

## Making Eye Contact

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Effective eye contact is the difference between conversing and connecting and can be the difference between a 1 and a 6 in any given round!

**1. Before you speak, pause and connect with distinct listeners**

This will give you time to connect with your audience and build anticipation for your speech. (PS – NSDA National Videos are good examples of this technique – Example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xQra3vaKCI>)

**2. Focus directly on your judge at the start of your presentation.** Even if you have other people in the room, the judge should be your 1st main focus.

**3. Focusing above the audiences' heads DOES NOT work for competition!**

- a. It takes no more than 3-5 seconds to establish meaningful eye contact. You don't have to count. One sentence ~ 5 seconds.
- b. Avoid long bouts of intense eye contact. If you 'laser-beam' stare at your judge, they will become uncomfortable. It's okay to look away and look back.
- c. Highlight your key points with strong eye contact.

**4. A successful speech is "a conversation, amplified."**

- a. Watch for non-verbal signals from your audience and adjust your speech accordingly.
- b. Nodding is affirmation that your judge has received your message.
- c. Judges may break eye-contact with you to jot down notes. Don't panic.

**5. Express emotion with your eyes** – Practice showing happiness, sadness, surprise, Just as voice conveys emotion, so should your eyes.

**6. Practice in a mirror** – Run through your entire presentation in your mind silently. Focus only on your eye contact and expressing emotion with your eyes. We call this silent practice.

**7. Practice with a group** - Ask all your audience members to start with a hand raised. They will lower their hand only after you have maintained three full seconds of eye contact.