

Associated or Dissociated

Is the person you are communicating with involved in the conversation or somewhere else? Do they see themselves from an internal perspective or as if they were outside themselves?

People who are **associated** (tuned into things):

- Usually lean forward
- Are often animated, using gestures and imagery
- Might include more emotions in the conversation

People who are **dissociated** (tuned out of themselves or the conversation):

- Usually lean backwards
- Use fewer gestures and practical language
- Often have a more objective approach

Both of these states can be useful. If you are facilitating mediation (where you must be neutral), a dissociated state might be useful. However, if you're listening to a close friend's problem, an associated state might be more appropriate.

Towards or Away From

This state reflects whether we are looking towards what we want to achieve, or away from the goal and at a problem that we are facing. In the **Away From** state, we are often tense and negative, thinking of the challenges that we are facing. In a **Towards** state, people are typically more relaxed with positive body language.

Match/Mismatch

We all have a natural tendency towards antagonism or co-operation and friendliness. Those who naturally **match** the environment around them can also often easily create rapport. They might naturally fall into the same body language patterns as the person that they are communicating with. They almost always try to build people up and support people.

People who try to find the differences in others usually fall into body language and speech patterns that are opposite of the person that they are communicating with. They might use expressions like:

- At odds with
- On the other hand
- Devil's advocate

Internally or Externally Oriented

Some people need feedback from **external sources** to judge how they are doing. These are the type of people who, for example, might not trust their judgment about how much something weighs but would rather use a scale. Or, if they are presenting an idea to their manager, they might glance at that person

quite frequently to gauge the approval level. Their presentation will likely contain facts and figures rather than their opinion.

Internally oriented people often don't need this type of feedback. During a presentation, they will likely be focused on their materials rather than looking around the room for approval. They might rely more heavily on their interpretation of the facts to support their conclusion.

This provides a good example of how NLP can help you interpret body language. Let's say that you are attending a presentation where the presenter doesn't look around the room very much, and they insert their opinion and their beliefs quite frequently. Some people might interpret this as conceited or arrogant. With NLP, however, you can easily identify that this person is likely internally oriented. You can then look past these cues (rather than being distracted by them) and get to the real point of that person's message.

Using Body Language to Influence Ourselves and Others

We can also use body language to influence how we feel and how others feel. Let's say that you're facing a significant challenge that you're finding tough to resolve because of your emotional involvement. You can say to yourself, "I need to distance myself from this," and adopt some dissociated behaviors – leaning back in your chair and using objective language in your internal dialogue, for example. You might also want to use a Towards state rather than an Away state: relax your muscles and think of what you want to achieve.

If you were speaking with a friend who was in this situation, you might suggest that they imagine themselves as outside of the problem. If they are a matching type, you might also model dissociated, "towards" body language in the hopes that they will match you and adopt that state themselves. (It's important to watch their body language to see if they match you. If not, you'll want to switch to an associated state to ensure that they don't view your body language as disinterested.)

These methods won't guarantee an instant solution, but they should help you get yourself (or the person that you're communicating with) in the right frame of mind to achieve results.

Asking Clean Questions

The NLP Style of Questioning

Traditional communication techniques focus on the use of **open questions** (which start with who, where, what, when, why, or how) or **closed questions** (which can only be answered with a specific piece of data, like yes or no, a date, etc.). NLP uses question forms that are more typically seen in therapy, called **clean questioning**.

Sue Knight, an NLP expert, describes clean questions like this: "To be 'clean' is to be naïve, present, open, not knowing, alert, aware, fascinated, eager to learn, and selfless." (Source: Page 82, *NLP at Work by Sue Knight*)

This is why commands like:

- Don't touch that glass
- Don't go anywhere
- There's no need to worry
- Don't drive into the ditch

Are often ineffective. (Parents in particular know what we're talking about!)

Instead of focusing on what you don't want, **focus on what you do want**. (To use a driving analogy, look where you want to go!) Use a positive command instead. So, the directions above might look like:

- Please keep your hands on the table
- Please stay seated
- Try to relax
- Stay on the road

Influencing Outcomes

We can also use presuppositions and insightful language to help us work with others and achieve an outcome.

Presuppositions as Questions

For example, when you arrive at a restaurant and are seated, they typically do not ask, "Are you thirsty?" They **presuppose or assume** that you have come to the restaurant because you are hungry and/or thirsty and therefore would like something to drink. The server usually proceeds to the next logical question ("What would you like to drink?") rather than asking **if** you would like something to drink.

In other words, you are giving the person a choice, but over elements that you choose. (Of course, in the above example, the person might say, "Nothing," but it is more likely that they will choose a beverage.)

You might also use a leading question, a rhetorical question, or a statement to obtain the desired result. Some other ways that the server could pose their question might be:

- What can I get you from our premium selection?
- You might be wondering what our drink specials are today.
- Would you like a hot or cold beverage today?
- A coffee would be really warming, wouldn't it?

This technique is only effective if you use it in appropriate situations. For example, if your server approached you and said, "A coffee would be really warming, wouldn't it?" as her opening statement, you might find that strange, patronizing, or even offensive and condescending.

However, if you were trying to decide whether to have a soda or a premium cocktail, and the server asked, "What can I get you from our premium selection?" you might be swayed towards the premium cocktail.

Insightful Sentences

Another way of moving others towards a desired outcome is by using language that presupposes that you know what they are thinking. (Of course, if you have been using the tools that we learned about so far, you probably have a pretty good idea of their state of mind!)

Some **insightful sentence stems** that you can use:

- You might be thinking...
- You're probably wondering...
- You're probably asking yourself...
- I can predict your next move.
- I know what you are thinking/will say.
- You will likely have an answer.

Once again, it is important to use these techniques appropriately. A sales pitch that includes the statement, "You might be wondering how this product can save you time," isn't terribly presumptuous. But starting a pitch with, "I can predict your next move – you will buy this product!" might irritate some of your potential clients!

Overcoming Challenges

Another way of getting the outcome you want is by learning how to **break down oppositional thinking**. For example, let's say that you are trying to convince your accountant to hire some help for the upcoming tax season. He says, "Those people never do anything right."

You could ask him to **clarify** several parts of that statement:

- Who are "those people?" ("Everyone" is not an answer!)
- If the person in question has never prepared a proper tax return, perhaps they should not be an accountant!
- What is the definition of "right?" Is the accountant talking about legally correct or simply the way he would do it?

The goal here is to help the person explore their negative thinking and look at the bigger picture, instead of seeing things through a particular lens.