



The Eyes Have It!

Eye movements indicate how a person is thinking - whether they are imagining a future or past event, internally re-hearing a sound or making up a sound, talking to themselves, or attending to their feelings.

Why pay attention to eye movements?

Being able to notice a person's eye direction movements - and to recognise what they mean for that particular individual provides information about how they are processing or 'thinking' in the broadest sense of the term.



Often even the person, themselves, will not be aware of how they are thinking yet it is available for the sharp-eyed and skilled observer.

So, let's say, you are *explaining* to a colleague how to do something and they say they do not understand - while looking UP to either the left or the right (indicating that they may be visualising or trying to visualise). This could indicate that they need you to *demonstrate*, rather than verbally explain, so they will be able to *see* how to do it.

People are unwittingly providing us with free information all the time about how they are thinking, how they like to be treated, and how they would like us to communicate with them. And we are providing everyone else with free information, too.

This article provides practical and immediately applicable tools with which to recognise and to 'decode' this free information that people are continually transmitting, by watching their eye movements. This skill will immediately begin to improve communication with everyone in their personal and professional lives.

What the eyes indicate

The Eye Accessing Cues indicate whether a person is thinking in images, sounds, self-talk, or through their feelings. Having this information enables us to communicate in a way that more effectively matches their current thinking style.

Recognising eye movements takes a little practise because, although some people have eye movements that are quite slow and deliberate, most eye assessing will be very brief and subtle with little 'flicks' that are almost unnoticeable.

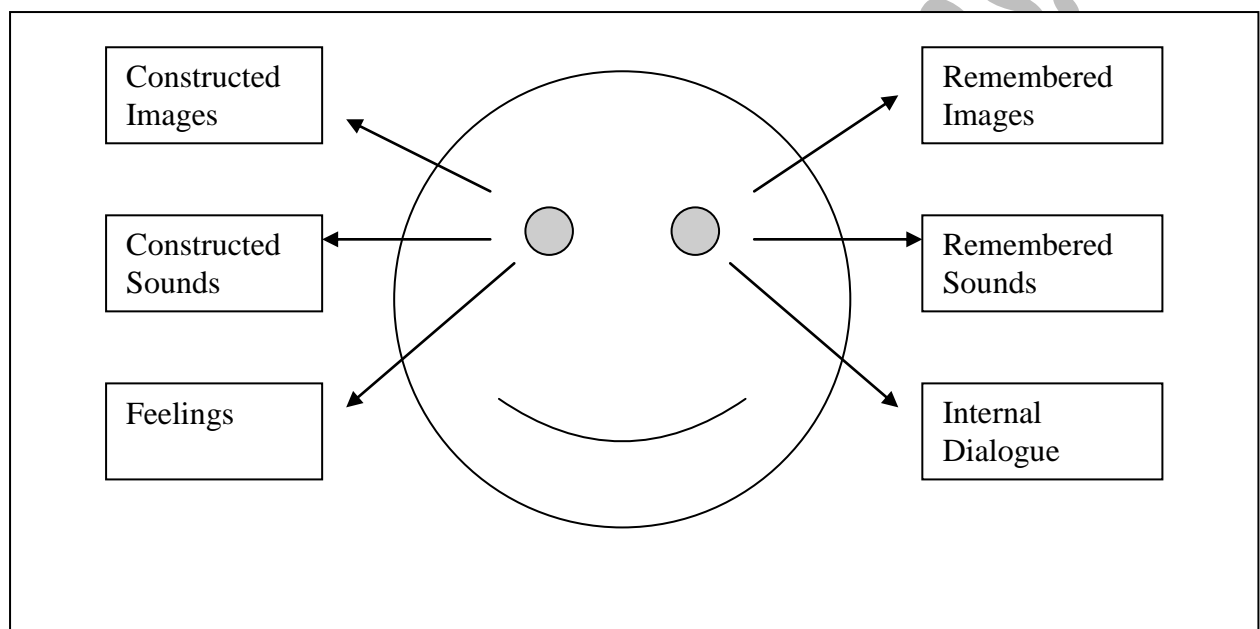
The most common directions

Imagine you are looking at a person's face. Now imagine that you are superimposing on their face a Grid of three zones – upper, middle, and lower. These zones correspond to the visual, auditory and self-talk/feelings areas (for the majority of, but not all, people).

The upper zone of the Grid is the visual one and begins at eye level. If their eyes move or flick upwards this often indicates 'visual accessing' – this tells us that they may be visualising images.

The middle zone refers to 'horizontal' eye movements that look directly to the left or the right. These often indicate that the person is listening to remembered or invented sounds.

The lower zone of the superimposed Grid corresponds to eye movements that are down to the left or the right. Down to the left (of the Grid) usually indicates that they are checking their feelings. Down to the right of the Grid is the self-talk area – which people access when they are internally verbalising.



Some practical applications

The following are just of few applications of the insights resulting from developing skill in recognising eye accessing cues.

Application 1: Use them to think more effectively

Many of us were taught to look people straight in the eye when communicating. However you may find it useful to begin to more actively and more enthusiastically use your eyes when thinking.

Some experts consider eye movements to be aid to thinking since they stimulate different parts of the brain. And that if, for some reason – such as believing they should make 'good eye contact', a person is unable to make the accessing movements this can interfere with and slow their normal thinking style.

(You may remember a common junior school experience. The teacher asks you a question. As you struggle to visualise the answer, eyes moving up and to the left or right, the teacher interrupts with

'Well, you won't find the answer on the ceiling, you know! Next person!' Yet, intuitively you know that that is, precisely, where you will find the answer...)

Application 2: Know when to shut up!

If you speak while a person is making eye movements you will interrupt their thinking and this will slow down the interaction and/or cause them to feel confused or resentful towards you. While they are accessing it is wise to wait silently and without distracting movements.

Application 3: How to meet their needs

Let's say you are making a business presentation and:

- The person's eye accessing indicates that they are highly visual. They will like to think in pictures and will give you more attention if your presentation is delivered in a slightly high tonality, has a brisk pace, is not too fact-filled, has lots of anecdotes and is supported with lots of visual aids such as brochures, photographs, PowerPoint slides, etc.
- Their eye accessing indicates they do a lot of self-talking. They want hard facts and figures and are not influenced by emotions or effusive enthusiasm. They will expect you to be able to support your ideas with well-researched data and they like 'no-nonsense' visuals such as graphs, bar charts, etc. They will want to be able to interrupt you with questions, sometimes quite frequently.
- Their eye accessing indicates that they are highly kinaesthetic. They want to be actively involved. So give them things to handle or thumb through. Invite them to come up and help you with working things out on the flip chart. Ideally have a sample that they can keep and play with - left to their own devices they will probably sell it to themselves! Speak at a measured rate, not too fast, and allow lots of pauses especially when you see them accessing their feelings. And, avoid long presentations – they'll likely get antsy after about 20 minutes!

Application 4: Your language

Although it has quite a subtle effect if you switch to using predicates which match the other person's eye accessing cues, this will enhance the rapport between you. If, for example, your colleague or customer appears to be primarily thinking in pictures it's not very useful to ask how they 'feel' about your idea or product, or how things 'sound' to them. It's much better to ask them how it looks to them, whether they like the appearance of the idea, whether then can visualise the end result, etc. Match the eye accessing of highly kinaesthetic, auditory, or self-talk-oriented people similarly.

Application 5: Their personal space

The eye accessing cues also give us information about their 'personal space' needs. Highly visual people like lots of personal space. They like you to be far enough from them so they can see all of you since they are picking up a lot of information from watching all of you. So stand or sit relatively far from them.

People who think mainly with feelings like to be close enough to be able to touch you – and they frequently will do this patting your arm, holding your elbow or shoulder, or using a double clasp handshake which they seem reluctant to release!

The self-talk auditory people will probably have only minimal awareness of you and your body language since they are paying so much attention to the facts and figures and to their analysis of these facts and figures. They will frequently look past you as you are conversing and some may tend to blink very frequently or even close their eyes for a few seconds while speaking to you about complex subjects.

Which to give more attention to?

What do you do when the information from their predicates and from their eye accessing cues do not match? Let's say they use lots of visual predicates but their eye accessing is mostly kinaesthetic, what then? As a general rule go by using eye accessing - this is providing you with more important information.

Beware:

- **These are not fixed attributes:** be aware that people 'are' not auditory nor visual nor kinaesthetic. It's just something they do. Some people do it most of the time and in most situations while others specialise in a particular rep system in particular situations and may switch favoured systems in a different context. So always verify how the person with whom you are communicating is functioning.
- **Not everyone reads like a book!** The eye-accessing assumes that, if a person looks upwards to either the right or left, they are mentally visualising. The same applies, incidentally, if they look straight ahead in a slightly defocused way. If they look down to their right we assume they are checking how they feel about something. Glances down to their left indicate they are sub-vocalising or silently talking to themselves. Looking to either left or right may be an indicator or listening to internal sounds. However these assumptions are not true for everyone. They are merely working hypotheses. They are used as starting points – and then their validity is verified by further observation and through questions.

Action points...

Aim to wire-in these skills systematically. Spend a few days or a week simply noticing how different people use their eyes. Notice how some make big and obvious movements while others make minimal little flicks. During this time it is also wise to begin to notice all the other ways in which people use their eyes as well.

Then spend some time specialising first in the 'visual' direction, then the auditory, third the self-talk and finally the kinaesthetic.

When you have got really good at noticing these movements in a wide variety of people move on to establishing the significance of what you are seeing. There are two useful ways of doing this.

- (1) Notice if their eye accessing is congruent with what they are saying – in other words are they looking in the kinaesthetic direction when talking about feelings or activity.
- (2) With people you know and with whom you feel at ease ask verifying questions. When you see a particularly noticeable eye access, ask them what they were doing internally.

And, finally, while it is emphasised that the 'standard directions' are to be treated as working hypotheses you are likely to find that they will be true for well over 90 percent of the people you meet!