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[The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right](#)

September 24, 2007 at 10:30 am · Filed under [Cultural differences](#), [Unspoken](#) · Posted by Dave

Anybody remember when George H W Bush tried to signal 'peace' during a visit to Australia in the 90s by giving a large crowd the time-honoured two-fingered salute? Though he didn't know it at the time, he was actually telling the whole crowd to go screw themselves - and all because he made the seemingly innocuous error that his palm was facing inwards instead of outwards.

Nacho highlighted the danger of using certain hand gestures when travelling in [an earlier post](#), as some have very different meanings in some countries from what we as Westerners believe them to stand for. Let's take a look, shall we?

1. The "Wanker"

This one actually has a universal meaning; it was just too good not to include in any compilation of hand gestures. There aren't many places on earth where you could get away with frantically fist-pumping at somebody - I'd imagine because masturbating's the same wherever you go. Even in Japan.



Particularly popular with fans at football matches to taunt opposition players, [Tony Blair](#) famously copped a bit of embarrassment when the uncensored version of a photograph of him during his Oxford University days was shown on BBC2's Newsnight: a photo that had later been photoshopped by the supplying press agency to cover up Blair's rude – and delightfully unambiguous – hand gesture. Yes, Tony. You are.

Interestingly, in **Greece** and **Portugal** the gesture is made with the palm *facing the ground*, implying that the person is rather fonder of wanking other men as opposed to himself.

2. The "Thumbs-Up"

First of all, let's quash the urban legend of the 'thumbs-up/thumbs-down' being used by the audience in the Roman coliseum to vote on the life or death of a defeated gladiator, as furthered by such movies as *Gladiator* and *Spartacus*. There's no evidence for this, and it's just massively unlikely. Sorry.

While Western culture has become used to the thumbs-up as a



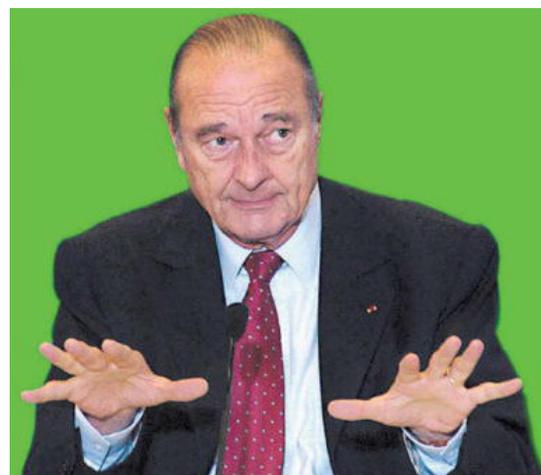
positive, informal signal, generally indicating a job well done (probably stemming from World War II pilots using the signal to communicate that they were “good to go” with ground crews), there are cultures where a thumbs-up may land you in trouble. In most of **Latin America** and **West Africa**, as well as **Greece**, **Russia**, **Sardinia** and the south of **Italy**, the thumbs-up basically means the same as the middle finger: “sit on it and swivel”. Also, it’s generally not recommended to use the thumbs-up around the **Middle East** as it’s pretty much the biggest insult out there – and even worse if you pull off the emphatic version with both hands – so no Fonzie impressions, please.



Rather more charming is a thumbs-up in **Germany** and in the less-Westernised areas of **Japan** – they just see it as the hand signal for the number one. Bless.

3. The “Moutza”

Opening your palm to your target and stretching out your fingers seems harmless enough to most Westerners. Most of us would think you’re waving. In **Greece**, however, the gesture is known as a *moutza*, and is one of their most traditional manual insults. With fingers slightly apart, you thrust your hand into your target’s face, usually coupling the gesture with a brash “*na!*”, meaning “here you go!”. The basic suggestion is something like “eat shit”, implying that you’re not particularly impressed and would rather the target of the *moutza* leave you alone – comparable to the American interpretation of the same signal as “talk to the hand, because the face isn’t listening”.



The gesture is also an insulting one in **Pakistan** and many parts of **Africa**. The **Japanese** use a very similar sign to insult their old enemies, the **Koreans**. Roughly translating as ‘animal’, the signal is similar to the *moutza* in every way except they tuck the thumb into the palm.

Amusingly, Microsoft used to use a very similar-looking hand signal as an icon for warning dialogs in previous versions of Windows – what Greek users must have thought of that, I don’t know... “This application has performed an illegal operation - now, *eat shit!*”.

4. The “Dog Call”

Curling your index finger towards you in a summoning motion is a gesture generally linked with seductive temptresses in Hollywood movies, beckoning for their targeted men to follow them into another room.

Beware, however, of using this gesture in the **Philippines** – it’s a method of communication considered worthy only to use on dogs, and is actually punishable by arrest. Worst of all, they’ll break your index finger in order to prevent you from committing the same crime again!



5. The “A-OK”

Mainly used by scuba divers to mean “OK” (to prevent ambiguity with the thumbs-up sign, which means “ascend”), this hand gesture is generally called ‘A-OK’, and in **America** and the **UK** is often used to tell somebody that they’ve made a great meal, as talking with your mouth would just be impolite. Essentially the meaning comes out as “*great*”, or “*absolutely fine*”.

Not so, however, in a few countries in Europe, where the



numerical interpretation gives the signal an insulting overtone – essentially you're telling them that you think they're a 'zero'.

Far worse, however, is the meaning in **Brazil**, **Germany** and a few **Mediterranean countries**: the circular shape of the gesture gives it the meaning of "anus", and is therefore used to call somebody an "asshole", or, by extension, a homosexual. You probably wouldn't learn that in most of the [German courses London](#) has to offer.



6. The "Cutis"

While there isn't really an equivalent in Western culture, the *cutis* in **Indian** and **Pakistani** culture is basically a thumbs-up, except you push the nail on your thumb against your front teeth and flick, while saying "cutta!". It basically amounts to "screw you", and famously appeared in the media when Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar made the gesture in Melbourne as he left the field for a rain delay during the 2004 test series against Australia.



7. The "V Sign"

The age-old 'V sign' comes in two formats: one with the palm faced outwards, and one with the palm inwards. In **America** the two hand signals mean the same thing – 'victory', as popularised by Richard Nixon, or 'peace and love', which seemed to become the primary meaning after anti-Vietnam protesters used it during the 60s.

However, if the outside of your hand is facing your target, you're giving somebody a long-established insult in **Great Britain** and many English-speaking countries such as **Australia**, **Ireland** and **New Zealand**. Winston Churchill famously used the 'incorrect' version of the V sign during the early years of the war, switching round later when he'd been told by his advisors that he wasn't exactly giving the lower social orders a positive message. The V sign is also considered rude in **Italy**, especially if you place your nose between the two fingers, making the gesture resemble a crude vagina.



I myself have almost seen a fight start as a result of an American tourist ordering drinks in an English pub: when asked how many pints he wanted, he simply stuck two fingers up and looked straight into the eyes of the barman – perfectly normal on the other side of the Atlantic (it's actually the signal for the number 2 in American Sign Language), but it's [fighting talk](#) to the British.

8. The "Fig"

Nothing more than a fist with the thumb poking out from between the index and middle fingers, the *mano fico* (literally 'fig hand') is a gesture of Roman origin, used as a positive gesture to encourage good luck and fertility, and ward away the 'evil eye'. The sexual nuance comes from from the hand's resemblance to the female private parts (*fica* is actually Italian slang for "vulva"), with the nub of the thumb representing the clitoris.

There seems to be a lack of positive meaning to this sign these days, however. If you're doing the 'fig', it probably means you're denoting a letter T in American Sign Language. But if somebody else is giving you the same gesture (especially if they are of the Asian persuasion), they're probably giving you a



rather disparaging insult, roughly equivalent to “*fuck you!*”. This hand sign is also highly disparaging to **Italians** and **Turks**, and in **India** would be taken as a threatening gesture. Most non-deaf Americans or Brits, however, would simply see the *mano fico* as a bizarre-looking fist.



9. The “Cornia”

Consisting of a clenched fist with the second and fifth fingers straightened out, the *cornia* (‘horns’) hand gesture has most recently been adopted by fans of rock and heavy metal music, first used by Black Sabbath vocalist Ronnie James Dio. The gesture carries only a vague meaning, implying the presence of Satan, malevolence and loud guitar music, and is used in much the same way as headbanging. The gesture was actually popularised as a Satanic salute during the 1960s, appearing in many editions of the Satanic Bible. Nowadays many Americans use the gesture simply to mean “*rock on*”, or in support of the University of Texas in Austin (known as the “*Hook ‘em Horns*”).

Occasionally used by baseball players to indicate “two outs”, the *cornia* is actually a positive hand gesture in **Buddhism** and **Hinduism**, known as the *Karana Mudra* in such circles, and is used to dispel evil – an interestingly opposite meaning to its contemporary significance.

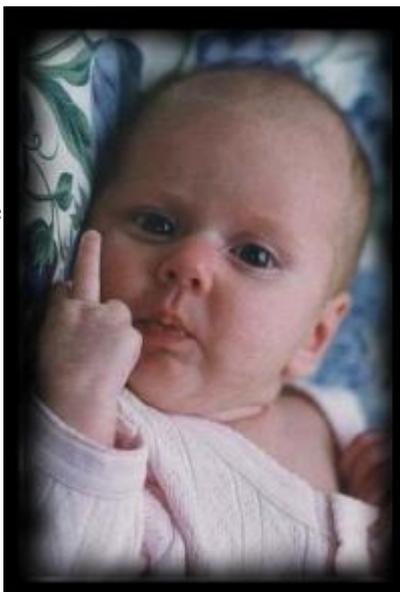


Historically, however, the symbol basically means “*cuckold*” (or rather, “*your wife is cheating on you*”), and its origins are Mediterranean, possibly dating back to Ancient Greece. The *cornia* is still popular in **Spain**, **Portugal**, **Greece**, **Colombia**, **Brazil**, **Albania**, **Slovakia** and the **Czech Republic**, and seems to be used most often to disagree with football referees - perhaps their wives are taking advantage of their husband’s occupation to score with hunky football players - though only when the referee make an incorrect decision, of course...

Of course, if you’re thinking of learning that in a [Spanish course London](#) is probably the best place to start...

10. “The Finger”

Most likely derived from Ancient Greece, ‘the finger’ is one of the most widespread obscene gestures throughout the Western world. In a handful of **Mediterranean** and **Arab** countries the index finger is preferred to the middle, but the meaning remains crystal clear. There are a myriad of different stories for the origin of the finger (going back as far as 2500 years), making mention of Greek tragedies, phallic representation, perverse Roman emperors, English longbowmen, and annoyed deaf people - but we just don’t know.



Also known as the ‘flip-off’, the ‘bird’, the ‘highway salute’, ‘*digitus impudicus*’ and the ‘One-Fingered Victory Salute’ (thanks to [President Bush’s famous TV blooper](#)), the middle finger is probably the most universally-understood hand gesture in the world. This is owed mostly to its age, the sheer simplicity of the gesture, as well as the human preoccupation with somehow relating everything back to sexual organs.

Of course there are regional differences, from half-extending the second and fourth fingers (no doubt to represent the ‘balls’ either side of the middle finger ‘dick’) or combining the finger with another rude gesture, to being as creative as holding up your middle three fingers and telling your target to “*read between the lines*”.

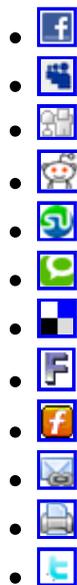
What have we learned here? Well, perhaps that endless [French lessons](#) aren't necessarily going to make you immune to insulting French people.

So, there you have it - ten of the most popular (and most globally misunderstood) hand gestures, in all their glory. I'll end this post by offering the same advice Nacho did in [his post](#) - the best idea when travelling abroad is probably to keep both hands pinned to your sides.

Permanently.

Do you think they should cover British slang and our most popular hand gestures as part of the [English courses London](#) has to offer?

Share and enjoy:



129 Comments [»](#)

1. **romney said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [9:55 am](#)

You left off the shocker:

<http://www.rotten.com/library/language/the-finger/shocker/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shocker_\(hand_gesture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shocker_(hand_gesture))

2. **snatchertas said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [10:42 am](#)

Correction:

#1 and #2 in Greece are no different than in the USA or the UK. For #3 the origin of the gesture is said to be the age-old stone-throwing. In modern Greece you will find both young drivers saluting each others with the “moutza” (expressing extreme disapproval for the stupidity of the other driver) and old women in villages using it like a curse which is probably a more accurate use.

3. **blah said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [11:02 am](#)

“Interestingly, in Greece and Portugal the gesture is made with the palm facing the ground, implying that the person is rather fonder of wanking other men as opposed to himself.”

Are you sure what are you talking about???

Living in Portugal and traveling to Greece frequently i never saw it like you say. The gesture is different but it means the same and does not imply wanking other mens!

4. **Bob said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [12:52 pm](#)

The caption for Jenna Bush is incorrect. It does not mean “Rock On” in this case, rather it is the hand signal for The University of Texas at Austin, which means “Hook’em Horns” and yes she did attend The University of Texas at Austin.

5. **Anon said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:11 pm](#)

The ‘A-OK’ sign is also used in Finland to show that you have zero days left to serve in the army (which is compulsory). Some even blow air through the hole to figuratively express their satisfaction of never having to go back to those days. I enjoyed the time so I never understood or granted them this pleasure when I was serving (being served =P).

6. **Paul Logasa Bogen II said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:13 pm](#)

More likely Jenna Bush was doing the “hook ‘em horns” sign. Which is the hand gesture associated with the University of Texas, her alma mater, since their mascot is a longhorn steer.

7. **Longhorns_Fan said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:15 pm](#)

Jena B and Big Daddy Dubya were at the University of Texas and were using the “Longhorns Salute”. Not rock on or bow to the devil or any other nonsense the media, as all ways (and so many other things), gets wrong.

8. **Ian said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:26 pm](#)

in #10 you mention that the English Longbowman as a possible origin.

Infact The longbowman is more likly to be a reason for the V sign (#7) as you need two fingers to pull the string.

The common explanation for this in the UK is that when English bowmen were caught by Norman’s/French, these two fingers were cut off. The sign could then be interpreted as “i’ve got both my fingers, Now eat my arrows!”

9. **Sven said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:31 pm](#)

The 'Cutis' was originally an old British signal that was exported to the southern Asian states during the time of the British Empire. It actually means 'I've tasted your wife!'

10. **Someone said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [1:53 pm](#)

regarding the Cutis, word "cutta" mean dog in both Hindi and Urdu.

11. **eric said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [2:00 pm](#)

living in Germany I am pretty sure nobody thinks the #5 A-OK would be an insult here. it's just a sign of something being good, possibly the food. I never even thought it could mean anus. who are your sources?

12. **bill said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [2:03 pm](#)

#9 is also a symbol for the University of Texas Longhorns, which is why Jenna Bush is using the gesture.

13. **Pasha_TX said,**

September 25, 2007 @ [3:26 pm](#)

Regarding The "Thumbs-Up" and Russia.

I would disagree that in Russia and in most former Soviet republics "Thumbs-Up" has negative connotation. it actually means all good, people use it the same way Arnold does.

Fig in Russia also means nothing or is somebody asks all you show is fig meaning I can give you only this, so go get lost. it used to be big deal in Soviet Union, but it is now rather taken over by middle finger.

14. **Fabio said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [2:08 pm](#)

In Argentina (South America, Latin) The "Corna" has the same meaning like another Latin countries, it means "cornudo", with horns, and, of course, is when your wife is with another man 😊

15. **Steve said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [2:15 pm](#)

Nice article and good explanations of them. Think need to cut down on the thumbs up here.

16. **Tamer said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [3:18 pm](#)

I have never new the name of #8, but I knew now 😊

17. **ork said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [5:26 pm](#)

#5 in Brazil is in fact A-OK. But with the palm turned to your own body, it means “you asshole”.

18. **Rafael said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [6:38 pm](#)

Very interesting posting. Being an immigrant in the US, I always wonder about this. I got in a little bit of trouble once when at work somebody made a signal with his hand pointing his index finger up, that in America means “wait a minute”, I didn’t know what it ment so I kept walking, needless to say he got very mad at me. In Mexico there are many hand signs that people should be aware of when traveling. Also Italians are very animated with hand gestures while talking. I enjoyed this article. Thanks!

19. **Daniel Hawkins said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [7:39 pm](#)

Number 9 - “The Corna”

This is also widely known to be the hand signal (Hook ‘em Horns) for the University of Texas Longhorns, which I’m pretty sure is what Jenna Bush was doing, as she is an alumna.

20. **Ol' Scratch said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [10:29 pm](#)

Check it out! These world leaders want you to ROCK ON!

http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Religions/Wicca%20&%20Witchcraft/signs_of_satan.htm

21. **Dave said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [11:31 pm](#)

In #9 Jenna Bush isn’t saying “rock on” she is saying “hook ‘em horns.” This is a hand gesture commonly used at the University of Texas, as seen here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hook_‘em_Horns

Hook ‘em!

22. **FatJoe from Kokomo said,**

September 26, 2007 @ [11:38 pm](#)

Jenna’s ‘corna’ might, more likely, be what fans of the University of Texas Longhorns sports teams call the “Hook ‘Em Horns”, symbolizing the longhorn mascot. And yes indeed, it has its own wikipedia page.

23. **Bud said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [12:53 am](#)

It does seem a bit odd that Jenna Bush would be doing the “rock on” signal on stage, in front of her dad. I’d say she’s showing school spirit. Hook ‘em Horns!

24. **dave said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [2:35 am](#)

I agree. Jenna was probably just giving the “hook ‘em horns” sign that symbolizes she stayed drunk while studying at the University of Texas.

25. **[MorganLighter](#) said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [3:15 pm](#)

Dave - Thanks for all the information on this and that. To be safe, I think I’ll just keep my hands in my pockets.

26. **Buddha said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [5:36 pm](#)

#3. I’m from the Philippines and it is a insulting to be summoned with the dog call. A better method would be having the palm facing the ground and using your four fingers (excluding the thumb) curling towards you repeatedly. I am not aware of any laws that would want to break your finger though. You might get into a fight if you do that but you will still have your index finger intact.

27. **Ammon said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [6:08 pm](#)

You’re better off not keeping your hands in your pockets—just put them at your sides. In some countries, speaking with someone with your hands in your pockets is a big no-no.

28. **Igz said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [8:05 pm](#)

Guys. We get it. Jenna Bush is doing the Hook ‘Em Horns. Why on earth do you think we need thirty different people telling him the same thing?

As for the article, it’s definitely an interesting read. And people telling commenting that the signals may not mean what you say they mean only makes me agree with MorganLighter more- these hands are staying hidden.

29. **Agustin said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [9:02 pm](#)

Hey, great article!!

I only have to disagree with one thing, here in Latin America (I’m from Argentina, but I think that in most countries from here it’s the same) the “thumbs-up” means the same that in the US.

PS: Sorry for my english =P

30. **Jack said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [9:49 pm](#)

3# The “Fig” in Poland means “I don’t give you anything” or Fuck off

31. **Andrei said,**

September 27, 2007 @ [10:26 pm](#)

The Figa is the most common one in russia, not the thumbs-up.

32. **Dave said,**

September 28, 2007 @ [3:48 am](#)

the second and third finger clenched with the first and fourth digit extended. whilst the thumb covers the clenched fingers is american sign language for ” i Love you”

come on guys

33. **Dave Hardy said,**

September 28, 2007 @ [4:31 am](#)

With regard the corna, my late father in law, an expert on languages and cultures, I think told me that in some places it symbolized the horns of the goat, which essentially meant someone was trifling with the affections of your wife and you were too stupid to know or cowardly to interfere (“goat” I know is a fighting insult in Spanish).

34. **[matt](#) said,**

October 1, 2007 @ [9:35 pm](#)

I might argue that the “cutis” may have been used in western society in the past but fallen out of favor. The reason I think this is in William Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” Act 1 Scene 1 where 2 of Capulet’s henchmen start a fight with some of the Montagues when one of them bites his thumb at them. The line I remembered is, “No, sir. I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.” There are several other lines which seem to indicate that it was considered a highly offensive gesture. So offensive in fact that the person making the gesture would not have been considered in the right if the gesture had started a fight. My URL links to a page with the scene.

35. **Kate said,**

October 1, 2007 @ [9:56 pm](#)

I actually think that Jenna Bush is flashing the “hook ‘em horns”, the hand gesture meant to represent the mascot and informal slogan of the University of Texas (also Ms. Bush’s alma mater).



36. **John said,**

October 1, 2007 @ [11:33 pm](#)

The thumbs-up in Latin America aren’t an insult, unless you move your hand up and down, as in

“shove it up yours”.

37. **Elizabeth said,**

October 2, 2007 @ [1:39 am](#)

#9 is also the sign for the University of Texas Longhorns where Bush's daughter went to college.

38. **t said,**

October 2, 2007 @ [6:01 am](#)

The “Moutza” does actually have historical reference in western culture... even shakespeare used it. ‘do you bite your thumb at me sir?’ and the finger? english longbow men would taunt with both fingers which you put on here as The “V Sign”

39. **Joel said,**

October 3, 2007 @ [5:12 pm](#)

Just want to comment on the “corna” (horns), isnt that a symbol in sign-language meaning “I love you”? Pretty sure Im right here, please write back...

40. **[Armand](#) said,**

October 3, 2007 @ [7:11 pm](#)

Funny ones! Had a good laugh, especially with #3 (Windows-Greeks...). 😊

41. **Nick said,**

October 3, 2007 @ [9:01 pm](#)

No. 9 in Texas also means “Hook ‘Em Horns”... Too bad it represents such a lousy school.

42. **[Zath](#) said,**

October 4, 2007 @ [7:36 am](#)

This is a really interesting read, I've always wondered about the origins of these kind of things, thanks for providing some enlightenment to me!

43. **NIMISUBO NIMIDEJAN said,**

October 5, 2007 @ [3:18 am](#)

FUCK YOU!

44. **Palad said,**

October 6, 2007 @ [8:17 am](#)

Actually, Jenna Bush is showing the ‘Hook-em Horns’, a fan sign for the Texas Longhorns sports

team.

45. **vellocet said,**

October 6, 2007 @ [2:35 pm](#)

Jenna Bush was doing the “hook ‘em Horns” hand signal from the University of Texas. It’s meant to look like a longhorn steer, the school’s mascot. This usage dates back more than 100 years, far before heavy metal music.

46. **Kendall said,**

October 6, 2007 @ [4:37 pm](#)

I’ve never really thought about gestures being rude, i loved this article proving that gestures can be a insult.

47. **Derrick said,**

October 7, 2007 @ [3:24 am](#)

Jenna Bush was making the University of Texas hand sign. The schools mascot is a bull (Longhorn), and the hand sign is a reference to this.

48. **Jay said,**

October 7, 2007 @ [6:24 am](#)

Jenna went to UT: that’s the Longhorn salute, not “Rock On”

49. **dema said,**

October 7, 2007 @ [11:24 pm](#)

Jenna Bush is most definitely giving the corna gesture to cheer for the University of Texas Longhorns, where she was a student and in the city where Bush was governor. In America, especially in Texas, every university has its own hand gesture you use when you are cheering at a sporting event. That said, UTexas stole the gesture from its more common 60’s ‘rock on’ meaning ... just a shade of gray in the meaning there.

50. **dema said,**

October 7, 2007 @ [11:28 pm](#)

Well, this is what they get for having the “Leave a Comment” box *before* the comments ... you’re going to get the same comment a million times!

51. **Bridgett said,**

October 11, 2007 @ [3:42 am](#)

The “Corona” as demonstrated by Jenna Bush is the University of Texas hand signal...for the Longhorns (the mascot). Jenna attended the University of Texas. She is not implying “rock on” rather her sentiment is “hook’em horns”. Just thought I’d share to contribute the the noble goal of

seeing that these hand signs are no longer “universally misunderstood.” Enjoyed your site!

Oh! This hand sign can also be seen in the teen-angst epic “The Breakfast Club” where the disgruntled principal says “You mess with the bull, you get the horns.” (No connection to the University of Texas...)

52. **Scott said,**

October 11, 2007 @ [1:04 pm](#)

Actually, Jenna and George use the gesture to signify their fondness for The University of Texas at Austin. The gesture is supposed to be representative of their mascot, the Longhorn.

Here's an example:

<http://cache.viewimages.com/xc/57121413.jpg?v=1&c=ViewImages&k=2&d=17A4AD9FDB9CF1939847EC77F5F8D1CEF35BACCD0ACF0185A40A659CEC4C8CB6>

53. **T.Young said,**

October 11, 2007 @ [3:38 pm](#)

Jenna Bush is doing the “Hook ‘em Horns” sign from the University of Texas

54. **EDRM said,**

October 12, 2007 @ [6:28 am](#)

No. 7 The v sign.

I am Scottish and therefore British. This gesture came about during the many, many wars that have happened between England and France.

Before guns, bombs and electricity the “Weapons of Mass Destruction” was the English Long Bow. It was the ultimate trump card in any English King's army.

It could kill the enemy 300meters before they were able to fire arrows back at the English. Which was a huge advantage in those days.

Obviously the English were winning a lot of battles due to the Bow and their Bowmen, who were trained from a very young age. (To pull the bow back took a huge amount of strength and thus training must be started as soon as possible.)

The French HATED the Long Bow Men as they caused so many defeats.

So when they captured an English Long Bow Man they would cut of his Index and middle finger to prevent him from ever using a bow again.

Thus the English started showing the French that they had their fingers and could still kill them.

The meaning started as something similar to “F**k you Frenchy I still have my fingers and now im going to kill you.”

Then to just “f**k you! You French Dick!”

To just “Fuck you.”

55. **Dave said,**

October 12, 2007 @ [10:41 am](#)

Yeah, it'd be really nice if that were the story behind it, because it's a lovely little story. It's also been used as the basis for the single-fingered gesture, but it's a myth sadly. There's no evidence corroborating the story, and no contemporary accounts of the practice. One French historian writes something about finger-waving, but does not specify which finger it was, nor the reason behind it.

Also, if the French were to capture any non-noble English soldiers, they would just be killed on the spot. There is no advantage in crippling an enemy soldier when they could just chop his head off instead. While it's true that the longbow was undoubtedly one of the major weapons of the English army against the French, this story is far more folklore than etymology. I agree that it's a great story, though.

Oh, and seemingly to the entire world, I profusely apologise for not correctly identifying Jenna Bush's "Hook 'em Horns". I've now been corrected about 50,000 times by you knowledgeable folks. God bless the internet - where everybody's an expert. 😊

[By the way, the 'Black Sabbath guitarist' instead of "Black Sabbath singer" faux-pas was a momentary lapse that somehow made it through proofing, and was fixed within hours of the article being submitted - after somebody had submitted the article to Digg and our servers crashed due to the unexpected traffic, 95% of you guys are actually reading the mirror, located on canuq.com, which still contains this error. Those complaining that you can't read comments before posting are also suffering from the same problem - the site has been correct for days. OThere have been over 150 comments about the Black Sabbath error alone, once again proving that everybody's an expert on the internet...]

56. **Michelle said,**

October 13, 2007 @ [10:42 pm](#)

Michelle

Great site! i'm looking forward to reading more.

57. **jc said,**

October 14, 2007 @ [12:58 am](#)

I love the corna, and how this site called top hand signs you should know. Jenna Bush is giving the hook em horns hand sign for Texas University, in this case not for rocking on...

58. **Cynthia said,**

October 16, 2007 @ [9:26 pm](#)

I wonder if Jenna Bush might be doing the "Hook 'em Horns" gesture from her alma mater, the University of Texas... I wish someone would post a comment about it.

59. **Plinko said,**

October 17, 2007 @ [11:11 pm](#)

Jenna Bush is throwing the horns in support of the University of Texas Longhorns, not any form of rocking. It's a traditional gesture at the university.

60. **Jack said,**

October 20, 2007 @ [1:20 am](#)

Jack

Nice entry. You made some great points.

61. **Michael said,**

October 24, 2007 @ [5:02 am](#)

In the picture of Jenna Bush, she is not meaning “Rock On”. That is the hand sign of the University of Texas, where she went to school. They are the longhorns and that is what the sign is imitating. It is usually accompanied with the phrase “Hook Em’ Horns”.

62. **Thomas said,**

October 24, 2007 @ [2:47 pm](#)

Jenna Bush is not saying “rock on” with her hand gesture. She’s saying, “Hook ‘em horns.” It’s a hand gesture used by Texas Longhorn fans. Bush used the same gesture during his last inauguration parade as the University of Texas marching band paraded by. European news services picked up the photo and ran with stories that he was devil worshipping.

63. **Helen said,**

October 25, 2007 @ [2:17 pm](#)

Actually, I’ve met quite a few people in Japan who have no clue what the wanker sign means. Up to the point where I had three quite shy female teachers doing this gesture in the middle of a school staffroom trying to figure out what it meant.

Thumbs up in Japan also means boyfriend, raised pinky finger means girlfriend.

And an upside down A-ok means money, same as the gesture for rubbing thumbs and index and middle fingers together.

Another good one is crossing your fingers for good luck. In Japan this is a barrier to ward off bad things like a cold.

64. **Julia said,**

October 25, 2007 @ [5:28 pm](#)

@ Dave & Joel

The #9 Hook ‘em Horns/Corna is not the sign for “I Love You” because the thumb is not extended. Look it up, folks.

<http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/I/W1708.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corna>

65. **Eric said,**

October 28, 2007 @ [8:31 pm](#)

Eric

Definitely, the most sensible thing i have seen in a long time.

66. Tombrend said,

October 29, 2007 @ [2:31 pm](#)

Number 9, the “Corna”, is used as the hand signal to indicate two downs by American football referees. It is also used by a few colleges/universities whose mascot is the Bull, in which case the “Corna” literally means what it translates to- horns. It is also used by Scandanavians to indicate satan, as saying his name is thought to bring bad luck in that culture.

67. Adam said,

November 2, 2007 @ [7:48 pm](#)

Just one quick correction to your article, in regards to Item Number 9 - The “Corna”:

Ronnie James Dio - the man largely credited with bringing this gesture (and it’s modern meaning in Western culture) is not, nor was he ever, a guitar player in the band Black Sabbath (or any other band I know of, for that matter).

He was the lead singer for Black Sabbath during the years after the band’s separation from original vocalist Ozzy Osbourne, from 1979 to 1983.

The guitarist for Black Sabbath is and has always been a one Mr. Tony Iommi, who suffered a well-known injury early in his career where he severed the tips of several fingers on his left hand. This led to him using a set of specially-made thimbles designed to facilitate his guitar playing. Perhaps all this business with fingers, gestures, the devil, and dismemberment was the cause of your confusion.

In short, you credited the right man, but the wrong hand, more or less.

Interesting article, regardless.

68. Thomas Müller said,

November 6, 2007 @ [10:53 am](#)

5. The “A-OK”

Far worse, however, is the meaning in Brazil, Germany and a few Mediterranean countries: the circular shape of the gesture gives it the meaning of “anus”, and is therefore used to call somebody an “asshole”, or, by extension, a homosexual.

I’m from Germany and I’ve heard actually of this meaning, but I know absolutely no German who understands this sign as insult. I’m using it myself as “perfect” or so. Maybe there are regions in Germany where poeple will misinterpret this, but I think this is more an urban legend.

69. mellonmarshall said,

November 6, 2007 @ [9:53 pm](#)

in refer to 4 the dog call, when I or anyone else I know want someone we use the whole hand like you would for a car, with the palm point to you then point the palm out to get you to stop

Because of the fact the hand appear bound 3 just confused me
I from Norwich England we do thing different if our motto anything to go by

ps the sign language for love is either to put your hands on your shoulders crossed or to do the horn thing with your thumb in the lower fingers (one the British way and one the yank forgot which is which mind) To say me/I, you point to you and to say you, you point to them so ha

70. **YXH said,**

November 8, 2007 @ [4:27 am](#)

One more thing. in Germany and central Europe do not touch your forehead with your palm. This signalizes you are telling the other person he's an idiot. My cousins hubby had to pay a fine for this signal while driving.

71. **[Digg Top OffBeat News of all times » The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right](#) said,**

November 9, 2007 @ [4:38 pm](#)

[...] [read more](#) | [digg story](#) [...]

72. **matt b said,**

November 30, 2007 @ [1:48 am](#)

in slovakia, you would do #8 - "the fig" - when someone asks you for something while saying 'figa borova,' which means something similar to 'i'm not giving you shit'

73. **Michelle said,**

November 30, 2007 @ [8:31 am](#)

I'm confused....after reading all these comments, I still don't know what sign Jenna Bush is making. If another 50 people explain it, I might get it.

74. **someone said,**

January 1, 2008 @ [6:38 am](#)

u would need the middle finger 2 aim the arrow, of course...

75. **[Eric](#) said,**

February 25, 2008 @ [12:03 pm](#)

Eric

Geat post. I added you to my blog roll!

76. **[Jelo](#) said,**

March 16, 2008 @ [1:38 am](#)

It never even occurred to me that the “thumbs up” might be an offensive gesture in other countries as Americans always seem to get the thumbs up from locals when traveling abroad. Come to think of it though, every time I received the thumbs up when in Senegal the people did seem to find it amusing. I think they are well aware of the American meaning though. Also the “A-OK” in Senegal means Allah as it resembles the Arabic word for it. Also in urban areas of the USA the “A-OK” could get you killed as it is a threat towards Blood gang members as in “BK” or “Blood Killer”...although some Bloods have adopted it to mean “Blood Kingdom”. I also remember the cutis being a popular insult in grade school & middle school (here in the USA) except that we did not say “cutta”.

77. **[Be Careful Where You Point That Thing « Sand dollar Adventures](#) said,**

March 21, 2008 @ [9:42 am](#)

[...] about when you travel to foreign lands and you don't even realize that simple hand gestures or body position could be highly offensive and just might get you shot. And you'll never even [...]

78. **c said,**

April 1, 2008 @ [8:56 pm](#)

the thumbs up sign originated from around Europe and it meant that men had a large sperm count

79. **[International Body Language, Gestures & Manners: Don't Be "That Guy!"](#) said,**

May 1, 2008 @ [8:52 pm](#)

[...] Language Trainers No Tags [...]

80. **[latin definitions](#) said,**

May 5, 2008 @ [11:53 pm](#)

[...] certainly come in handy get it? if you want to avoid making an international-scale fool of yourself. <http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/1989> revision of the AIDS case definition of Latin America by the ... File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat [...]

81. **[hand gestures](#) said,**

May 9, 2008 @ [2:52 pm](#)

[...] &8250 ErrorIf you're unsure what these terms mean you should probably contact your host. <http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Pierce&39s> message still isn't clear - Boston GlobeThe subtle difference in hand gestures used by [...]

82. **[International Body Language & Manners: The Sequel](#) said,**

May 23, 2008 @ [3:14 pm](#)

[...] air travel, travel blog, travel blogs, travel tips, travel web [...]

83. **[latin thumbs](#) said,**

May 28, 2008 @ [4:21 pm](#)

[...] certainly come in handy get it? if you want to avoid making an international-scale fool of yourself. [http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/LATIN THUMBS](http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/LATIN_THUMBS) - Translate this page The searchable Latina thumb preview TGP. ... LatinThumbs.com does [...]

84. **[hand sign meanings](#) said,**

May 30, 2008 @ [2:51 pm](#)

[...] very different meanings in some countries from what we as Westerners believe them to stand for. ... <http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/RE: The Atlantean Conspiracy> ... into popular culture and given different exoteric meanings to the [...]

85. **[hand](#) said,**

June 11, 2008 @ [11:44 am](#)

[...] you&8217d better get right ... You left off the shocker: <http://www.rotten.com/library/language/> ... <http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Scottish company&39s bionic hand wins top award - Scotsman> By CRAIG BROWN THE world&39s most advanced [...]

86. **[hand gestures](#) said,**

June 14, 2008 @ [1:31 am](#)

[...] when travelling in an earlier post, as some have very different meanings in some countries from ... <http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Gesture - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia> Hand gestures , i.e., gestures performed by one or two [...]

87. **[thumbs up hand gesture](#) said,**

June 14, 2008 @ [4:15 am](#)

[...] certainly come in handy get it? if you want to avoid making an international-scale fool of yourself. <http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Hand gestures> Girl red sports outfit thumbs hand gestures nonverbal communication Body Language [...]

88. **[gestures](#) said,**

June 19, 2008 @ [6:17 pm](#)

[...] in an earlier post, ... it was just too good not to include in any compilation of hand gestures. [http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Talking before he talks - SceneShe??"s taught son Kai simple physical gestures which relate to words](http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Talking before he talks - SceneShe??) [...]

89. **[hand gestures for rock on](#) said,**

June 20, 2008 @ [1:13 pm](#)

[...] you better make sure you use these symbols only when you know you know what you're trying to say. <http://www.languagetainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Signs of>

Satan! Below are some photos where the hand gesture is used in a clearly Satanic context: [...]

90. **[by hand said,](#)**

June 29, 2008 @ [8:51 pm](#)

[...] in an earlier post, ... it was just too good not to include in any compilation of hand gestures. [http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Democratic-hand-holding-still-strained - Honolulu Star-Bulletin](http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Democratic-hand-holding-still-strained-Honolulu-Star-Bulletin) It was almost too saccharine to [...]

91. **[fark.my said,](#)**

July 3, 2008 @ [4:08 pm](#)

The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right

the danger of using certain hand gestures when traveling in as some have very different meanings in some countries

92. **[Hand Gestures: Good versus Bad! « Tembam's Weblog said,](#)**

July 9, 2008 @ [3:06 am](#)

[...] for right about now. I found an interesting post on the Language Trainers Blog that lists "The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right". I'm not sure what the gesture made by Gung Mokhtar meant but take a look at some [...]

93. **[hand sign for you rock said,](#)**

July 9, 2008 @ [7:55 pm](#)

[...] you better make sure you use these symbols only when you know you know what you're trying to say. <http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/Buddha's Caves New York Times> On the lip of the Gobi Desert, sand and tourists threaten Mogaoku's [...]

94. **[Just a little heads up | Language Trainers UK Blog said,](#)**

July 15, 2008 @ [11:22 pm](#)

[...] all know that hand gestures aren't always universal, but what about head movements? Surely a nod always means [...]

95. **Pete said,**

August 13, 2008 @ [1:54 am](#)

In the 1940's (in the U.S.) #9 meant "Bull Shit". I'm amazed no one has pointed this out.

96. **[Bye bye, Beijing said,](#)**

August 25, 2008 @ [9:34 pm](#)

[...] we've discussed before, it may just be best to keep your mind open, a smile on your face, and your hands in your pockets. [...]

97. **Trish said,**

October 16, 2008 @ [9:02 pm](#)

It says that “6. The Cutis” has no equivalent in Western Culture. But I remember my dad, who grew up in an Italian part of the Bronx, doing a similar gesture - touching the back of his front teeth with his thumb - but instead of extended fingers, the fingers were curled. The meaning was basically the same as the mean given for Cutis - @#\$\$%^&* you.

98. [webebroke.com » Blog Archive » Things My Father Taught Me: Part 3—Facts About The O.K. Hand Sign](#) **said,**

October 31, 2008 @ [1:06 am](#)

[...] More information on hand signs appears here: The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right. [...]

99. [Friggin Abandoned » Blog Archiv » London](#) **said,**

November 2, 2008 @ [10:46 pm](#)

[...] stretch limo's. Then 10 reasons not to skimp on sleep. Important, that, I guess. And finally Top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right... November 3, 2008 at 12:45 am by Asmodeane Category: Posts, [...]

100. **Peter said,**

November 5, 2008 @ [5:54 pm](#)

This cool site lists what the most common hand gestures mean in different countries: <http://www.hellobackpacker.com/gestures/> Check it out!

101. [Japanese Customs, Quirks & Other Fascinating Oddities | Taking Off](#) **said,**

November 17, 2008 @ [11:02 pm](#)

[...] Related PostsDo You Speak English? When Good Products Have Bad NamesInternational Body Language & Manners: The SequelSamantha & the Girls in Atlantic City for the Weekend! [...]

102. [International Body Language & Manners: The Sequel | Taking Off](#) **said,**

November 17, 2008 @ [11:03 pm](#)

[...] Related PostsInternational Body Language, Gestures & Manners: Don't Be “That Guy!”Three Essential Gadgets For The Business TravelerLayover In LAX - Things To Do [...]

103. [International Body Language, Gestures & Manners: Don't Be “That Guy!” | Taking Off](#) **said,**

November 17, 2008 @ [11:06 pm](#)

[...] only ones seems to be the smile. Some sources for this article:Gay Thailand Orville Jenkins (Africa)Language Trainers Related PostsInternational Body Language & Manners: The

SequelThree Essential Gadgets For The [...]

104. [GnuGK Information » Blog Archive » Prototype Scanner Gives Middle Finger To Drunk Driving](#) said,

December 15, 2008 @ [8:00 pm](#)

[...] development bodes well for other hand gesture controls in future car innovations. We might have an upside-down touch screen where the car is started by [...]

105. [Psychology research & the human hand! « Palmistry Report](#) said,

December 16, 2008 @ [12:54 am](#)

[...] The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right Posted in palmistry | Tagged autism, brain, Cesar Baldaccini, Frank Wilson, human hand, left handed, neuroticism, psychology research, the hand, the thumb, thumb | [...]

106. [Technology](#) said,

December 18, 2008 @ [1:40 pm](#)

[...] development bodes well for other hand gesture controls in future car innovations. We might have an upside-down touch screen where the car is started by [...]

107. **gina** said,

January 13, 2009 @ [8:01 pm](#)

i am from central america and someone told me NO. 9 is like a wave, used by surfers, maybe he was wrong, I thought it is used by rockers or satanic as you have mentioned.

108. **gina** said,

January 13, 2009 @ [8:10 pm](#)

my correction: i had a confusion with NO. 9 . I mean using the little finger with the thumb looks like a wave.... this would be another sign

109. **Bob** said,

January 18, 2009 @ [8:49 pm](#)

I see comments are still coming in more than two years after the original article.

[I won't say anything about Jenna]

But if I can get into trouble even by keeping my hands in my pockets, what about just hiding them by folding my arms in front of me.

Is there some country where I can get shot for that?

110. **JK** said,

January 21, 2009 @ [3:36 pm](#)

What is a "cutis" with the thumb touching the nose instead of the teeth? For an example, see

yesterday's photo of incoming White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel.

111. **[Green hats and adultery | Language Trainers UK Blog said,](#)**

February 3, 2009 @ [9:53 am](#)

[...] a side note, Dave mentioned the corna, a hand gesture used in some countries to indicate that a man's wife is cheating on [...]

112. **[Where can I find an online database of hand gestures? Peace sign, devil horns, etc...? | devil vision said,](#)**

February 11, 2009 @ [5:54 am](#)

[...] 1 Institution? Diyor ki: February 11th, 2009 at 3:54 am <http://www.lcdf.org/xwrits/GESTURES>
<http://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2007/09/24/top-10-hand-gestures/> [...]

113. **Dani said,**

February 17, 2009 @ [12:34 pm](#)

Hi!

I came across a book training students for the CPE exam and it featured a cartoon where an oil slick resembles a man making a rude gesture. He seems to have his index finger facing forward and touching the tip of his nose. Have you got any idea what that means?

Cheers

114. **Ian said,**

February 20, 2009 @ [5:15 am](#)

Well done, good show on the writing aspect, I laughed many a times... It opened up enlightening truths in their most candid ways, that is the best I can say.

115. **Fernando said,**

March 2, 2009 @ [6:14 pm](#)

In Portugal, the "figa" sign is a sign of good luck. Parents will often buy a "figa" pendant for their children, in gold or silver, as a good-luck charm, to wear in a bracelet, or around the neck. I have one.

116. **[Hilliary Clinton Button Fail - Kaitlin Foley said,](#)**

March 7, 2009 @ [10:56 pm](#)

[...] example, secretary. Sure, the gesture was only mildly awkward, and at least Hillary didn't inadvertently flip the crowd off. Show no such ignorance. American leaders have every reason to expect that any diplomatic action [...]

117. **Andie said,**

April 24, 2009 @ [7:51 am](#)

"[...] as well as Greece, Russia, Sardinia and the south of Italy, the thumbs-up basically means the same as the middle finger: "sit on it and swivel".

That's not true. I don't know about Greece or Sardinia, but I'm russian and the thumbs-up here basically means the same as the thumbs-up in USA or UK.

118. **Michele said,**

May 19, 2009 @ [11:48 am](#)

Hello, i am italian from Palermo (sicily, south Italy) and i have friends in Sardinia too. I dont know where you took your informations, but they are totally WRONG.

A thumb up in Sicily as in the rest of Italy and in the world means "ok", "welldone". and it's no t a bad gesture AT ALL!!!

119. **Michele said,**

May 19, 2009 @ [11:52 am](#)

another error: "the fig" (n.8) ins not from romans. It came from ancient florence (Firenze) and it's very very very very old fashioned now in Italy (probably only man and woman form 80 years old up know what it means...for all the rest of the italian ppl means quite nothing nowadays).

120. **[LinkLove session #4 | Liens autour du voyage et du nomadisme | Vie Nomade](#) said,**

July 17, 2009 @ [8:21 am](#)

[...] The top 10 hand gestures you'd better get right (en) 10 signes de la main plutôt communs qui pourraient être mal interprétés dans certains coins du globe. [...]

121. **[Gestures and language learning | Language Trainers UK Blog](#) said,**

February 10, 2010 @ [1:36 pm](#)

[...] So, waving your arms around could be considered more valid than speaking. Just remember that some gestures aren't always polite! Share and [...]

122. **Samantha said,**

June 7, 2010 @ [4:03 pm](#)

I would just like to say that having a child represent number 10 is absolutely horrible and completely ridiculous. That should be taken off the website.

123. **john patrick said,**

June 23, 2010 @ [3:35 am](#)

yeah!!! this is totally great

124. **Rino said,**

July 5, 2010 @ [3:26 pm](#)

Can't believe that in the entry about the "corna" symbol they forgot to mention Italy and in particular Sicily. Even the word they are using, "corna" is Italian. But the country is not mentioned... Geez. Just like discussing the origin of spaghetti (some believe they came from China) and adding that they are still popular in France, Britain and the US. Hello???

125. **Arantha Sirimanne said,**

July 8, 2010 @ [10:39 am](#)

Budu aaaathal kolloooo.....

126. **Mike Foster said,**

July 16, 2010 @ [3:35 am](#)

I'm a bit confused about the "V" sign. I've seen my healthy (or possibly unhealthy) share of British film and TV, and I've always seen the gesture used palm side in. I've also viewed it used with a pumping motion (somewhat like a boxing uppercut) while the person gave their target a "raspberry". What's the difference?

127. **Tanie auta said,**

July 20, 2010 @ [9:51 am](#)

interising article...

128. **Taxi London said,**

July 22, 2010 @ [8:31 am](#)

good article...

129. **dreamy_nightsky said,**

August 17, 2010 @ [4:42 am](#)

About #4:

Beware, however, of using this gesture in the Philippines – it's a method of communication considered worthy only to use on dogs, and is actually punishable by arrest. Worst of all, they'll break your index finger in order to prevent you from committing the same crime again!

→ Sorry but this is so untrue.

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• About the author



Wendy Wong

Wendy is a full-time language teacher and curriculum designer, part-time blogger, and constant traveller.

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