



# LIFE & STYLE

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## You Really Look Smart

Tactics People Use to Seem Intelligent Often Backfire; a Growing Body of Research

[ Bonds ]

By SUE SHELLENBARGER



While trying to look intelligent, a lot of people do things that make them look dumb.

For instance, people use big words or put on a poker face—tactics that can backfire for some, studies show.

A growing amount of research is teasing out how people form first impressions of others' intelligence—and how well it works when you try to manage those impressions. The cues people look for in assessing each other's intelligence are simple. But they aren't always easy to pull off under pressure. They include showing self-confidence, speaking clearly and smoothly, and responding thoughtfully to what others are saying, research shows.

And put away that phone: One of the strongest and most accurate signs of intelligence is looking at others when you are speaking to them, says Nora A. Murphy, an associate professor of psychology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, who has conducted six studies on the topic. In one, Dr. Murphy compared, in the same study, the behaviors people adopt when trying to look smart with the cues observers use in sizing up others' intelligence.

In a 2007 study of 182 graduate students, some participants were instructed to try to appear intelligent during a videotaped discussion with a partner. Each also took an IQ test. Other people were asked to watch the videos and make a judgment about the participants' likely IQ. Separately, researchers watched the videos for 28 different behaviors.

People trying to look intelligent had a few behaviors in common. Among them were looking at others while listening or speaking, sitting up straight, putting on a serious face and avoiding certain gestures, such as touching their hair or face. But just the first two of those behaviors earned them a high IQ score from people watching the videos.

The observers also gave higher IQ ratings to participants who appeared more relaxed and confident. They rated as smarter participants who wore a self-assured expression rather than a poker face, spoke clearly in a pleasant, expressive voice, and were responsive to their conversation partners—gesturing, nodding and "being engaged in the conversation and paying attention," Dr. Murphy says.

People who tried to appear in-

telligent risked exposing what they didn't know, the research shows. Observers were more accurate in estimating the IQs—including lower IQs—of those instructed to act intelligent than in estimating the IQs of controls who weren't given any instructions. Apparently, participants' attempts at impression management actually magnified other cues signaling low intelligence.

"The more you try, the more it's going to be obvious" that you're trying, Dr. Murphy says. Some simple stereotypes about intelligence can also shape others' first impressions. Wearing eyeglasses can lead strangers to regard you as more intelligent, says a 2011 study in the *Swiss Journal of Psychology*.

Using a middle initial makes people expect you to perform bet-

ter on a competitive intellectual quiz, according to several studies of European and U.S. subjects published last year in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*; middle initials are linked in many people's minds to higher social status and education.

Those positive first impressions may be shattered, however, as soon as pretentious language starts interfering with others' ability to understand and communicate with you. People who embellish their writing with long, complicated words are seen as less intelligent by readers, according to a 2006 study in *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

The workplace, of course, is full of people trying too hard to look smart. Dianna Booher coached a manager who tried to impress others by learning a new

word every day and using it all day. "He'd say, 'I'm going to use the word 'ubiquitous' today,' and he'd use it three or four different ways in meetings, in hallway conversations, and sometimes it fit and sometimes it didn't," says Ms. Booher, a Colleyville, Texas, author and consultant on business communication. Rather than burling his image, "he became a laughingstock," she says.

Others try to project intelligence by talking too much, and too loudly—"hiding inside a barrage of words, hoping no one will notice that they don't know anything," says Lisa D. Parker, president of Heads Up Coaching and Consulting in New York.

Ms. Parker has a clock on her office wall. She sometimes quietly times overtalkers and surprises them by revealing just how long

they've been droning on. She advises them to practice halting the flow: "Ask a question, let somebody else talk, and practice long, slow, deep breaths" to regain self-control.

Onlookers often interpret such behavior as a sign of insecurity and low self-esteem, says Joel Garfinkle, an Oakland, Calif., executive coach and author.

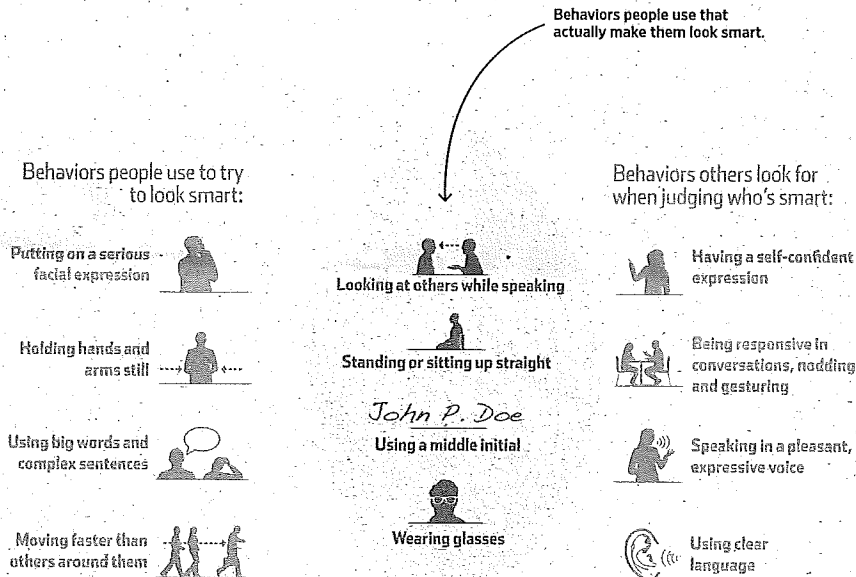
Appearing calm and confident is another cue: People who move faster than others around them are seen as less intelligent, according to a 2007 study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Still, some people treat projecting intelligence like a race, says William Arruda, a New York City personal-branding consultant. "In meetings, they think, 'I always

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### How to Project Intelligence

What people do to look smart often isn't what comes across as smart, research shows.



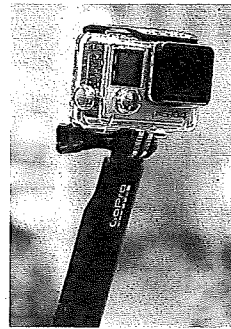
Sources: Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin; European Journal of Social Psychology; Journal of Personality and Social Psychology; Applied Cognitive Psychology; Journal of Personality; Swiss Journal of Psychology.

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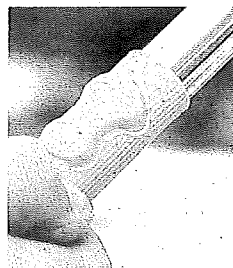
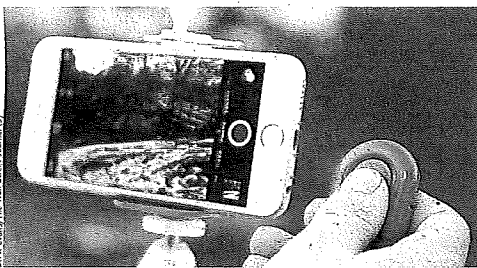
## LIFE &amp; STYLE

# For Better Selfies, Carry a Big Stick

If You're Going to Join the Trend, You Might as Well Get the Best



Clockwise from left: With many selfie sticks, you can plug your phone into the headphone port. The GoPro's 3-Way stick, which turns into a tripod, below, the button on the Looq DG allows you to take the photo without tapping your phone's screen. Vivitar's Bluetooth remote.



By JOANNA STERN



Since the dawn of time, the stick has been essential to human survival. Without it, our ancestors may not have been able to create fire, figure out writing or trudge their way toward new frontiers.

History books may soon be updated with the most recent (and possibly the greatest) chapter in the stick's continuing relationship with humankind. That humble tool now enables us to lift our phones and cameras aloft, to take better photos of our surroundings...and ourselves.

Behold, the selfie stick. I know what you are thinking. "If this narcissistic trend was meant to be, we'd have been born with really, really long arms!" I felt the same way when I first started noticing selfie sticks cropping up.

But using a selfie stick is a little like eating an oyster for the first time: Don't knock it until you try it. There are some real advantages to having one. No, looking respectable isn't one of them. But it does capture more stable video, and you can shoot wider angles of yourself and your whole family—without having to hand your phone over to a total stranger.

I figured if I'm going to join this absurd-looking trend, I should have the best one. Now, you're probably thinking, "How complicated can a stick be?" Not all are created equal, not remotely. So to pick a winner, I've been accumulating countless selfies, and the disdainful gazes of countless strangers, as I put 14 sticks through their paces.

## Cheap Stick

Fundamentally, selfie sticks are just poles with attachments at the end for your smartphone or small camera. They're no more than hand-held tripods.

For just five bucks on Amazon, you can see countless listings for the same 100-centimeter, TV antenna-looking pole with a colorful rubberized grip and "Monopod" label. Most are made in Asia, which makes sense, since the selfie-stick phenomenon did take off here. Don't buy these—your precious phone or camera should be worth your paying at least \$15.

A variation of that basic stick, such as the \$20 Looq DG, has a remote-control feature: A dangling curly headphone-jack plug at the top lets you take a photo without having to tap your phone's screen. Attach your iPhone or Android phone, plug in the cord, launch the camera app and you can start snapping away, just by pressing a button on the rubberized grip.

It is very convenient, but pressing the button can cause the stick to shake a bit, resulting in a potentially blurry photo.

Vivitar's \$15 alternative, the Bluetooth Remote Selfie Monopod, which will be on sale early next week, comes with a wireless remote instead of a headphone plug. Its foam-like grip is also far more comfortable to hold, and the stick—available in a number of different colors—has a more eye-pleasing design. I kept misplacing the tiny control, however.

Some have Bluetooth built in to the handle, even the forthcoming Belfie stick—yes, a Kardashian-inspired stick that's hinged for taking DIY butt photos. However, you have to remember

to charge your stick, and you can't get the pole wet.

All of the sub-\$30 options have one thing in common. They feel really cheap. If someone really disliked your selfie stick, they would have no problem bending it right over their knee. Sometimes it even mistakenly presses on the iPhone's camera button so you end up with hundreds of photos you don't want. The plastic phone mount clamps down hard, like you're putting your delicate device in a bear trap. Good luck fitting your big-screen iPhone 6 Plus or Galaxy Note.

## Raise the Bar

For that beach or ski vacation, there are plenty of more durable and waterproof options. You just have to pay more.

Of the many I tested in this range, my favorite was the \$60-to-\$70 Digipower Quik Pod Selfie Extreme (aka "Quik Pod Ultra" or "Xpert"), in part because of its raised rubberized grip.

There's no shutter gimmick built-in—to shoot remotely, you'd have to use a timer or buy a \$5 Bluetooth remote, like one from Vivitar. (There's a mirror, though, so you can frame selfies even with a GoPro, traditional point-and-shoot or the rear-facing better camera on your phone.)

The saltwater-proof pole, which extends 135 centimeters, is much sturdier than others, with a regular tripod leg that is held in place with lever lock. The Quik Pod's drawback is that its cheaper listings (like one I've seen for \$50) don't all come with a phone mount. Make sure to check the mount situation before buying.

If you need to buy a mount, iStabilizer's \$20 SmartMount is

the sturdiest and safest I've found for my phone. Upgrading a bad mount could also be an important investment, especially if you plan to hold your phone out over the side of a boat or chairlift!

## Going Extreme

These sticks aren't just for beauty selfies and family photos. They're great for capturing action shots on the fly. And when GoPro arrived, the trend really picked up. The good news? Pairing a selfie stick with a ski helmet or Jet Ski makes you look way less ridiculous.

I highly recommend GoPro's own \$70 3-Way. It folds up into a fairly compact package that can easily be tossed in a backpack, it has two joints you can bend to nail a tricky shot, and the bottom pops off, so it can become a tripod.

I also liked PolarPro's \$100 PowerPole. It is the Tesla of selfie sticks, with a built-in battery that recharges phones and GoPros.

Still, my old standby the Quik Pod costs less, is lighter and can be retracted into a much smaller pole. And a GoPro mount is included in the box.

I'm going to give it to you straight, dear reader. No matter which one of these you go with, you'll still look a bit ridiculous walking around with your phone attached to a stick. But the better the photos of you and your family get, perhaps the more comfortable you'll be with the social cost.

Mark my words, I'll be taking the Quik Pod on my next vacation. And every time I use it, I'll be reminded of this epoch in human history where we, like our cave-dwelling ancestors, took up sticks to overcome our greatest obstacles.

## The Art Of Looking Smart; Tactics Often Backfire

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have to have the answer, so I have to blurt out the first thing that comes to my head," he says.

Others quickly see through such behaviors as a sign of insecurity. Those who do the best job of projecting intelligence, Mr. Arruda says, "are those who are able to say, 'I don't know.'"

When Dan Cappello, a former insurance executive and stock-exchange floor trader, bought a company that makes equipment for chip manufacturers years ago, he knew nothing about the industry. In initial meetings, he decided to just admit it, and surprised the company's 40 employees by announcing, "Hey, I don't understand this. Can you explain this to me?" Mr. Cappello says.

He told employees he was eager to learn the business but would focus on his strengths in sales and marketing to expand the company, says Mr. Cappello, president and CEO of MEI in Albany, Ore. The company has expanded sales tenfold and grown to 300 employees.

The kind of natural, responsive behavior that conveys true intelligence is complicated, says Suzanne Bates, an author on executive presence and chief executive of Bates Communications in Wellesley, Mass. It entails listening carefully, responding in a way that shows understanding, asking questions and welcoming other points of view. "You really can't fake it," she says.

**"The thing I do that I find people respond to the most is that I am really enthusiastic."**

Carolyn Sandano, marketing executive

You can learn it, though. Carolyn Sandano worried on her first major job out of college years ago, as a marketing specialist for a law firm, that colleagues would look down on her because she didn't have a law degree. When her boss asked her for a recommendation on buying some software, she wrote a 30-page report bristling with data, big words and erudite sentences.

"I wanted everybody to think I was smart," she says. Instead of reading it, her boss asked her at a meeting to "just boil it down for us."

These days, the New York City legal-marketing executive is open about what she doesn't know, and "if I'm wrong, I say so," she says. She asks a lot of questions and spends 75% of her time listening intently, she says, "as if there were nothing more important in your life right now" than that conversation.

She also shows genuine interest in others' ideas.

"The thing I do that I find people respond to the most," she says, "is that I am really enthusiastic."