

C1-C2 English Worksheet

Body Language and First Impressions: Can We Really Tell Who Likes Us?

20 October 2026

Article

First impressions feel immediate, but the inferences we draw from them can be remarkably fragile. In a Guardian column published on 18 October, Polly Hudson examines a list of five ostensibly revealing signs that somebody dislikes us: avoiding eye contact, displaying contempt, smiling less, turning the body away and maintaining physical distance. It is easy to latch on to one cue or single out an uncomfortable expression as decisive evidence. Yet social behaviour is ambiguous, and a momentary reaction rarely provides a robust basis for judging another person's intentions.

A fleeting expression might give away irritation, but it could just as easily reflect fatigue or distraction. An averted gaze may mean very little, yet we sometimes read into it and imagine hostility without enough evidence. Such assumptions may not add up. Habitual responses to uncertainty also shape perception: people sometimes fall back on familiar stereotypes rather than factor in temperament, neurodiversity and cultural expectations. Eye contact, for instance, carries different social meanings across communities. Neither a tentative smile nor averted posture should be taken as an isolated verdict on someone's feelings. Even clusters of apparently negative signals require interpretation in context.

The deeper issue is whether we should take at face value the claims of psychological checklists that promise certainty about relationships. Such shortcuts can encourage unwarranted confidence, especially when a person already fears being disliked. A more credible approach is to recognise the nuances of an interaction, look for repeated patterns and rule out alternative explanations before reaching a judgement. Healthy scepticism does not mean ignoring genuine hostility; it means resisting the urge to turn uncertainty into a personal verdict. Understanding another person often requires patience, conversation and the willingness to go beyond an initial impression.

Source: The Guardian (18 October 2026); BBC Science Focus (12 October 2026).

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

No.	Statement	T / F
1	The article treats spontaneous judgements about other people as potentially unreliable.	
2	Hudson presents the five behaviours as definitive proof of personal hostility.	
3	The article states that eye contact has precisely the same meaning in every culture.	
4	Someone can appear irritated for reasons unrelated to the person they are speaking to.	
5	Existing stereotypes can influence the interpretation of another person's behaviour.	
6	The writer advises accepting every psychological checklist without questioning its claims.	
7	Looking for recurring patterns can be more informative than judging a single reaction.	
8	The article argues that uncertainty should always be interpreted as deliberate rejection.	

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct meanings (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. latch on to	A. attribute a meaning to something that may not be there
2. single out	B. accept something as true without examining it critically
3. give away	C. return to an established approach when uncertain
4. read into	D. select one person or thing for special attention
5. add up	E. exclude something as a possible explanation
6. fall back on	F. include something when reaching a judgement
7. factor in	G. focus strongly on a particular detail or idea
8. take at face value	H. move past an existing limit or superficial interpretation
9. rule out	I. unintentionally reveal a feeling or secret
10. go beyond	J. seem consistent or logically convincing

Synonym Match

Match each article word (1-10) with the closest synonym (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. inferences	A. disdain
2. fragile	B. routine
3. ostensibly	C. shaky
4. contempt	D. unjustified
5. ambiguous	E. deductions
6. robust	F. subtleties
7. habitual	G. sound
8. tentative	H. apparently
9. unwarranted	I. hesitant
10. nuances	J. equivocal

Use the New Language

Choose five words or phrases from the worksheet and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions	
Student A - Personal experience	Student B - Deeper discussion
1. When did your first impression of somebody turn out to be inaccurate?	1. Why are apparently simple explanations of other people's behaviour so appealing?
2. What small non-verbal signals do you notice during an important conversation?	2. Can body-language training create unwarranted confidence in interpreting strangers?
3. Have you ever misread someone's silence as disapproval?	3. How should we distinguish evidence of rejection from ordinary social uncertainty?
4. How does your body language change when you feel uncomfortable or tired?	4. Do cultural norms make supposedly universal rules of non-verbal communication unreliable?
5. Do you behave differently in a job interview than with close friends?	5. Could job interviews disadvantage neurodivergent candidates when confidence is inferred from eye contact?
6. Which communication habits have surprised you when meeting people from other cultures?	6. When might trusting a first impression be useful despite the risk of stereotyping?
7. Have you ever felt that somebody was reading too much into your behaviour?	7. How much responsibility do we have to clarify misunderstandings before judging others?
8. What helps you revise a negative judgement after a difficult first meeting?	8. Could the popularity of psychological checklists make relationships more suspicious rather than more understanding?

Answer Key

True/False 1=T, 2=F, 3=F, 4=T, 5=T, 6=F, 7=T, 8=F

Phrase Match 1=G, 2=D, 3=I, 4=A, 5=J, 6=C, 7=F, 8=B, 9=E, 10=H

Synonym Match 1=E, 2=C, 3=H, 4=A, 5=J, 6=G, 7=B, 8=I, 9=D, 10=F

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	People sometimes latch on to the first explanation that sounds plausible.
2	The interviewer should not single out quiet candidates for negative attention.
3	An involuntary smile can give away excitement before someone speaks.
4	A pause may mean nothing, yet people sometimes read into it and assume disapproval.
5	The accusations did not add up once the full context became clear.
6	Under pressure, we often fall back on familiar assumptions.
7	A fair assessment must factor in cultural differences.
8	It would be unwise to take a single gesture at face value.
9	We cannot rule out tiredness as the reason for his silence.
10	Understanding a colleague requires us to go beyond first impressions.