Non-verbal Communication: Common Gestures

One of my students -- now in Level 4 -- still shakes her head when she is saying something affirmative which is very confusing. Obviously this could be an impediment to people understanding her. Gestures are one of those things we often overlook in class but which are immensely important to our students' success in this country. This lesson is a quick and fun way to teach them some of the more common gestures.

The photos come from The ESL Miscellany (Pro Lingua Associates 1991; ISBN: 0-086647-043-3) and Culturally Speaking by Rhona Genzel and Martha Cummings (Heinle & Heinle 1994; ISBN: 0-8384-4213-7). I have done my best to make good copies of these pictures. Unfortunately some of them have lost some of their clarity through the copying process. I have also used some clip art.

Please note: Our symbol for Okay (see picture 8) is considered vulgar in some other cultures. You may have to assure your students that it is Okay (!) to use it here.

Please note II: As an optional gesture to be shown during the closure of Day One I have included the “finger” (aka the “Angry” person) since it is likely that all our students have seen it already (and maybe even used it). If you do use this, obviously stress that they shouldn’t use it since it is considered vulgar in our culture.

Please note III: I have only included vocabulary for some of the gestures (point, wave, shrug, etc.) as they are easy words to learn and explain. For the rest of them, I would just teach them the meaning, not what the action is since they are more difficult to define or more difficult words (the OK sign, beckon, etc.).