

# Influencing others through gestures: misleading eyewitnesses

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Gestures made during interviews can influence or even misinform eyewitnesses. In addition, eyewitnesses are unlikely to recall the influential gestures being shown to them, new research from the University of Hertfordshire suggests. These findings are being presented this week at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference.

Dr Daniel Gurney, from the University of Hertfordshire, interviewed 90 people about the contents of a video they had watched. During the interviews, the researcher deliberately performed misleading hand gestures to suggest inaccurate information about the detail in the video. These hand gestures included chin stroking to suggest someone had a beard. Although the man in the video did not have a beard, Dr Gurney found that the interviewees were three times more likely to recall seeing a beard when one was gestured to them, than those [interviewees](#) who were not gestured to. Other hand gestures used in the research included touching a [ring finger](#) (to suggest a ring), grasping a wrist (to suggest a watch) and pretending to pull on gloves. All of these gestures implied details that did not actually appear in the video and the results were similar to those with the [misinformation](#) about the beard.

Dr Gurney said: “A lot of research has showed that eyewitnesses can be influenced by misleading questions, but this research shows that gestures can also mislead, and sometimes without eyewitnesses even realising. For those professionals in the police, legal and other sensitive areas of work where questioning and recall of detail is important, we need to make sure the significance of [hand gestures](#) is fully taken on board.”

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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