on the fingernails of your right hand and then polish those fingernails on your shirt, over your chest.

- a) I did really well/ Congratulations to me
- b) I doubt what you are saying
- c) I'm worried by what you are saying

Slow hand clap

Clap your hands very very slowly

- a) I'm not impressed by what you said
- b) I'm so impressed by what you said that I'm in shock

Cross your heart

Point to the top left side of your chest with your index finger then draw a cross over your heart by bringing that finger down then doing the same thing left to right

- a) I need good luck/ Wish me luck
- b) I promise that I am telling the truth ("Cross my heart, hope to die")

Crossing your fingers/ Fingers crossed

Cross your right middle finger over the your right index finger to make a kind of knot

- a) I need good luck/ I wish you luck/ I really hope so
- b) It's a secret/ I won't tell you

Tapping your nose

Point up with your right index finger and touch the side of your nose with it, then tap the side of your nose several times

- a) It's a secret/ Don't be nosy/ You don't need to know/ Never you mind
- b) You guessed correctly

Neck cutting

Hold your hand open in front of your neck with the palm facing down towards the floor, and make a cutting motion several times quickly across your neck (without touching your neck)

- a) I'll kill you
- b) Stop speaking (e.g. at the end of a presentation)/ Stop saying what you are saying
- c) You are sacked/ You are fired

Touch the left side of your neck with your right index finger and pull it slowly across your neck until it reaches the right side of your neck

- a) I'll kill you/ I'll get you back later for what you just said or did
- b) Stop speaking (e.g. at the end of a presentation)/ Stop saying what you are saying
- c) You are sacked/ You are fired

Air quotes

Put up your curved index finger and curved middle finger up on both hands and move those fingers up and down several times

- a) Someone else says this but I don't really believe it/ I'm saying this ironically/ I'm saying this sarcastically
- b) What I am saying is really important/ Please listen carefully

Shaking hands

Shake hands with the other person (= hold each other by the right hand and shake those hands up and down quickly around three times)

- a) Nice to meet you
- b) Good morning

Shake hands really strongly (= squeeze your partner's hand while you move your hands up and down)

- a) I'm so happy to meet you
- b) I'm extremely ambitious and/ or aggressive (in business)

While you shake hands, hold your partner's right forearm with your right hand

- a) Thanks for coming all this way
- b) It's such an honour to meet you/ I'm so grateful to you. You saved my life!

While you shake hands, hold your partner's right shoulder with your left hand

- a) I hope you get better soon/ Don't worry, I'm sure it will be okay/ I really feel for you
- b) It's so nice to finally meet you

Patting yourself on the back

Reach all the way around the front of your neck with your right hand and pat yourself on your left shoulder about three times

- a) I did a really good job
- b) I shouldn't worry, it will all be okay in the end

Come here and go away

Hold up an open hand with your palm facing yourself and your fingers pointing up, then move your four fingers back and forth towards yourself quite slowly without moving your hand and arm

- a) Come here
- b) Go away

Hold out an open hand with the palm facing left and a little towards the floor and your fingers curled, then move your fingers out to point towards the other person around three times

- a) Come here
- b) Go away

Hold up just your right index finger and your palm facing yourself, then curl your index finger down towards your palm three or four times

- a) Come here
- b) You are in trouble/ You have been naughty/ Please come here so I can punish you

Suggested answers

The V sign

Hold up the index finger and middle finger of your right hand in a V shape with your palm towards you and the back of your hand facing the person that you are talking to
Bugger off/ Sod off/ Eff off/ F**k off/ F**k you

Polishing your fingernails

Blow hot air once or twice on the fingernails of your right hand and then polish those fingernails on your shirt, over your chest.
I did really well/ Congratulations to me

Slow hand clap

Clap your hands very very slowly
I'm not impressed by what you said

Cross your heart

Point to the top left side of your chest with your index finger then draw a cross over your heart by bringing that finger down then doing the same thing left to right
I promise that I am telling the truth ("Cross my heart, hope to die")

Crossing your fingers/ Fingers crossed

Cross your right middle finger over the your right index finger to make a kind of knot
I need good luck/ I wish you luck/ I really hope so

Tapping your nose

Point up with your right index finger and touch the side of your nose with it, then tap the side of your nose several times
It's a secret/ Don't be nosy/ You don't need to know/ Never you mind

Neck cutting

Hold your hand open in front of your neck with the palm facing down towards the floor, and make a cutting motion several times quickly across your neck (without touching your neck)
Stop speaking (e.g. at the end of a presentation)/ Stop saying what you are saying

Touch the left side of your neck with your right index finger and pull it slowly across your neck until it reaches the right side of your neck
I'll kill you/ I'll get you back later for what you just said or did

Air quotes

Put up your curved index finger and curved middle finger up on both hands and move those fingers up and down several times
Someone else says this but I don't really believe it/ I'm saying this ironically/ I'm saying this sarcastically

Shaking hands

Shake hands with the other person (= hold each other by the right hand and shake those hands up and down quickly around three times)

Nice to meet you

Shake hands really strongly (= squeeze your partner's hand while you move your hands up and down)

I'm extremely ambitious and/ or aggressive (in business)

While you shake hands, hold your partner's right forearm with your right hand

It's such an honour to meet you/ I'm so grateful to you. You saved my life!

While you shake hands, hold your partner's right shoulder with your left hand

I hope you get better soon/ Don't worry, I'm sure it will be okay/ I really feel for you

Patting yourself on the back

Reach all the way around the front of your neck with your right hand and pat yourself on your left shoulder about three times

I did a really good job

Come here and go away

Hold up an open hand with your palm facing yourself and your fingers pointing up, then move your four fingers back and forth towards yourself quite slowly without moving your hand and arm

Come here

Hold out an open hand with the palm facing left and a little towards the floor and your fingers curled, then move your fingers out to point towards the other person around three times

Go away

Hold up just your right index finger and your palm facing yourself, then curl your index finger down towards your palm three or four times

You are in trouble/ You have been naughty/ Please come here so I can punish you

Without looking above, say and/ or write a phrase to accompany each of these gestures.

- Hold up the index finger and middle finger of your right hand in a V shape with your palm towards you and the back of your hand facing the person that you are talking to
- Blow hot air once or twice on the fingernails of your right hand and then polish those fingernails on your shirt, over your chest.
- Clap your hands very very slowly
- Point to the top left side of your chest with your index finger then draw a cross over your heart by bringing that finger down then doing the same thing left to right
- Cross your right middle finger over the your right index finger to make a kind of knot
- Point up with your right index finger and touch the side of your nose with it, then tap the side of your nose several times
- Hold your hand open in front of your neck with the palm facing down towards the floor, and make a cutting motion several times quickly across your neck (without touching your neck)
- Touch the left side of your neck with your right index finger and pull it slowly across your neck until it reaches the right side of your neck
- Put up your curved index finger and curved middle finger up on both hands and move those fingers up and down several times
- Shake hands with the other person (= hold each other by the right hand and shake those hands up and down quickly around three times)
- Shake hands really strongly (= squeeze your partner's hand while you move your hands up and down)
- While you shake hands, hold your partner's right forearm with your right hand
- While you shake hands, hold your partner's right shoulder with your left hand
- Reach all the way around the front of your neck with your right hand and pat yourself on your left shoulder about three times
- Hold up an open hand with your palm facing yourself and your fingers pointing up, then move your four fingers back and forth towards yourself quite slowly without moving your hand and arm
- Hold out an open hand with the palm facing left and a little towards the floor and your fingers curled, then move your fingers out to point towards the other person around three times
- Hold up just your right index finger and your palm facing yourself, then curl your index finger down towards your palm three or four times

Check with the previous page.

Test each other:

- Read out a phrase and see if your partner can make the gesture
- Make a gesture and see if your partner can say the phrase