

Enhancing Eye Contact

Eye contact is an essential element of effective public speaking—and good communication in general. Eye contact does not mean just looking over the tops of your listeners' heads at the back wall. It means actually “touching” their eyes with yours. Maintaining good eye contact makes your listeners feel that you are speaking directly to them. As a result, they will pay more attention to what you have to say. Good eye contact also makes a better impression. It shows that you are full of confidence and conviction. It gives your listeners more faith both in you and your message.

Activity 1

In a small group, take turns reciting the alphabet. Say several letters each. When it is your turn to speak, you should make eye contact with a different member of the group each time you say a letter. Do not take your eyes off a listener until he or she looks into your eyes. Don't go around the group in order from one person to the next. Skip around. Catch people off guard. Predictability is boring. Avoiding predictability is another essential element of **good public speaking**. When it is your turn to listen, note down the letters the speaker says. Also, make comments about how well he or she maintained eye contact. Use the chart below.

Speaker's name	Letters spoken while looking in your eyes	Comments

Activity 2

Public speaking is the art of conveying a message to an audience. Whether your topic is easy or difficult, eye contact helps you to do this more effectively. For this activity, take a minute or two to think about the following questions (do not write anything down):

What is your favorite food? Why do you like it?

Now tell the group about your favorite food. Try to make them see how much you like it—and how happy you are to be telling them about it. To do this, you need to maintain good eye contact. As in Activity 1, do not take your eyes off your listeners until they look into your eyes. And don't go around the group in order. When it is your turn to listen, make notes and comments using the chart below.

Speaker's name	Favorite Food	Comments

Activity 3

It is hard enough to maintain good eye contact when you are talking about something you know and understand well, like your favorite food. It is much harder when your topic is difficult and challenging and not so familiar to you. **When talking about more complex matters, it is almost impossible to speak from memory. You need to have something written down. Of course, you should never just read your speech word for word.** How can you read and maintain good eye contact at the same time? Instead, you should make notes that cover your main points. These notes should be in the form of short, simple phrases or sentences. You can also include difficult words that you might have trouble remembering.

As you speak, glance down at these notes and words from time to time to “trigger” your memory. Then look back up at your audience and speak directly

to them. Don't worry if you end up saying something a little different from what you had planned, or even if you make an error or two. The important thing is to hold your audience's eyes—and attention.

For this activity, read this short speech about Murakami Haruki. Then look at the notes and follow the instructions below.

Speech

Hello everyone. Today I'd like to talk to you about Murakami Haruki. Murakami was born in Kyoto in 1949 and graduated from Waseda University in 1973. When he was 30, he received the Gunzo Prize for New Talent for *Hear the Wind Sing*. After this he published *Pinball, 1973* in 1980 and *A Wild Sheep Chase* in 1982. These three books form a trilogy.

Norwegian Wood, which is named after a Beatles song and was published in 1987, sold 3 million copies. In addition to these books, Murakami has written many others. He has also translated the works of such American writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Raymond Carver.

Notes

born Kyoto 1949

graduated Waseda 1973

at age 30 won Gunzo Prize for New Talent for "Hear the Wind Sing;"

"Pinball, 1973" published 1980; "A Wild Sheep Chase," 1982;

"Norwegian Wood," title taken from Beatles song, published 1987, 3 million sold;

many other books; also translated works of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Raymond Carver

Now cover the speech and practice presenting the information to your group. Use your notes, but do not just read them. Glance down, find the information you need, then look back up into your listeners' eyes and tell them about Murakami.

Activity 4

Work in pairs. Decide who will present speech "A" and who speech "B" below. Read your speech and, in the box that follows, prepare notes. Don't write too much—40 words should be enough. When you are ready, present the information to your partner. Again, don't just read, tell!

A

Hello everyone. Today I'd like to tell you about the writer Yoshimoto Banana. Yoshimoto was born in Tokyo in 1964. She is the daughter of the poet and critic Yoshimoto Takaaki. With her first work, *Kitchen*, she won the 6th Kaien Newcomer Writers Prize in 1987 and then the 16th Izumi Kyoka Literary Prize in 1988. Since then she has written many other works and has received numerous additional prizes. Her books have been translated and published in more than 20 countries.

B

Hello everyone. Today I'd like to talk to you about the journalist Tachibana Takashi. Tachibana was born in Nagasaki in 1940 and graduated from Tokyo University. In 1974 he wrote a series of articles for the magazine *Bungei Shunju* about the political and financial transactions of Tanaka Kakuei. At that time Tanaka was the prime minister of Japan, and the series was one cause of Tanaka's resignation. In 1987 Tachibana received the Mainichi Book Award for *Brain Death*. He has also written a study of the Japan Communist Party.

Notes

