

Status

Status is pecking order. The person who is lower in **status** defers to the person who is higher in **status**.

Status is partly established by social position--e.g. boss and employee--but mainly by the way you interact. If you interact in a way that says you are not to be trifled with, the other person must adjust to you, then you are establishing high **status**. If you interact in a way that says you are willing to go along, you don't want responsibility, that's low **status**. A boss can play low **status** or high **status**. An employee can play low **status** or high **status**.

Status is established in every line and gesture, and changes continuously. **Status** is something that one character plays to another at a particular moment. If you convey that the other person must not cross you on what you're saying now, then you are playing high **status** to that person in that line. Your very next line might come out low **status**, as you suggest willingness to defer about something else.

If you analyze your most successful scenes, it's likely they involved several **status** changes between the players. Therefore, one path to great scenes is to intentionally change **status**. You can raise or lower your own **status**, or the **status** of the other player. The more subtly you can do this, the better the scene.

High-status behaviors

When walking, assuming that other people will get out of your path.

Making eye contact while speaking.

Not checking the other person's eyes for a reaction to what you said.

Having no visible reaction to what the other person said. (Imagine saying something to a typical Clint Eastwood character. You say something expecting a reaction, and you get--nothing.)

Speaking in complete sentences.

Interrupting before you know what you are going to say.

Spreading out your body to full comfort. Taking up a lot of space with your body.

Looking at the other person with your eyes somewhat down (head tilted back a bit to make this work), creating the feeling that you are a parent talking to a child.

Talking matter-of-factly about things that the other person finds displeasing or offensive.

Letting your body be vulnerable, exposing your neck and torso to the other person.

Moving comfortably and gracefully.

Keeping your hands away from your face.

Speaking authoritatively, with certainty.

Making decisions for a group; taking responsibility.

Giving or withholding permission.

Evaluating other people's work.

Speaking cryptically, not adjusting your speech to be easily understood by the other person (except that mumbling does not count). E.g. saying, "Chomper not right" with no explanation of what you mean or what you want the other person to do.

Being surrounded by an entourage, especially of people who are physically smaller than you.
A "high-**status** specialist" conveys in every word and gesture, "Don't come near me, I bite."

Low-status behaviors

When walking, moving out of other people's path.

Looking away from the other person's eyes.

Briefly checking the other person's eyes to see if they reacted positively to what you said.

Speaking in halting, incomplete sentences. Trailing off, editing your sentences as you go.

Sitting or standing uncomfortably in order to adjust to the other person and give them space. Pulling inward to give the other person more room. If you're tall, you might need to scrunch down a bit to indicate that you're not going to use your height against the other person.

Looking up toward the other person (head tilted forward a bit to make this work), creating the feeling that you are a child talking to a parent.

Dancing around your words (beating around the bush) when talking about something that will displease the other person.

Shouting as an attempt to intimidate the other person. This is low **status** because it suggests that you expect resistance.

Crouching your body as if to ward off a blow; protecting your face, neck, and torso.

Moving awkwardly or jerkily, with unnecessary movements.

Touching your face or head.

Avoiding making decisions for the group; avoiding responsibility.

Needing permission before you can act.

Adjusting the way you say something to help the other person understand; meeting the other person on their (cognitive) ground; explaining yourself. E.g. "Could you please adjust the chomper? That's the gadget on the kitchen counter immediately to the left of the toaster. If you just give it a slight rap on the top, that should adjust it."

A "low-**status** specialist" conveys in every word and gesture, "Please don't bite me, I'm not worth the trouble."

Raising another person's status

To raise another person's **status** is to establish them as high in the pecking order in your group (possibly just the two of you).

- Ask their permission to do something.
- Ask their opinion about something.
- Ask them for advice or help.
- Express gratitude for something they did.
- Apologize to them for something you did.
- Agree that they are right and you were wrong.
- Defer to their judgement without requiring proof.
- Address them with a fancy title or honorific (even "Mr." or "Sir" works very

well).

- Downplay your own achievement or attribute in comparison to theirs. "Your wedding cake is so much whiter than mine."
- Do something incompetent in front of them and then apologize for it or act sheepish about it.
- Mention a failure or shortcoming of your own. "I was supposed to go to an audition today, but I was late. They said I was wrong for the part anyway."
- Compliment them in a way that suggests appreciation, not judgement. "Wow, what a beautiful cat you have!"
- Obey them unquestioningly.
- Back down in a conflict.
- Move out of their way, bow to them, lower yourself before them.
- Tip your hat to them.
- Lose to them at something competitive, like a game (or any comparison).
- Wait for them.
- Serve them; do manual labor for them.

Tip: Whenever you bring an audience member on stage, always raise their **status**, never lower it.

Lowering another person's status

To lower another person's **status** is to attack or discredit their right to be high in the pecking order. Another word for "lowering someone's **status**" is "humiliating them."

- Criticize something they did.
- Contradict them. Tell them they are wrong. Prove it with facts and logic.
- Correct them.
- Insult them.
- Give them unsolicited advice.
Approve or disapprove of something they did or some attribute of theirs. "Your cat has both nose and ear points. That is acceptable." Anything that sets you up as the judge lowers their **status**, even "Nice work on the Milligan account, Joe."
- Shout at them.
- Tell them what to do.
- Ignore what they said and talk about something else, especially when they've said something that requires an answer. E.g. "Have you seen my socks?" "The train leaves in five minutes."
- One-up them. E.g. have a worse problem than the one they described, have a greater past achievement than theirs, have met a more famous celebrity, earn more money, do better than them at something they're good at, etc.
- Win: beat them at something competitive, like a game (or any comparison).
- Announce something good about yourself or something you did. "I went to an audition today, and I got the part!"
- Disregard their opinion. E.g. "You'd better not smoke while pumping gas, it's a fire hazard." Flick, light, puff, puff, pump, pump.

- Talk sarcastically to them.
- Make them wait for you.
- When they've fallen behind you, don't wait for them to catch up, just push on and get further out of sync.
- Disobey them.
- Violate their space.
- Beat them up. Beating them up in front of other people, especially their wife, girlfriend, and/or children, is particularly **status**-lowering.
- In a conflict, make them back down.
- Taunt them. Tease them.

The basic status-lowering act

Laugh at them. (Not with them.)

The basic status-raising act

Be laughed at by them.

Second to that is laughing with them at someone else.

(Notice that those are primarily what comedians do.)

Note that behaviors that raise another person's **status** are not necessarily low-**status** behaviors, and behaviors that lower another person's **status** are not necessarily high-**status** behaviors. People at any **status** level raise and lower each other all the time. They can do so in ways that convey high or low **status**.

For example, shouting at someone lowers their **status** but is itself a low-**status** behavior.

Objects and environments also have high or low **status**, although this is seldom explored. So explore it. Make something cheap and inconsequential high **status**. (This fingernail clipping came from Graceland!) Or bring down the **status** of a high **status** item. (Casually toss a 2 carat diamond ring on your jewelry pile.)