

The Importance of Eye Contact and How to Improve It

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CONSCIOUS LIVING

Making good eye contact is an art that is difficult to master. In fact, keeping a well-balanced ratio of eye contact is astonishingly difficult. On the one hand, eye contact that is too intense can quickly come across as an overly dominant stare. On the other hand, however, not being able to maintain eye contact may be perceived as disinterest, disrespectful, or even social anxiety. If you seek to [improve your communication skills](#), mastering eye contact is one important area to address. By learning the fine art of eye contact, you will not only leave a better impression during discussions but you will also find that it helps you to present your ideas more convincingly. In the following, you will discover why eye contact is so important and how you can improve eye contact.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who did not at all look you in the eyes when they were talking? It somehow feels a little awkward and irritating when someone does not at all look at you when they are speaking. In fact, it often feels as if they are talking to someone else because they never look at you.

As any speaker will tell you, when you address a large number of people from a stage, you try to make eye contact with people in the audience to communicate that you're accessible and interested in them.

Simon Mainwaring

It is important to note, however, that there are certain gender differences when it comes to eye contact. It is very common that men do not look at their counterparts as often as women do when they are speaking. Maintaining a high level of eye contact simply does not feel too natural when we men are speaking. Instead, keeping the eyes unfocused every now and then while speaking may often help us to better focus on the arguments we want to convey. At the same time, it helps us to collect our thoughts.

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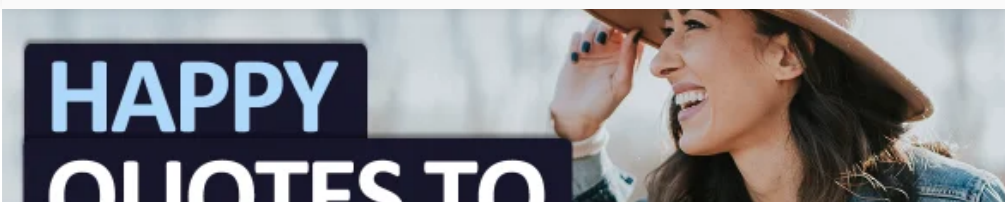
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Eye contact is a fine art but it can be mastered.

However, just because eye contact does not come naturally to many of us, does not mean it should be neglected. In fact, it is an important skill to develop. Maintaining a balanced level of eye contact will help you to build trust with those you're speaking to. At the same time, by keeping eye contact you will be perceived as a better listener and in many cases also as someone who engages the audience in a more skillful way. Even further, keeping a higher level of eye contact during a conversation can greatly help you to be regarded as more qualified, attractive, competent, trustworthy, and confident.

The importance of eye contact and how to improve eye contact

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Let's begin by having a quick look at the reasons why eye contact is so important.

The importance of eye contact

Excellent communicators regard their eye contact skills as an important asset. But why is it that the ability to maintain eye contact is so highly regarded? Why do so many people seem to pay more attention to what the eyes of a person say than listening to what the person expresses with their words?

In general, by maintaining a healthy but confident level of eye contact during an interaction, you can greatly improve the quality of that conversation. Not only will the person you're speaking to feel a greater level of connection with you but they will also consider you as a more competent and trustworthy individual.

In this sense, the way you make eye contact with other people can greatly influence the outcome of these interactions. If you are unable to maintain even the slightest level of eye contact, the results of your interactions may possibly suffer from it. At the same time, if you skillfully manage to maintain eye contact – without staring aggressively – you will most likely be more successful in conveying your ideas.

A) Eye contact signals attention

If you've ever spoken to someone who did not at all look at you while you were speaking, you know how irritating it feels like. It clearly signals you that the other person is not at all interested in you and what you have to say. In short, speaking to someone who does not look at you feels like you're talking to a wall.

Maintaining eye contact whenever people speak does not only signal that you're paying attention to what they say but also that you are interested in what they have to say. By looking at others when they speak, they become your full center of attention. It will show your counterpart that you respect them and that you are interested in what they say. Doing so will simultaneously make them respect and appreciate you a lot more.

B) Eye contact conveys confidence and trustworthiness

Admittedly, it takes confidence to maintain eye contact with the person you're speaking to. This is especially true when you are giving a presentation. In most situations, the temptation to let your eyes wander around is quite appealing.

By maintaining eye contact, others will be more likely to perceive you as a

competent and trustworthy person. Everyone around you knows just as much as you do how difficult it can be to maintain a high level of eye contact. That's the reason why others will greatly appreciate it when you are able to keep the eye contact when you speak.

At the same time, others will be more likely to perceive you as someone who is convicted of what you say and will feel that you believe in your ideas.

C) Eye contact helps you to create a bond with others

Maintaining eye contact, no matter if you speak or listen, helps you to better connect with others. It will signal them that you are open and that you have nothing to hide – or at least that you are speaking the truth. Doing so will help you to establish trust with other people, which helps you to quickly form a bond with them.

D) Eye contact engages others

When you do not look others in the eyes when you speak, it can come across as if you are having a monologue. Your counterparts will feel as if you're not interested in having a real dialogue with them.

You can avoid all this by maintaining eye contact when you speak. Doing so invites your listeners to actively participate in the discussion. The eye contact you maintain with them will also encourage other people's nonverbal feedback about that which you're saying.

In short, keeping eye contact will encourage your listeners to become active participants in the conversation.

E) Eye contact makes you more confident

As astonishingly as it sounds, keeping eye contact when you speak will make you feel more confident about yourself. At the same time, the way you behave and speak will become more assertive and convincing.

Naturally, becoming more confident by looking others in the eyes is not something that happens immediately. In the beginning, keeping a higher level of eye contact will feel a bit awkward. But as soon as you are getting used to it, you will become less nervous, which in turn allows you to be more confident.

Another positive side-effect of maintaining eye contact when you speak is that it will slow your speech down in a natural way. Instead of hastily trying to get your voice heard, you will speak slower, leading others to perceive you as more skilled, experienced, or authoritative.

How to improve eye contact

The good thing about eye contact is that it can be learned just like any other skill. If

you feel that you are struggling to maintain eye contact in conversations – especially when you’re talking – the following will be of great help to you. Admittedly, it takes a little practice to be able to confidently hold eye contact with someone you’re speaking to. But if you are willing to practice and strengthen your eye contact skills regularly, you will be able to see encouraging improvements in your day-to-day life.

Improving your eye contact skills is not even difficult. In fact, you can affect positive changes quite easily in a relatively short time.

1. Maintain the right balance

Balance is of great importance when it comes to eye contact. Effective eye contact is curious, appropriate and balanced. When you overdo it, it’s perceived as aggressive and/or overly dominant. If you stare at people when they speak, you can make them quite uncomfortable.

Always ask yourself what kind of eye contact is appropriate in the particular situation you are confronted with. You don’t want to hold too much eye contact as this can look pretty creepy. As general rules of thumb, consider these eye contact guidelines:

- **When you’re listening:** maintain eye contact 2/3 of the time
- **When you’re talking:** maintain eye contact 1/3 of the time

In general, a higher level of eye contact is greatly wanted and appreciated when other people are speaking to you. It shows them that you’re respectfully keeping attention and that you are interested in what they have to say. At the same time, you want to avoid staring too intensively at them while they speak.

Instead of continuously staring them in the eyes, allow your sight to move away every once in a while. Show them that you are reflecting or thinking about what they are saying by shortly looking away and by giving nonverbal cues. Doing so will help you to avoid making your counterpart feel uncomfortable and shows them that you’re not just listening but also thinking about what is being said.

The situation is different when you speak. You can take eye contact pauses while speaking in order to collect your thoughts. This is acceptable as long as you don’t exaggerate. Staring too intensively in the eyes of a listener may come across as somehow irritating, e.g. as if you are talking down to them.

2. Learn to overcome fear and nervousness

It’s quite natural to feel uncomfortable when you’re not used to keeping a high level of eye contact when you speak. This is nothing to be ashamed about. The good news is that you can learn to overcome nervousness and discomfort when looking others in the eyes.

The key to overcoming these awkward sensations lies in diligent practice. Gradually increasing the amount of eye contact you keep while speaking will help you to slowly but surely adapt to the unfamiliar experience. In this sense, you are progressively desensitizing yourself to the way it feels when maintaining a higher level of eye contact.

By taking one step at a time, or rather one look after another, you will quickly increase the duration of eye contact that is comfortable to you. In the beginning, you may want to increase the duration of eye contact from one second to two seconds to three and so on. Keep in mind that you don't have to accomplish this gradual desensitization in a week or so. Take yourself time and progress at a pace that feels natural. All that matters is that you make a conscious effort to gradually increase the duration of eye contact.

3. Focus on one eye

Have you ever talked to a person who repeatedly shifted their attention from one of your eyes to the other every second or so? It somehow felt a little awkward, didn't it?

In fact, it can be quite irritating if someone is not focusing on one of your eyes but is instead actively switching from one eye to the other. Needless to say, it is quite uncomfortable to maintain eye contact with someone who appears to be watching a tennis match on your face. It somehow creates a hectic atmosphere and is not at all comforting.

When you're looking at someone, pick one eye and keep looking at it without switching between the eyes. You can feel free to switch eyes every once in a while – just make sure that it is not done too frequently. Similarly, don't try to compensate for the fact that you can never look at both eyes of a person by staring at the bridge of a person's nose. If the people you are talking to are sitting close to you, they will quickly realize that you're not looking them in the eyes.

4. Maintain the right duration of eye contact

Always make sure that you are not staring at the other person. You certainly don't want to overdo it. More eye contact is not always better. In fact, it can be quite creepy to talk to someone who does not even once look away from you. It's even more unnatural to listen to someone who maintains eye contact the entire time they are speaking.

When it comes to the right duration of eye contact, try to maintain a healthy balance. Keep the eye contact for about 5 to 10 seconds. After that, look away shortly to gather your thoughts or to think about what was being said and reestablish the eye contact again.

It's all about finding a natural balance between maintaining eye contact and looking away shortly. At the same time, the duration of your eye contact also greatly

depends on the situation you're confronted with.

5. Practice, practice, practice

As already mentioned, you can make quick improvements by practicing regularly and by gradually increasing your level of eye contact. Some excellent people you can practice with are your family members and your friends. These are the people who won't mind if you struggle a little bit here and there when you're speaking while simultaneously maintaining eye contact.

All it takes is practice and the conscious effort to keep looking at other people's eyes when you speak. You will surely fall back into old patterns every once in a while. For this reason, try to pay close attention to your eye movements as you speak. When you notice that your eyes have been scanning the environment for far too long, simply refocus them in order to reestablish the eye contact.

6. Break eye contact to the side

Avoid situations in which you look down when breaking the eye contact. This signals submission, guilt, disagreement, lower status or even shame. At the same time, breaking eye contact by looking up may be perceived as a sign of dominance or boredom. That's also something to be avoided.

Break your eye contact by looking sideways in order to avoid these negative nonverbal signals.

7. Practice in front of a mirror

An excellent way to train your ability to maintain a high level of eye contact when you speak is to practice in front of a mirror. It can be a fantastic exercise by means of which you become quickly accustomed to looking other people right in the eyes when speaking. At the same time, you can practice in a comfortable atmosphere without any pressure.

In this sense, practicing in front of a mirror is perhaps the most effective technique to accelerate your eye contact skills.

8. Practice by watching news anchors

Another helpful method to practice your eye contact skills is to use news anchors on the TV as your practice partners. Doing so helps you to practice your skill of maintaining eye contact when another person is speaking to you. It also gives you the opportunity to train your ability to maintain a healthy ratio between maintaining eye contact and looking shortly away.

9. Make use of little tricks

In the beginning, you may feel quite uncomfortable during your attempts of trying

to increase the duration of eye contact you keep with other people. But worry not, there are a couple of tricks you can make use of in order to overcome these initial difficulties.

First and foremost, you don't necessarily have to look another person right in the eyes. Especially if they are not right in front of you, you may find it quite helpful to look not directly in the eyes but somewhere nearby. In almost all cases, the other person won't even realize that you are not looking straight into their eyes. This can greatly help you to be more confident when you speak. However, keep in mind that you want to find a spot that is really close by to their eyes. Otherwise, they will notice.

Another helpful trick is to begin your practice exercises with your listening skills. It is by far easier to practice your eye contact skills while listening to another person. Once you feel pretty confident and comfortable with the level of eye contact you establish with others when listening to them, begin the rest of the training exercises.

I hope you enjoyed this article about the reasons why eye contact is so important and how to improve eye contact. What are your experiences with people who avoid looking others into the eyes?

Stay victorious!

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Steve is the founder of *Planet of Success*, the #1 choice when it comes to motivation, self-growth and empowerment. This world does not need followers. What it needs is people who stand in their own sovereignty. Join us in the quest to live life to the fullest!

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