



Have you ever heard someone refer to their need for "personal space"? Have you ever started to feel uncomfortable when someone stands just a little too close to you? The term proxemics refers to the distance between people as they interact. Just as body movements and facial expressions can communicate a great deal of nonverbal information, so can this physical space between individuals.

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall described four levels of social distance that occur in different situations:

- **Intimate distance - 6 to 18 inches**
This level of physical distance often indicates a closer relationship or greater comfort between individuals. It often occurs during intimate contact such as hugging, whispering, or touching.
- **Personal distance - 1.5 to 4 feet**
Physical distance at this level usually occurs between people who are family members or close friends. The closer the people can comfortably stand while interacting can be an indicator of the intimacy of the relationship.
- **Social distance - 4 to 12 feet**
This level of physical distance is often used with individuals who are acquaintances. With someone you know fairly well, such as a co-worker you see several times a week, you might feel more comfortable interacting at a closer distance. In cases where you do not know the other person well, such as a postal delivery driver you only see once a month, a distance of 10 to 12 feet may feel more comfortable.
- **Public distance - 12 to 25 feet**
Physical distance at this level is often used in public speaking situations. Talking in front of a class full of students or giving a presentation at work are good examples of such situations.

It is also important to note that the level of personal distance that individuals need to feel comfortable can vary from culture to culture. One oft-cited example is the difference between people from Latin cultures and those from North America. People from Latin countries tend to feel more comfortable standing closer to one another as they interact, while those from North America need more personal distance.

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http://psychology.about.com/od/nonverbalcommunication/ss/understanding-body-language_8.htm)