

Non-verbal Communication Statistics Wrong

You might have heard of the 7-38-55 Rule of Personal Communication. This urban myth states only 7% of communication is verbal words, while 38% is tone of voice, and 55% is body language.

These numbers are still found in many textbooks and publications today.

Unfortunately, these numbers are FALSE. They were taken, out of context, from two studies conducted in 1967 (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). The primary author of both studies has acknowledged,

“My findings are often misquoted. Clearly, it is absurd to imply or suggest that the verbal portion of all communication constitutes only 7% of the message. Suppose I want to tell you that the eraser you are looking for is in the second right-hand drawer of my desk in my third-floor office. How could anyone contend that the verbal part of this message is only 7% of the message?” (Mehrabian, 1995, as cited in Lapakko, 1997, p. 65)

While the numbers may be false, the idea that non-verbal communication is important is true.