

10 Ways Liars Use Words To Obscure the Truth

From: <http://lespotting.com/lespotting-basics/words/>

Instructions: Read and annotate. Make connections to your text and to what you've learned about the universal emotions and how to detect them on faces. Make connections to what you learned about body language and emotion from your reading in your textbook.

Lying is hard work.

Daunting as it may seem to keep track of all the possible signs of deception—facial cues, gestures, leg movements—think of how difficult it is to be the deceiver. To tell a convincing lie, you must keep all the details of your story straight. And not only that, you must sell it with appropriate body language, while trying to avoid leaking any emotional clues that would give the lie away.

It's so difficult to keep a false story going that you'd think it would be easy to catch a liar in the act. Yet it isn't. We still catch only about 50% of lies. We're terrible at reading facial expressions and body language. And we're not much better at listening to the words.

So what are we to do? Listen more carefully, for starters. While liars are more likely to rehearse their words than their body language, there are a number of telltale signs that still leak out. From word choice to vocal tone to the chronology of stories, the trained listener has several verbal clues with which to work. Knowing the potential slip-ups, you can zero in on suspicious language, ask questions, and spot the lies.

Here are 10 common ways that liars use words to obscure the truth, so you can be on guard for deception:

1. **Liars will repeat a question verbatim.** Hey Charles, did you send the email to Jackie? Did I send the email to Jackie? If this is Charles's response, you have your answer—he didn't send it yet. Repeating a question in full is a common stalling tactic used by people looking for an extra moment to prepare their deceptive reply. In natural conversation, people will sometimes repeat part of a question, but restating the entire question is highly awkward and unnecessary—they clearly heard you the first time.
2. **Liars will take a guarded tone.** If Charles had replied to the direct question by lowering his voice and asking, *What do you mean?*, a lie may well have been in the works. A suspicious or guarded approach isn't usually called for, and may indicate that he's concealing something—whether it's the truthful answer or his attitude toward you for asking the question in the first place.
3. **Liars won't use contractions in their denials.** Bill Clinton provides the classic example of what interrogators call a "non-contracted denial" when he said "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." The extra emphasis in the denial is unnecessary if someone is telling the truth. *I didn't have sex with her* is how the honest person is likely to phrase his claim of innocence. Clinton said a lot more than he realized with his words.
4. **Liars tell stories in strict chronology.** To keep their stories straight, liars tend to stick to chronological accounts when relating an event. They don't want to get tripped up by an out-of-place detail—there's enough to think about already. But this isn't how we talk when being truthful. We relate stories in the way we remember them, not in strict chronological order. That's because memorable events carry an emotional component too. Often we'll lead with the most searing emotional moment, and jump around in time.
5. **Liars love euphemisms.** It's human nature not to implicate ourselves in wrongdoing. This holds true even for liars, who will shy away from dwelling on their deception if possible. One way they do this is opting for softer language—instead of saying "I didn't steal the purse" they may say "I didn't take the purse." If you ask someone a direct question about their involvement in an incident and they change your words to something softer, raise your deception antennae.

6. **Liars overemphasize their truthfulness.** "To tell you the truth..." "Honestly..." "I swear to you..." "Oh, if only I were so! When people use these bolstering statements to emphasize their honesty, there's a good chance they are hiding something. Learning to baseline someone's normal behavior is important in situations such as this: You want to listen for normal or harmless use of such phrases. There's no need to add them if you really are telling the truth, so be on guard.
7. **Liars avoid or confuse pronouns.** We use a fair amount of pronouns in normal conversation. They are a sign of comfortable speech, and they may disappear or be misused by someone who is trying to be extra careful with his words. A liar may say "You don't bill hours that you didn't work" instead of making the clear first-person statement: "I don't bill hours I didn't work."
8. **Liars use long introductions but skip over main events.** When a liar wants to build credibility, she will pad her story with as much factual content as possible. The Israeli researcher Avramio Sapir found that deceptive individuals will add more detail around the prologue of a story, but gloss over the main event where the deception comes into play. Careful listeners can pick up on this lopsided storytelling style and use the BASIC method to zero in on the missing details with specific questions.
9. **Liars give very specific denials.** We've already discussed the human impulse to avoid implicating ourselves. So we can expect liars to be very particular in what they say and don't say. Truth-tellers have no problem issuing categorical denials—*I never cheated anyone in my whole life*—where as the liar will choose his words ever so carefully.
10. **Liars hedge their statements.** We hear them in court testimony, political hearings and TV confessional interviews all the time: qualifying statements that leave an out for the person on the hot seat. "As far as I recall..." "If you really think about it..." "What I remember is..." Hedged statements aren't an absolute indicator of deception, but an overuse of such qualifying phrases certainly should raise suspicion that a person isn't being totally up front with what he or she knows.

Even without the benefit of being able to watch body language and facial expressions, the careful listener can do a fair bit of lespotting just from the words liars choose to use.

Lie Detection Assignments: All activities DUE: March 17th

1. Watch tedEd: How to Spot a Liar <http://ted.com/lesson/How-to-Spot-a-Liar>
2. Complete the classroom exercise: Difficulty in Detecting Deception
 - Get with a partner.
 - One participant in each pair prepares answers for the questions in list 1 and asks his or her partner the questions in list 2; the other participant in each pair prepares answers for the questions in list 2 and asks the partner the questions in list 1.
 - Prepare lies for your answers to at least three, but not more than five, of the questions.
 - When you have decided how to answer the questions, students in each pair should take turns asking each other the questions.
 - Immediately after hearing your partner's response, you should write down whether they believe the answer was truthful or a lie.
 - Also, indicate your degree of confidence—from 0 to 100 percent—in their judgment.
3. With a partner or working independently, design an experiment or activity about lying and detecting the body language of deception. Your goal is to find out how well you AND/OR other people are at detecting lies.
 - a. Complete a short write up of your activity/experiment and your results
 - b. Watch the TED talk "The Future of Lying" by Jeff Hancock
 - c. Keep track of how often you can detect people telling these types of lies
 - d. Use what you know about detecting deception in body language and communication
 - e. Complete a write up of your findings and your thoughts about the future of lying

PsychSim 5: CATCHING LIARS

Name: _____ Section: _____

Date: _____

In this activity you will explore some of the methods used to detect deception.

Nonverbal Cues

- After watching the two video clips, which version do you think is true?

____ The first version (born in New York) is true.

____ The second version (born in England) is true.

Detecting Emotion from Facial Expression

- After examining the photos, which do you think show a genuinely happy person?

____ The left photo shows a genuine smile.

____ The right photo shows a genuine smile.

Using a Polygraph to Detect Deception

- Briefly explain how a polygraph is used to detect lies.

Differences Among the Physiological Measurements

- Why is respiration rate a less reliable indication of nervousness than perspiration or heart rate?

Concerns About the Use of Polygraphs

- Of those listed, which type of error could not be tolerated by the justice system?

Results From the Stimulated Polygraph Session

- After you have reviewed the pattern of physiological activity, indicate your best judgment about the truthfulness of the suspect.

____ This person is telling the truth. He didn't take the camera.

____ This person is lying. He probably took the camera, or knows where it is.

____ It's impossible to tell whether this person is lying.

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

HANDOUT 8B-9

List 1

1. What is your favorite type of pizza?

2. Of all the television shows you've seen lately, what is your favorite?

3. How did you celebrate your last birthday?

4. What activities do you participate in?

5. What is your favorite course thus far?

6. What do you hope to do after high school?

7. What animal do you think is the ideal pet?

8. What academic subject is your best?

List 2

1. What is your favorite dessert?

2. Of all the movies you've seen lately, what is your favorite?

3. How did you celebrate Valentine's Day?

4. What extracurricular activities are you involved in?

5. What is your favorite class?

6. What are your summer plans?

7. When you go to the zoo, what animals do you like to see the best?

8. What sport do you play the best?

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