

Day 15 – Eye Accessing Cues

When I (Laureli) attended my very first NLP seminar, I was struck by how watching people's eye patterns meant something. I was astounded to think that people's eye movements had relevance versus randomness. I could not wait to learn more about how it all worked.

Everyone has their own model of their world. For instance, something can happen to two people at the same time, and their memory of that event can be very different depending upon how they filtered the experience. The memories of these events are stored as an internal representation; that is, the event is stored as a picture, sound, feeling, or thought. In fact, each of our memories is stored as a specific set of images, sounds, feelings, smells, and tastes (VAKOG). This is how we distinguish one set of memories from another. We mentally recreate and recall our experiences (memories) with these stored pictures, words, sounds, and physical feelings as we think.

In 1890, Williams James, American psychologist, in his book *Principles of Psychology*, wrote, "In attending to either an idea or a sensation belonging to a particular sense-sphere, the movement is the adjustment of the sense organ (eye), felt as it occurs. I cannot think in visual terms, for example, without feeling a fluctuating play of pressures, convergences, divergences, and accommodations in my eyeballs... When I try to remember or reflect, the movements in question feels like a sort of withdrawal from the outer world. As far as I can detect, these feelings are due to an actual rolling outwards and upwards of the eyeballs."

In the early days of NLP, both Grinder and Bandler believed they identified a pattern of relationships between the sensory-based language people use in general conversation and corresponding eye movement. In 1976, Robert Dilts took this hypothesis to the next step. He conducted a study at Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute in San Francisco to find out if this had relevance. Using electrodes, he tracked both eye movement and brain wave characteristics of people who when asked questions related to various senses (VAK) that involved both right-brain memory and left-brain mental construction. As a result of these studies, eye movement patterns or eye accessing cues were identified.

Eye Accessing Cues

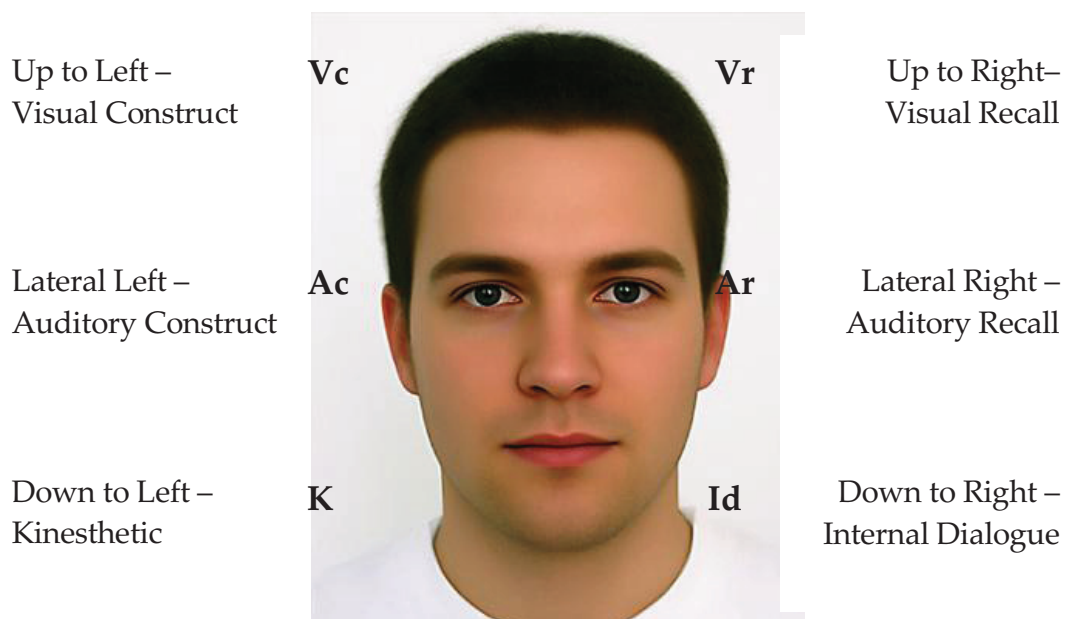
When people access their memories, their eyes move in specific and observable directions. These movements are called **eye accessing cues** and they correspond to the neural pathways in the brain that store and process sensory details. Everything has a place to be stored, and this is how people access stored information. This is valuable information that can provide us with clues as to whether they are thinking in pictures, sounds, feelings, or talking to themselves. A skilled NLP practitioner will notice the sequencing of eye patterns. However, learning to read eye accessing cues will not make you a mind reader, but will give you relevant information to the way the other person is thinking. This is also referred to as a person's lead representational system.

NLP suggests such eye accessing cues are: (1) idiosyncratic and habitual for each person, (2) may form significant clues as to how a person is processing or representing a thought to themselves unconsciously.

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This information can be useful in gaining rapport, achieving more effective communication, asking applicable questions, and gaining understanding. It allows you to communicate to people in their own language as you match it back. This is why we often call them eye accessing *clues*.

Let's take a look at the eye pattern chart. This chart is read as you look at another person's face straight on. This chart is referred to as **normally organized**. Some people are reverse organized and the eye pattern chart is flipped and opposite. We've found that some left-handed people are reverse organized (but not all) and a few right-handed people we've met have also been reverse organized. But, generally, the normally organized patterns are fairly consistent across all races, with the possible exception of the Basques in Spain, who seem to have some exceptions to the rule. However, never assume, ask questions and watch the eyes to find how the person stores information.



The eyes play a big part in how a person lives their lives. A whopping quarter of the brain is devoted to vision and our optic nerves are directly wired to the brain. In fact, our eyes are the only organ we can literally examine externally. A person's

eyes tell a story as the eyes move involuntarily and in conjunction with whatever is being thought or felt.

Let us try it on. Ask yourself the following questions and notice what direction/s your eyes move as you think of the answers. (Note, this exercise is just to notice that your eyes are moving, normally we only notice and identify eye patterns in others.)

1. How many windows do you have in your home?
2. What would your car look like in 15 years if you never washed it?
3. What does your favorite song sound like?
4. What would your voice sound like if you were Donald Duck?
5. What does it feel like to take a warm bath or shower?
6. What does your voice sound like when you talk to yourself?

Each of the questions caused you to either access a memory or mentally construct some experience. If your eyes do not move, you may notice that, you may have looked in a direction for only a nanosecond or perhaps defocused looking out in front of yourself. This is generally considered either visual or auditory remembered as the memory is in your present awareness.

Now ask someone else these same questions using the eye-accessing chart. Face them directly and remember the chart is normally organized. It may be helpful to jot down your findings as you watch their eyes so you can review them later.

What happens when people's eyes move?

Note: The following eye movements are as you watch someone's eyes. When we refer to a location, this is your left or right as if the person is in front of you.

Visual Construct (Vc) – Up and to your left would be accessing an image they need to construct a picture of because they either have not seen it before, or because the picture has been stored in the past and not the immediate recall zone.

Visual Recall (Vr) – Up and to your right would elicit an image they seen or imagined before.

It is nearly impossible to tell if someone is lying from eye patterns alone. Be careful assuming that people are lying or making things up just because their eyes move to Visual Construct. It could be they just don't have the information readily available. For example, what did you wear two days ago? When you find the answer to this question, you may have to construct what clothes you have, use internal dialogue to ask yourself the question, you may have to remember what you did that day and even construct what you might have looked like in a certain outfit that day. So, your eyes may go more to construct although you're not making it up. To identify if someone is lying, you would need to calibrate the whole person – physiology, eyes, tonality, etc.

Auditory Construct (Ac) – Lateral and to your left would be accessing something they have not heard before, or they have to construct a sound or conversation.

Auditory Recall (Ar) – Lateral and to your right would be eliciting something they have heard before. This could be a conversation or sound, and it could be of themselves or someone else.

Kinesthetic (K) – Eyes down and to your left would access a person's feelings internally (e.g. emotions) or externally (e.g. tactile feel of velvet or a cat's tongue).

Internal Dialogue (Id) – Eyes down and to your right would access the person's self talk or internal dialogue.

Practice makes understanding eye accessing cues easy. You can learn by observing people's eyes as you ask them questions in normal conversations; start noticing how different people use their eyes. Notice how some make big and obvious movements, while others make minimal little moves. Something that is available to everyone nowadays is television. Reality shows, talk shows, and unscripted interviews are great to use as a learning tool as they are usually spontaneous. Turn the volume down on the TV for a while and just identify where the person's eyes move to. This is a great way to become unconsciously skilled at making meaning of eye patterns.

With people you know and feel at ease with, ask verifying questions. For example, if you are talking to a friend about their weekend and you see their eyes shift up and to your right, you can ask, "What do you recall seeing?" When you see a particularly noticeable eye movement, ask them what they were doing internally. You are likely to find that where their eyes moved and what they were thinking is accurate for well over 90 percent of the people you meet. There are many practical uses of eye accessing cues.

Incorporating Eye Patterns into Life

- Upgrade your communication style. Using eye accessing enables us to communicate in a way that more effectively matches another person's current thinking style. This would enable you to respond by matching their eye movement with your words. When you do this, you will have more useful questions and replies.

Vr – Looking up to their right; it would be a clue to use more visual words and questions. Use visual aids; show them examples, slides, brochures, pictures, diagrams.

K – Looking down to the left; it is a clue to use feeling words and questions. Let them touch things or try them on or something they can thumb through.

Id – Looking down to the right; to use more logical, thinking, analytical words and questions. Use graphs, charts, and statistics and hard facts and figures.

Ar – Looking laterally to the right; use more auditory questions and examples. Explain and tell them about it. Use and refer to sounds, conversations and ask what they've heard.

- **Ask better questions.** One of Heidi's main reasons for wanting to master the elicitation and understanding of eye patterns is to ask better questions. As you will continue to learn, there are a lot of NLP tools to help us to make changes to patterns; sometimes a good question will bring you to the right tool to use. For example, one of her clients wanted to start his own business but was sabotaging his efforts. In their first coaching session, he made a statement: "I just don't know if I can really make it work"; as he said this statement, his eyes moved up and to her right – to Visual Recall. Heidi asked a question: "What are you remembering right now?" He then told her about a failed business of his uncle's and how his uncle struggled to create a successful business and keep his family together. This one question possibly saved a lot of coaching time – they were able to identify a major interference and then were able to do something about it.
- **Identify a strategy.** In NLP we also track eye patterns when we are eliciting someone's strategies. When we ask someone how they do a task, a pattern or even a thought process, they often don't consciously know. However, if we ask them to give us their step-by-step

methods, we can find their strategy. Because the unconscious mind works in harmony with our thoughts, our eyes will move into various quadrants that verify our strategy. We will be looking at strategies more in depth on day 27.

Other Practical Examples:

You have a client you are trying to sell your product to. As you are talking about the benefits and features of the product, you notice the client looking up to your right (VR). When we see this eye moment, we can presuppose that they are seeing a remembered image in their mind. You could ask them if they have had/used a product like this before, or if they can remember where they will be using it, or if they need to see more literature. You could even lead them to a Visual Construction about your product by asking if they could imagine having/using the product.

You are having a conversation with your spouse. Your spouse is telling you where they want to go for a vacation. You notice their eyes go down and to your left (K). We can presuppose that your spouse is experiencing a feeling of some sort. You could respond with: "I know how much you want to enjoy where we go and it is important to find the right place where we feel comfortable."

You are talking to a potential new client. While you are explaining your services to him, you see his eyes go down and to your right (Id). We can presuppose that he is doing some self-talk. In this instance, you could use a logical tactic to give more information and detail about your services. Conversely, if his eyes had moved down and to your left (K), you might want to use a more emotional tact.

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When we can identify and use a person's eye accessing cues, we can communicate easier at an unconscious level – if I'm talking in pictures when they have pictures in their mind, then their mind has to do less filtering of what is said. If I only go based on my model of the world, a lot more filtering has to happen. Using the vacation example from earlier, what if you would have said, "I can see how you would enjoy going there." It is not a "bad" way to communicate; however, you jumped to a visual while they are in K. As human beings we do change representation systems as we talk; however, miscommunication often happens when we disregard where someone else is coming from and tell them about ours.

To get this skill in your muscle we encourage you to start watching eye patterns of others and putting meaning to them by asking better questions, using them in your language patterns or responding based on the movement. This really is a great skill to have as a master communicator, and it makes a fantastic party trick!