

Eye contact: Don't make these mistakes

Jodi Schulz, [Michigan State University Extension](#) - December 31, 2012

Eye contact is vital during a conversation, is a skill that can be developed and can be used to make presentations stronger. Explore some common mistakes that are made with eye contact.

Communication mistakes occur regularly. Statements can be taken out of context; what is said might be misheard; or body language can send an unintended message. Did you know that a person can communicate with their eyes and never say a word? Our eyes show emotion, build connections and indicate interest. Communication mistakes can even happen when using eye contact.

Have you thought about eye contact as a skill? If you are an adult, you already know that using appropriate eye contact can be difficult, so it's important to help youth think about eye contact as a skill they can continue to work on. Since eye contact can be tied to so many life skills, it's important for our youth to practice and learn about eye contact as a communication skill. Consider for a moment using eye contact to show empathy, concern for others, to manage feelings or to help with communication. Those are all life skills that youth will develop as they mature into successful adults.

We already know from [part one](#) and [part two](#) of this article series that eye contact is vital during a conversation because it's a mode of communication that shows emotion or interest. Likewise, each time a youth talks to a judge, reads minutes of a meeting out loud or provides a how-to demonstration, that youth is presenting. Presentation skills, like eye contact, can be tricky. Because such skills can be tricky, we will explore some common mistakes in eye contact communication and how to remedy those mistakes.

The [Conversation Aid](#) website is a great tool that explores many facets of communication. One of the greatest mistakes in eye contact is staring. They suggest the following tips to help maintain good eye contact without staring:



- **Use the 50/70 rule.** To maintain appropriate eye contact without staring, you should maintain eye contact for 50 percent of the time while speaking and 70% of the time while listening. This helps to display interest and confidence.
- **Maintain it for 4-5 seconds.** Once you establish eye contact, maintain or hold it for 4-5 seconds. After this time passes, you can slowly glance to the side and then go back to establishing eye contact.

- **Think about where you're looking.** Maintaining eye contact is easy because you're looking at the other person. However, when you look away, do it slowly without darting your eyes. This can make you look shy or nervous. And don't look down; remember to look from side-to-side. Looking down can give the appearance that you lack confidence.
- **Establish eye contact right away.** Before you begin talking, establish eye contact. Don't look down or look at something before you begin speaking. Establish eye contact right away and then begin talking.
- Listening with your eyes is important too: Remember the 70 percent rule (you should maintain eye contact for 70 percent of the time while listening)? Communication happens with your eyes while you're listening just as much as when you're talking. Remember that while you're listening and maintaining eye contact, you should smile, open your face and look interested.
- **Practice.** Eye contact will come easy to some, but if it doesn't for you, it's okay to practice until you become confident. You can look at an eyebrow or the space between the eyes and mouth. You can also practice with yourself in the mirror.

This article is the third and last in a series of articles that examined eye contact in communication. Remember that eye contact is a skill and it often takes time and practice to fine-tune our skills. This article was published by **Michigan State University Extension**. For more information, visit <https://extension.msu.edu>. To have a digest of information delivered straight to your email inbox, visit <https://extension.msu.edu/newsletters>. To contact an expert in your area, visit <https://extension.msu.edu/experts>, or call [888-MSUE4MI \(888-678-3464\)](tel:888-MSUE4MI).

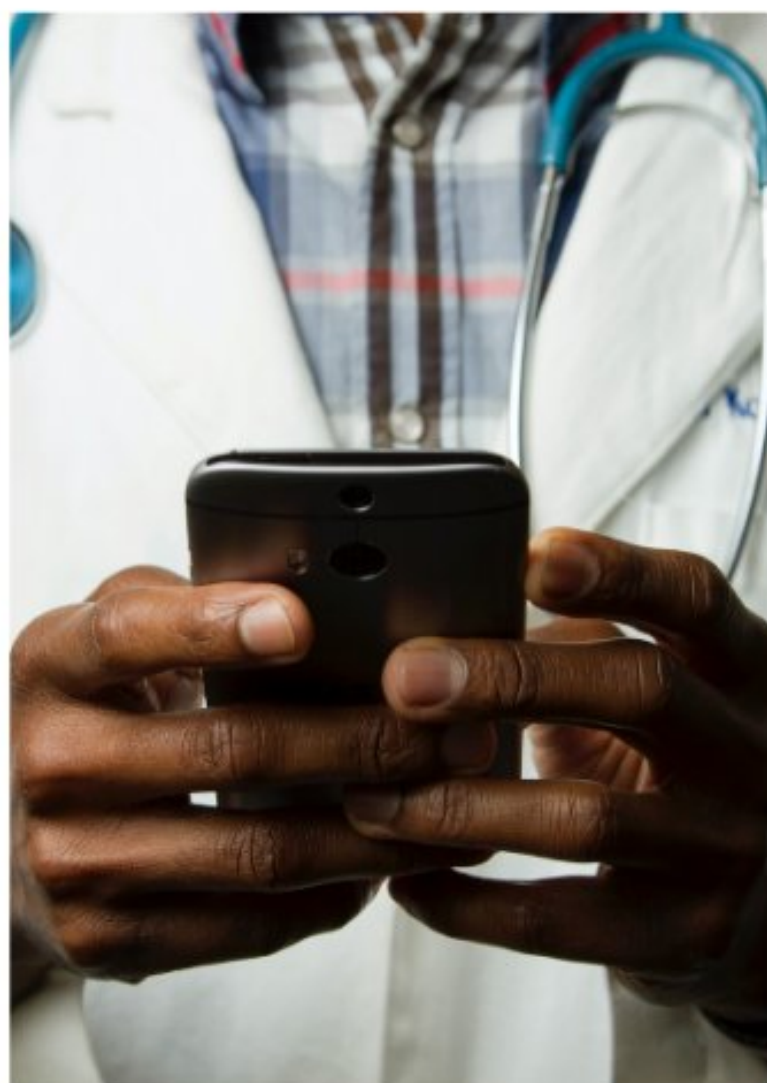
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