

# How Eye Contact Can Help You Close a Sale

## Rules About When and How to Make Eye Contact in Different Cultures

BY **LAHLE WOLFE** Updated August 05, 2019

Eye contact is a method of communication. A quick glance sends a different message than a cold stare, but both are forms of making eye contact. Depending on the culture, setting, and person, the message you think you are sending with nonverbal communication may not be the one that is received.

### **How Different Cultures View Eye Contact**

How and when to make eye contact depends entirely on the customs of where you are, who you are with, and the social setting. For example, some cultures consider making direct eye contact aggressive, rude, or a show of disrespect. Other cultures and some religious groups consider eye contact between men and women inappropriate and either as threatening or flirtatious. In many Asian cultures, avoiding eye contact with a member of the opposite sex or a superior is seen as a show of respect.

However, in the United States and most of Europe, making eye contact is not only seen as appropriate but is necessary for establishing yourself as a powerful business professional.

### **Effectively Communicate by Making the Right Eye Contact**

In business and social settings making the "right" eye contact never involves staring at someone or having a fixed gaze. To make eye contact, look directly into the other persons' eyes for 4-5 seconds. Be sure to blink normally, and nod or shift your head from time to time during a conversation. Mimicking the facial expressions of the person talking (i.e., showing concern or smiling) also helps to support appropriate eye contact. A frozen stance and tense face seem more like staring than contact.

Almost universally, looking into someone else's eyes for more than a few seconds before smiling or otherwise changing your facial expression. Blinking fast and frequently can be associated with feeling nervous or uncomfortable; be sure to gauge your blink rate and watch how the person you are looking at is responding.

Retrieved from: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/business-and-social-etiquette-how-to-make-eye-contact-3514819>

## **Not Easy for Some People to Do**

It is, however, to be aware that some people have challenges that make it extremely difficult to make direct eye contact. It is important to apply general rules of etiquette and attempt to make direct eye contact with others, but it is equally important to be sensitive to others who make suffer from social anxiety disorders, Autism, or Asperger Syndrome. If someone seems unable or unwilling to meet your gaze, don't push it, offer a soft gaze rather than a stare, and never try to move someone's head or position yourself so that they have to look at you if they do not want to.

## **Making Eye Contact in the United States**

In the United States, making eye contact is interpreted as showing interest, paying attention, and a sign of self-confidence. Unless the situation itself is confrontational in nature, it is generally acceptable for children, adults, and people of both sexes to make eye contact with other people.

In business, it is particularly important that you make eye contact when you are introduced to someone, and when they are speaking to you. You do not have to stare someone down, but frequently glancing away or refusing to make eye contact may be interpreted as weakness, disinterest, or as being disrespectful.

## **Making Eye Contact in European Countries**

Most European eye contact customs are similar to those in the United States, especially in such countries as Spain, France, and Germany. In France, making eye contact with a stranger may be interpreted as showing interest.

## **Eye Contact in Most Asian Cultures**

In some cultures, extended eye contact can be taken as an affront or a challenge of authority. Generally, only sporadic or brief eye contact is considered acceptable. This limited eye contact custom is particularly true in Asian cultures where people are from different professions or social levels. For example, in China and Japan, children show respect to elders by not making intense eye contact. Employees would not make eye contact with their employers and students would not force eye contact with teachers.

These cultures do not view avoiding looking at someone in the eyes as rude or disinterested. They also do not view it as necessarily being submissive. Instead, avoiding eye contact is usually interpreted as being simply being polite or reverent. The rule of thumb in Asia, Africa, and Latin American cultures is to be careful about the eye contact you make with anyone that could be seen as a social (or workplace) superior. Staring at a superior will be seen as a challenge or as a sign of disrespect.

### **African, and Latin American Customs**

According to "TheTravel.com," in some African countries, eye contact norms vary with urban and rural settings. Urban centers may tolerate more eye contact than is seen as proper in villages. Also, when speaking to an elder, direct or extended eye contact should be avoided.

Mexico is another country that has varying degrees of allowable eye contact. Again, when speaking to superiors or elders the gaze is often averted. In a study conducted by the [Centers for Disease Control](#), they found that direct eye contact can be interpreted as intimidation by Mexican and other Hispanic cultures. However, sites like "CulturalAtlas.com" find this contact can be appreciated. The site states "Mexicans may hold your gaze for a prolonged period."

### **Etiquette in Middle Eastern Cultures**

In general, Middle Eastern cultures, particularly among Muslims, do not see as direct eye contact between the sexes as being appropriate. Businesswomen traveling to the Middle East may draw attention simply for being different, and some men may try to make eye contact. However, be advised that making or holding eye contact can communicate the message that your interest is less than casual or curious.

If you are doing business with another woman, intense eye contact *within* your gender is often used to stress the truthfulness of a point and is considered acceptable.