

Where Should I Look?

If you view the audience as piranhas, you'll grab any chance to avoid looking them in the eye. In order to see people in your audience for what they are--people--master the following eye-contact techniques. Your listeners will see you as warmer and more influential.

Techniques:

1. *Warm up.* Get the good feeling of relating well to your audience by making small talk with several individuals before your talk begins. Then when all the eyes are on you, you won't be confronting a mass of strangers.

2. *Follow the "Rule of Three."* If you're new at public speaking, pick three specific people to focus on--one in the middle, one on the right, and one on the left of the room. These audience members will be your eye-contact landmarks as you scan the room. Be careful, though, not to look at any one person for more than about five seconds. It's creepy being stared at by the speaker!

3. *Do the one-minute scan.* Include everyone in your audience by scanning the people in the room about once a minute while you're talking. You will have a tendency to focus more attention on the folks directly in front of you. That's all right, but be sure you don't ignore those to your right and left.

4. *Learn the art of "nose contact."* If you are speaking to a small audience (three to thirty people), it's not necessary to look right into their eyes. Just glance at the center of a listener's face (usually the nose). You will establish contact this way without feeling as if you are staring at someone's eyes.