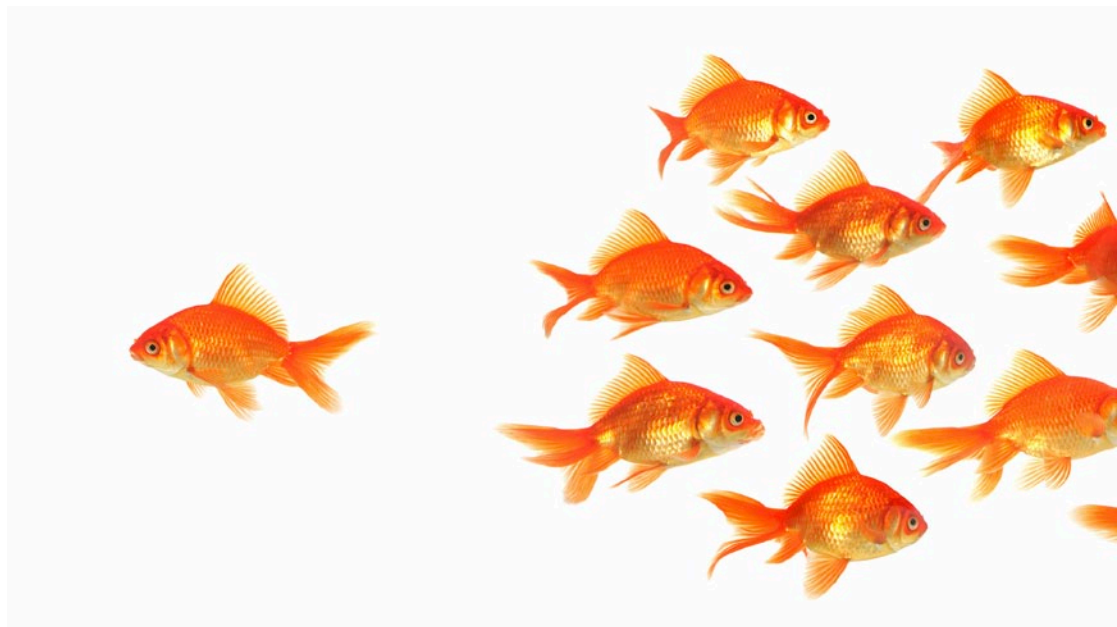


How to enjoy talking to people

by Mark Tyrrell

All you need to know about
overcoming **shyness** and getting
conversations going smoothly

Steps 1 and 6 from the course
10 steps to overcome social anxiety



How to enjoy talking to people

Mark Tyrrell

[Hypnosis Downloads](#) is wholly owned by Hypnosis Downloads.com Ltd.

It is a daughter company of [Uncommon Knowledge LLP](#), which was set up in 1998 and is a well-established hypnotherapy centre specialising in psychology training and provision of hypnosis resources online and offline.

How to enjoy talking to people

© 2012 Hypnosis Downloads.com Ltd

All rights reserved worldwide.

No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or reproduced in any way, including but not limited to digital copying and printing (except for strictly personal use), without the prior agreement and written permission of the author.

Uncommon Knowledge LLP
Queens Building, 8 George Street, Oban PA34 5SB
United Kingdom

Course design by Kathleen Fedouloff
kfedouloff@gmail.com

Cover design by YoYo Design
www.yoyodesign.com

Table of Contents

Copyright	3
A word from the author	5
Where do you start?	6
Overcoming shyness	11
Starting conversations	15
Article • How to read people	20
10 steps to overcome social anxiety - course contents	26

A word from the author



Hi, I'm [Mark Tyrrell](#) of [Hypnosis Downloads](#), and I am the author of '[10 steps to overcome social anxiety](#)'.

Social anxiety plagues so many people, young, old, and in between.

It's natural to feel awkward with other people *sometimes*. No matter how socially adept you are, you'll find yourself in the occasional properly embarrassing situation. But *always* feeling awkward and tongue-tied when you are with others is a torment no one should have to endure.

And you don't have to.

We've drawn on the findings of the very latest research into what influences social interaction and combined this with cutting-edge hypnosis sessions to create the ultimate path to feeling comfortable with anyone, anywhere.

How to enjoy talking to people contains extracts from '[10 steps to overcome social anxiety](#)' and shows that it is possible for you to begin to feel more at ease in company.

I hope this free excerpt from the course will show you just why you can look forward to being able to naturally enjoy all kinds of social interaction.

You can [read more about the full course here](#).

All the best

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark'.



Where do you start?

Human beings are social creatures.

We love nothing more than hanging out together. We talk all day long on every subject under the sun, sharing ideas, arguing, learning, instructing, inspiring, entertaining and generally having fun in each other's company. We band together, collaborate, cooperate, plan and organize. Mainly so we can do more things together.

We like to have a few close people to whom we can reveal our hearts, but we also enjoy having larger circles of friends and acquaintances with whom we can have fun times. And even when we're among strangers, we readily find people to connect with, with whom we can feel at ease.

At ease? You wish...?

The funny thing is, in spite of our super social natures, being with other people, talking and interacting with them, causes more human anxiety than almost anything else you can think of. For some people, even the thought of dying is less terrifying!

How can this be?

The long history behind us

The long course of human evolution has favored sociable behavior. A human on their own can't do much. But when they get together with others, it seems like there is almost nothing they cannot do. So our genes positively drive us together.

Humans are particularly brilliant at making the most of complementary skills and talents. We don't *all* have to be super intelligent, or super creative, or super strong, or super good at making things, or whatever. We can pool our knowledge and talents and come up with phenomenal schemes for making the most of the resources all around us, where many different people contribute in all sorts of different ways.

Civilizations, they're called.

An inevitable upshot of this selection for sociability has been the development in the human species of extreme sensitivity to social context. Our relations with other people *feel* supremely important. How we get on with other people, how they get on with us, *really matters*. And this evolutionary process is, of course, still going on.

As an individual, of course, you have no need to care about where evolution is going with all this, but you are still the product of everything that has gone before.

So it's not at all unusual – in fact it is *exceedingly common* – to experience a very strong *desire* to be sociable coupled with a very strong *anxiety* about being sociable, ranging from shyness or awkwardness to outright social phobia.

And the anxiety is not just because socializing is so important.

It can also be dangerous.

My description of human social evolution above all sounds very wonderful, but it's hardly the whole truth, is it?

History shows rather plainly that humans don't always use their amazing collaborative and cooperative talents for positive purposes. Humans *also* get together to be nasty and horrible to each other. With distressing frequency, and with at least as much ingenuity as they put into beneficial activities.

I am sure I need say no more on that front.

And that makes being very cautious and careful about *who* you socialize with, and *how* you socialize, seem only too sensible. Aren't other people best avoided, if they're such a threat?

It's a real dilemma!

If you just steer clear of other people, you might indeed avoid some of the dangers of hostility, but

- your basic sociable nature will be starved
- you'll experience a great deal of loneliness
- you are likely to be less financially successful (because it's 'who you know, not what you know')
- your health will suffer and you'll be likely to die earlier
- you'll miss out on the huge satisfactions to be gained from engaging in positive endeavors with others

- it will be harder to find people to be intimate with
- and you could get very very bored!

A note on normal anxiety

It's important to remember that social anxiety, even if it seems like an insuperable all-encompassing fixed problem to you right now, is also a *normal* part of human experience.

No matter how socially skilled and comfortable with others we are, there will also be times when we just naturally find social interaction more tricky.

For example, when we fall ill, and have to spend time 'out of the loop', or if we have had to be away for an extended period and so are unable to engage in our normal social activities, it's common to find that we are somehow 'rusty' and a bit awkward, and a little nervous, even with friends. We may 'talk too much' or, alternatively, feel we don't know what to say any more.

In these circumstances, rather than worrying that you've become some sort of freak, or that 'the old problem' has returned, it helps to recognize that you just need some time to re-adjust. You can acknowledge that you're just a bit 'hungry', and go easy on yourself.

Is it just me?

You may think you're the only person who feels terribly worried and nervous about being with other people in social situations.

Everybody else looks so relaxed! They all seem to find it so easy to talk to each other! They don't stutter or get tongue-tied. They don't blush. They make jokes and contribute to the conversation without making fools of themselves. Goodness, they even *start* conversations!

Don't be fooled. Remember: *"Never compare your inside with other people's outside."*

In any group you find yourself in, about half the people there will be experiencing some level of awkwardness and anxiety, and it's quite likely that one or two of them, at the very least, will be feeling even worse than you. But they've learned to hide it.

You may have learned to hide it too, perhaps better than you realize, so that no one suspects how much you are shrinking inside.

This act of concealment can be both a good thing and a bad thing.

It allows you to engage in social activity and enjoy some of its benefits in spite of how you feel.

It can also, if you know how to exploit this, allow you to ‘practice’ sociability safely until it really does become more comfortable and easy for you.

But the risk of always putting on an act is that you may never get to experience the real thing – feeling naturally happy and relaxed and at ease in the company of others. A very good ‘act’ can, paradoxically, stand in the way of really getting to grips with and overcoming the anxiety. On top of that, it’s exhausting to keep up!

Here comes the good news

Now of course, some people do just naturally find socializing easier than others, but even the most socially adept person in the world isn’t *born* knowing how to do it.

Everybody has to *learn* how to socialize. It’s a complex business, involving an interplay of your individual personality and preferences, your early family and social experiences, the culture in which you live, the expectations of those around you, and what real opportunities come your way to learn new ways of doing things.

This is good news.

Because, if socializing skill is something that you learn, and not some immutable ‘fact’ about you like the color of your eyes, then it really doesn’t matter whether your experience with social interaction up till now has been good or bad. It’s perfectly possible to learn new ways of engaging comfortably with others – and enjoying it.

And that’s what the full **10 steps to overcome social anxiety** course is all about.

We believe that everyone – and that includes you! – can learn and change.

We’ve looked closely at what exactly goes on when people get together and identified the factors that can make you feel nervous when dealing with others. And we’ve developed a structured program that pulls together what science has found out about how human interaction and combined it with **carefully selected hypnosis sessions** to enable you to begin to make **real** changes that will make an enormous difference to you.

Learning to be relaxed and comfortable associating and interacting with other people in all kinds of different situations is likely to be the most liberating thing that ever happens to you.

Interested? Read on!

How to enjoy talking to people aims to give you a real taste of what's in the [full 10 step course](#).

And not just a few paragraphs.

As well as this introduction, you have

- the **full** text of Step 1 – **Overcoming shyness**
- the **full** text of Step 6 – **Starting conversations**
- PLUS the **full** text of the article '*How to read people*'

You won't find the practical exercises or the hypnosis sessions and assignments (available when you acquire the [full 10 step course](#)) but otherwise you have all the material included in these steps.

I believe you'll find them invaluable.

Mark

Overcoming shyness

[Step 1 of **10 steps to overcome social anxiety**]

Shyness hurts. Literally. When we *feel* socially rejected (whether we actually have been or not) or even when we *fear* we might be socially rejected, the same regions of the brain activate as when we experience physical pain. (1)

When shyness strikes, it deals a double whammy. First, there's the shyness itself, the feeling of embarrassment, the anxiety, the wanting to hide from the spotlight, the fear of being judged negatively. But then there are also the feelings you have *about* being shy.

People talk about feeling 'stupid' or 'not as good as other people' or 'like a fool' for being shy. So not only do they have the shyness itself to deal with but also, often, all the self criticism that goes along with it; one client told me: "I hate myself for being shy!"

So what exactly is shyness?

Overcoming shyness: knowing the beast

The first step to becoming less shy is to understand what shyness does to people; to see it as a *pattern* and to remember that patterns can be changed.

Shyness has to do with:

- anxious thoughts and feelings in **anticipation** of meeting new people (or even people you see regularly)
- anxious thoughts and feelings in **company**
- feeling **unable to express yourself** or your ideas (and the attendant frustration)

- feeling very **self conscious** rather than relaxed during some conversations
- **misusing your imagination** by assuming you 'know' what other people 'must be' thinking about you
- **avoiding** certain conversations, occasions where you might be 'in the spotlight', or even just going out and seeing people
- **focusing too consciously** on what should be happening *unconsciously* – like your facial expression and every word you say. (Imagine if you had to consciously focus on every step you took when walking – that would certainly spoil your spontaneous enjoyment of the walk!)

'Shyness' is a mix of how we *feel* affecting how we *think* and *behave*.

The ten steps of this overcoming social anxiety course will help change all three of these facets of shyness.



Shyness makes us overthink

Exercise • What about you?

[Available in **10 steps to overcome social anxiety**]

Shyness stops us reacting naturally

Being shy means that you worry excessively that there is a 'wrong thing' and a 'right thing' to say, a 'wrong way' and a 'right way' to look or act. And that if you slip up even

once you may be shut out of the group or rejected in some way. Shy people tend to over-estimate the likelihood that they will be negatively judged or rejected.

Shyness – the vicious cycle

Feeling shy can work like a kind of self-reinforcing feedback loop. Worrying that you are acting shy and haven't said anything much can make you feel *more* anxious, thus making the shyness worse.

There is a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' element to this too, in that 'acting shy' can, in turn, make people around you feel less at ease, so making *you* feel like you are 'doing it all wrong'.

Either way, shyness begets more shyness.

The effects of shyness

Being excessively shy means that, among other things, you

- miss out on social, romantic, or career opportunities
- get frustrated
- can't be really honest, because of feeling reluctant to say what you really think, even when it would be beneficial to do so

So really think about what shyness means to you. What has it made *you* do, or not do?

Get to see the pattern of it. Because it's that pattern we are going to change.

Overcoming shyness by overcoming self focus

A few pages back I mentioned the idea of going for a walk and thinking about every single step you take as you go along. Now imagine actually doing that.

If you were to try it, you would find yourself walking much less naturally, and you would be more focused on what was happening in your legs and feet, your own experience, than on your surroundings. You would, in fact, be trying to control what should be a mostly *unconscious* activity with your conscious mind, constantly checking whether you are 'doing it right'. When you do that, it simply *can't* feel natural.

Shyness makes us do exactly this in a social context.

Feeling shy makes us less observant both of other people and our surroundings. (2)
Shyness demands that we focus in on what *we* feel and think about *ourselves*, rather than on the situation as a whole and on the other people present.

Exercise • Total recall?

[Available in **10 steps to overcome social anxiety**]

On becoming less self conscious

We overcome shyness not when we feel wonderful but when we spend less time thinking about ourselves and more time focusing outward onto others and our immediate environment.

In fact, when people talk to me about coming out of shyness, they often describe it as like ‘forgetting themselves’ and just enjoying the situation.

Imagine, if you were just focusing on the steps of your walk, you might not notice (and would therefore certainly fail to appreciate) the trees, other walkers, that fifty dollar bill at the side of the path...

I’ve talked a lot about what shyness is, but I also want to talk about *destination*.

Overcoming shyness means knowing where you want to be

If you are very shy, or at least shyer than you’d like to be, then it might feel ‘natural’ to focus on that shyness, to think and worry about it. And, as I’ve said, it is important to know how it ‘works’. But a large part of overcoming shyness is building a ‘blueprint’, a sort of map in your mind of *where you want to be*; how you’ll *know* when the shyness is no longer a problem.

The more detailed and vivid a sense of your future *beyond* shyness that you build (rather than just thinking about how bad the shyness is right now), the more likely it is that you’ll naturally move toward that future.

Exercise • Picture the scene

[Available in **10 steps to overcome social anxiety**]

Starting conversations

[Step 6 of 10 steps to overcome social anxiety]

It's an interesting phenomenon that even quite socially confident people, who aren't especially worried about engaging with new people, can sometimes struggle with managing the very first stages of an encounter. If you're not in some very structured situation, like, say, a business meeting, where everybody has a clearly defined role that guides the conversation, what on earth do you *say* to some new person whom you don't know from a bar of soap?

The irony is that the person you might feel least inclined to talk to, the person looking so 'stand-offish' and aloof, perhaps even downright unfriendly, may in fact be outwardly projecting their *own* social anxiety.

They might be experiencing the very same feelings that *you* used to have in these situations. So sometimes these are the very people who could do with your help.

Right, let's look at these very early stages of encounter.

Like at first sight?

You can't force people to like you. Maybe you remind them of an ex-husband or wife they now detest, perhaps you bear a passing resemblance to their nasty boss or to someone who bullied them at school. It's not *fair*, but our brains make this kind of 'faulty pattern match' all the time.

But the fact that you can't make someone like you when you first meet doesn't mean that they will *never* come to like you (and, strangely, sometimes we eventually like people *more* whom we didn't like so much to begin with – go figure!). Nor does it mean that you can't *influence* the probability that they will like you, sooner or later.

But how do you influence people to be more *likely* to like you?

Pre-conversational influence

Connection really begins before you even open your mouth. Your non-verbal communication is getting to work and saying things about you before you've spoken the first hello. So don't leave it (all) to chance.

Research has discovered that people are more likely to form an immediately favorable impression of you if they are eating a tasty meal when they meet you (1) and also that people are more impressionable after drinking coffee. (2)

Yes, really!

Okay, so we can't always control for such things, but having coffee and something tasty to go with it while chatting might do wonders for a budding friendship.

The magic of rapport

Imagine for a moment two people sitting opposite each other across a café table. One is sitting back, shoulders relaxed, arms resting easily on the lap, head up, looking around with open gaze. The other is sitting with shoulders hunched, gaze fixed firmly on the floor, arms tightly crossed.

A single glance would tell you that that these two people are probably not getting on like the proverbial house on fire.

People who are really getting on together (you may have noticed this), or who share a sense of understanding with one another, display certain typical behaviors.

These behaviors may be quite overt or very subtle. Their physical postures will tend to match – both leaning back with one hand resting on the table, for example. Their facial expressions – smiling or looking animated – will be similar. They will tend to use a similar tone of voice and even their choice of vocabulary seems to 'get in line'. They are 'in rapport'.

Now although this pattern happens naturally and unconsciously when you are getting along with someone, it's been found that by *purposely* adopting 'rapport building' behaviors it's possible to influence someone else to feel unconsciously connected to you. (3)

You can make use of this natural 'law'.

Mirroring and matching

When you are talking with someone, notice their body language (posture, gestures, expressions) and 'mirror' one or more aspect of it yourself. Be subtle about it – if you

mimic someone too closely, copying every single thing they do, they'll notice, and you'll spoil the effect.

So if they have one hand resting on the table holding a drink, you might do the same. if they are smiling, you might smile too, and so forth.

What you'll also notice when you do this is that when the other person genuinely starts to feel in rapport with you, they'll begin to reflect *your* body language and facial expressions. So you might notice that when you put your drink down and put your hands in your lap, they do something similar. At this point you know you have rapport with them.



Mirroring and matching each other's body posture and facial expressions helps build rapport... well... usually!

'Matching' is more subtle than mirroring. Instead of reproducing *exactly the same* behavior, you do something which *shares a trait* of that behavior. So if they are perhaps tapping one foot you might gently tap your fingers, if they have their right knee over their left you might have your arms crossed, and so on.

So much for non-verbal communication and influence. Now what about the verbal part of it? How do you get conversation going?

Exercise • Reflection

[Available in 10 steps to overcome social anxiety]

The art of the intro

This may be stating the obvious, but there is no ‘magic’ about the very first thing!

The most effective approach is also the simplest. Just tell people who you are and ask who they are.

“Hi, I’m George. What’s your name?”

Our identity is supremely important to us. When someone is talking to us, and uses our name, we feel acknowledged and recognized. Pushy salesmen (and women) have been known to abuse this aspect of our nature. Don’t be like them. Use the other person’s name in the course of the conversation, by all means, but don’t overdo it.

The art of being interested

People will find you interesting when you seem to find *them* interesting. Most people love talking about themselves.

Asking questions is a universal way of getting acquainted but all questions are not equal. The best kind of questions for getting communication going are ‘open questions’. An open question is a question that requires more than a yes/no or other one word answer.

A yes/no answer session can very quickly dry up, leaving you scrabbling to think of something else to say (unless the other person happens to be very forthcoming and socially at ease themselves). An open question encourages people to talk.

Asking people whether they like the venue is a closed question (because they can answer with just a “yes” or a “no” and then shut up).

But asking them something like: “How do you know Suzie?” gives them the opportunity to open up a bit.

Of course, a series of closed questions can gently lead to more open ones. Something like this:

“Hi, I’m Mark. What’s your name?”

[closed question]

“Georgina.”

“I see. Did you come with Suzie tonight?”

[closed question]

"Yes."

"How do you know Suzie?"

[open question]

"Well, I know her through netball. We play together at a club organized through work. We work in different departments but we met up during netball practice. She's a great laugh and we often go out together. How do you know Susie?"

"I don't. I'm a gatecrasher!"

I'm kidding here, of course, but you see how Georgina's answer has given us all kinds of other possible stuff to talk about, such as work, sport, how you know Suzie and whether she enjoys her job and so on.

So closed questions can lead to open questions, which in turn can lead to more open questions.

Exercise • Open and closed

*[Available in **10 steps to overcome social anxiety**]*

Article • How to read people

6 ways to know what they're really thinking

"Deafness has left me acutely aware of both the duplicity that language is capable of and the many expressions the body cannot hide." (Terry Galloway, American performance artist)

People are perverse or - let's be fair - they *can* be. You think you read them right and wham! They do something to confound your expectations.

She'd sat watching me for two days, intermittently sighing like a ripped inflatable boat; channelling a disappointed school teacher woefully bearing the inept mutterings of the class dimwit.

She looked bewildered, then baffled by my presentations on the nature of depression and its relation to the trance state, shaking her head in a way that screamed: "You're an idiot!"

"Had we been married in a previous life?" I silently wondered.

Still, everyone else seemed to enjoy the workshop, so I tried not to focus on this John Wilkes Booth to my Abe Lincoln as I presented. But concentrating can be hard when one woman present looks as if she'd happily pull an AK47 assault rifle on you and use it without whim.

Worse was to come because - horror upon horror! - as I was preparing to leave at the end, this woman approached me. The downturned corners of her mouth threatened to drag along the carpet. I pretended to be preoccupied with different coloured flip chart markers.

"Excuse me, I just want to say..."

"Yes?"

“...how much I loved the workshop. It’s been fun and I’ve truly learned a great deal.”

Her face contorted into a smile and with that she was gone. I scooped up my lower jaw and wondered: “What just happened? How could I have read this woman so wrong?”

I learned three things from this experience:

- Not to worry too much about what people think or don’t think.
- Not to assume everyone nonverbally communicates in identical ways to everyone else (though, as we’ll see, there is much overlap).
- Not to let emotion cloud my perception when it comes to reading others.

Some people such as the late great Dr Milton Erickson (1) and Dr Joseph Bell, the true-life inspiration behind mythical detective Sherlock Holmes (2), had legendary powers of perception and observation that left people wondering whether they had telepathic powers. How did they do it?

Body language and fleeting expressions

We’ve all seen body language books and some of what they offer may be worthwhile, but, like those ‘dream dictionaries’ that assume people never produce their very own unique symbolism, they are just too general. You know the kind of thing: If someone stands in a certain way with their feet pointing at you, it means they’re willing to have your babies and run off to Honolulu with you! It is useful to study body language and facial expression, but with a caveat.

Sometimes what people seem to show and what may really be going on are two different things depending on your state of mind at the time.

I was assuming that woman’s pained look of trying to assimilate some new, challenging ideas meant she was struggling with me as a person. Unless we’re calm and really look clearly, we can assume we see what is not there and also miss some vital clues as to what is.

Body language can tell us an awful lot, as can facial expressions, but we have to allow for individual differences in expression. So what do people’s facial expressions tell you about them?

Angry faces look the same

It’s true that there are some cultural differences in the way we express ourselves around the world. In some cultures, you can get into trouble just by the way you wave your hand (3).

Some anthropologists believed people learned what to do with their faces when angry (scowl, intense look, flared nostrils, arched eyebrows) from other people. Or that the only reason we don’t smile sweetly when sad is because we’ve learned the sad look

from other people in our culture. It was thought facial expressions and body language were acquired rather than hardwired.

The great psychologist Paul Ekman showed that facial expression of emotion is not culturally determined, but universal across human cultures. Whether you happen to be a Manhattan banker or a New Guinea tribeswoman, your expression of emotions such as anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, amusement, embarrassment, surprise, and shock will be recognizable worldwide. And these are pretty easy to read in the faces of other people.

The charade of adult life

People, especially once they join the adult world, like to 'put on a face'. Some people smile when they don't want to because they assume the occasion calls for it. You'll have seen this if you've ever been served by cabin crew at 30,000 feet. We might even fake looking sad on occasion if we know others are sad and that we're 'supposed' to feel that way too. Perhaps your neighbour is inconsolable because her annoying super-yappy sausage dog has been run over and you don't want to be grinning from ear to ear like you've won a sweepstake, so you act a bit sad. Much of adult life is (or can be) an act, often for altruistic reasons. So what can you do to read people better?

Tip 1: Look out for 'microexpressions'

Sometimes the mask slips. For the merest snatch of time, you'll see a true expression; what they're really thinking flashes out at you. Maybe the consoling neighbour lets out a gleeful smirk for less than 1/15th of a second (which is about how long these microexpressions last) or the cabin crewmember smiles with their mouth but seems to scowl with their eyebrows when you ask for more coffee.

The truth has a way of slipping out, but you need to look out for these fleeting 'microexpressions'. It's easy to fake body language and paste an expression onto your face; and it's also easy to be taken in (4). But if something doesn't 'feel right', look for microexpressions which are almost, but not quite, subliminal. Shooting stars don't last long, but you know when you've seen one.

Tip 2: Look for partial expressions or fleeting full ones

Psychologist Paul Ekman describes how microexpressions or 'tells' - which are, as he described, "very fast and intense expressions of concealed emotion" - can take two forms.

- A full but so fast as to be (almost?) missed expression, such as the waiter who serves you up a 1/15th of a second look of utter contempt when you ask for ketchup with the chef's finest creation. This is a complete expression, but so fast you might miss it as it melts back into the professional smile.
- *Partial* microexpressions contained in only part of the face. These partial 'tells' may last longer than full expressions, but only show on parts of the face such

as around the eyes or the mouth. A classic one might be eyes and eyebrows looking angry whilst mouth smiles.

Tip 3: Don't assume

It's important not to assume you know what you're looking for, because we can so often think we've found what we haven't. If you assume someone 'must' be angry, for example, then everything they say and do will seem like concealed anger to you. The woman at the workshop went on to do other training with us and I noticed (when I was calm) that she always looked a little pained when she was concentrating, as many of us do. I had quickly assumed that because she wasn't grinning like a teenager on a funfair ride, she wasn't enjoying herself.

Remember that we tend to see others through the lens of our prevailing emotion, so work to relax when watching people. Keep your mind nice and open.

Tip 4: Look for patterns

That cabin crewmember may have had an argument with her boyfriend before her shift and still be feeling angry about that as she serves you above the clouds. You don't know. But if you notice that she seems to display a microexpression of contempt at a particular passenger every time he drunkenly yells for more Smirnoff, then that's a *pattern* you've spotted.

Like the 'don't assume' tip, looking for patterns helps you keep more objective when observing others.

Tip 5: Watch what people do

People will tell you all kinds of things about what they think and feel and perhaps most of the time you can trust that. But people kid you - and themselves.

Look for 'incongruence', which means a seeming disconnect between a person's words and their expressions and body language. For example, someone is telling you they really love someone, but every time they mention that person, they shake their head. Or if they tell you something makes them happy but frown as they say it (believe you me, I've seen this many times), then that might be telling you something significant. The trick is not to assume you know for sure what that's telling you until you have more information.

Maybe they do love this person but feel this person doesn't love them back - hence the headshake; maybe this something does make them happy but they fear losing it - hence the frown. We don't know until we know. Practice watching chat shows (or talk shows) on TV with the sound down and guess what the people are feeling when they are talking, then watch again with the sound up and see if their words match their apparent facial expressions.

Tip 6: Merge with people's minds to feel what they feel

Genuine body language and facial expression reflect how we feel, but amazingly how we feel can be changed by adopting certain postures and facial expressions. Around 30 seconds of fake smiling can make you feel better (5), and sitting in an open, confident way can raise testosterone levels (as tested in men) and make you feel more confident, even if you didn't feel that way to begin with (6). So 'faking it 'til you make it' can and does affect hormonal levels and your emotional state in a kind of two-way feedback loop.

It's also been noted that when two people 'see eye to eye', they will naturally and quite unconsciously mirror one another's facial expressions, rate and types of movement, and body posture. But how about this? If you are with someone, try adopting their body posture, facial expressions, and so forth; not just to build better rapport, but to see how adopting these expressions makes you feel, as a way of discovering how they might be feeling.

Next time someone tells you they are not worried or they are happy, try seeing for yourself whether their body and facial movements seem to reflect these feelings by adopting them yourself. Of course, this needs to be done subtly or they'll notice.

I believe we can, with practice, become much better at reading people, perhaps to an astonishing degree. But ultimately, we can and should take people at face value and not be trying to 'read' them all the time, unless we feel something doesn't add up. It's worth remembering the words of the great fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, that most famous of people-readers:

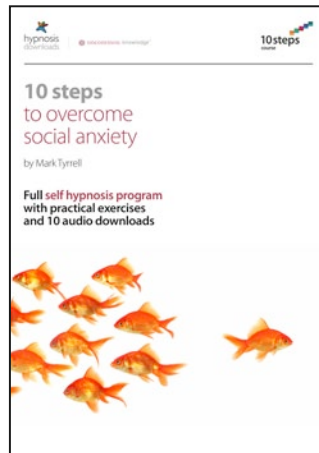
"The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession."

Look, see patterns, and bit by bit form conclusions - but only when all the 'evidence' is in.

Notes

- (1) Erickson contracted polio as a very young man, and was immobilized for many months and physically debilitated for the rest of his life. He is quoted as saying that his physical limitations had made him more observant, and certainly his powers of observation were legendary. On more than one occasion, he seemed to read people's minds.
- (2) Dr Joseph Bell was, in part, the inspiration for Arthur Conan Doyle's creation Sherlock Holmes. He was known as 'The Father of Modern Forensics' and could, it seems, randomly pick a stranger and, by careful observation, be able to tell his occupation and recent activities - something that his fictional counterpart would also sometimes do.
- (3) For example, in Iran the 'thumbs up' gesture seen as such a positive gesture in the west is considered a great insult.

- (4) Psychologist and world-renowned facial expression expert Paul Ekman found after testing 20,000 people from all different backgrounds that only 50 people had the capacity to reliably spot lies without any training in doing so.
- (5) Liverpool University's Professor of Clinical Psychology and Headroom consultant, Peter Kinderman, states: "There is considerable scientific evidence that just the physical act of a smile can induce positive emotions in a smiler, just as standing straight and looking up can help us feel more confident."
- (6) Research conducted by Dr Amy C.J. Cuddy, a social psychologist at the Harvard Business School, found that adopting an open body posture increased testosterone levels and lowered stress hormone. Looking confident can make us feel more powerful!



A powerful 10 step course that uses hypnosis to program your unconscious mind to feel more naturally at ease with other people. [Find out more.](#)

10 steps overcome social anxiety

Full self hypnosis program with practical exercises and 10 audio downloads

Introduction

- Step 1 Overcoming shyness
- Step 2 Overcoming social phobia
- Step 3 Being yourself socially
- Step 4 Eye contact
- Step 5 Meeting people
- Step 6 Starting conversations
- Step 7 Making small talk
- Step 8 Expressing your opinion
- Step 9 Speaking in groups
- Step 10 I'm OK, you're OK