

Body Language for Beginning Storytellers

Antonio Rocha

Your body is the first thing the audience comes in contact with. It is a visual business card.

Body language is first connected to what you wear on stage. If you put on flowing fabrics, it passes a certain attitude to the audience. If you put on shorts and a tank top, it will determine yet another. Your body falls into the frame of what you put on. The audience knows that and so the mindset of the listener is already going into a certain direction simply because of what you are wearing. Once you determine your outfit, now your body and clothing must surrender to the story. Not to you, to the story. Your body and outfit must be the frame upon which the story will unfold.

Now, you must be extremely aware of every move you make on stage. Every gesture, step, tilt of the head, eye movement, must be made to fit the need of the story first, then the audience. Everything you do with your body must be scrutinized, analyzed, and a decision must be made whether to keep it. Your overall attitude must be in sync with the tone of the story

and the characters' mannerisms within the story being told.

You do not need to look at the audience the whole time. Avoid looking at the audience at all costs if you are playing two characters in a dialogue. Characters in dialogue are in the world of the story and not on stage aware of the audience.

Why did you move left? Would moving right be better? Why did you touch your hair or face?

EVERYTHING you do must have a reason why and that reason is not "because you felt like it": it is because of the story. Of course, you are not going to talk with your back to the audience simply because the character is facing the other way. You must also be aware of your audience. That is why you are there to begin with. So, **deliver everything facing forward or slightly on a diagonal** depending on where things are in the world of the story. You can also project your eyes to the back of the theatre behind the audience for moments when things are coming, or going. (For example, when the sun is setting or rising, etc.) No matter where things are in the story, you must deliver towards the audience -- just like in a movie, where everything the camera shows is always on the flat screen facing the audience. North, south, east, and west are always forward towards the audience. Your verbal narration will determine what is north or who is facing south. The audience knows those are opposing directions, just like it knows that two bodies cannot occupy the same space, therefore eliminating your need to walk left or right to show where the characters are while in a dialogue. **DON'T LOOK DOWN**, as if looking for what to say next. Only look down if called by the story to do so.

I am a believer of the following:

- **Move only if you have a good reason to move.** Otherwise stay in one place. This goes for your arms and hands as well. Now, if you do not move at all and stand there like a statue, only moving your mouth, it will not be good either. You must add your eye, head, and breath! Every thought has its unique breath.

- **Control where your eyes go and everything will follow.** Not just the audience but yourself. “The giant is coming!” Look up above the audience, and towards the back. If you are representing a parent talking to a two year old, look down toward the invisible kid. The kids says something back, look up towards the parent and change your body to the child’s body language. You do not need to move your feet.
- **Less is more.** Try to say a lot by moving a little. Eloquence is key. I feel that storytellers are like gardeners and the listeners are the soil. We plant the seed and the soil grows it.
- **Above all, observe yourself and others.** Everything you do with your body and eyes, at every moment, has a reason in the story of your life. So, observe life.

Best of luck, and if you have questions, please ask.



Antonio Rocha, a native of Brazil, began his career in the performing arts in 1985. In 1988 he received a Partners of the Americas grant to come to the USA to perform and deepen his mime skills with Mime Master Tony Montanaro. Since then he has earned a Summa Cum Laude Theater BA from the University of Southern Maine and studied with Master Marcel Marceau. Mr. Rocha’s unique solo shows of stories and mime have been performed from Singapore to Hawaii and many places in between, including 16 countries on 6 continents. <http://www.storyinmotion.com>

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