CULTURE CLASH EXAMPLES | B1-B2 | 15 min · alone, then pairs

Normal for Whom?

Nine everyday situations. People in different places follow different unwritten rules, and neither habit is wrong.

1 **Read both habits in each row. Tick the one that is normal where you grew up. If neither fits, write your own habit next to the row.**

SITUATION	HABIT A	HABIT B	A-I
1 **Greeting a friend**	☐ A handshake, or a wave	☐ A kiss on the cheek, or a bow	
2 **Personal space**	☐ Standing close is friendly.	☐ About an arm's length apart is normal.	
3 **Arriving at a party**	☐ Times are flexible. Arriving on time can seem too early.	☐ On time, or a few minutes after the time on the invitation	
4 **Tipping in a restaurant**	☐ A tip of 15 to 20 percent is expected.	☐ Tipping is unusual or can feel awkward.	
5 **Saying no**	☐ A direct no is avoided. "That might be difficult" means no.	☐ A polite but clear no	
6 **Small talk**	☐ People chat with strangers about the weather.	☐ Chatting with strangers is unusual.	
7 **At the table**	☐ You wait for the host or the oldest person.	☐ You start eating when your food arrives.	
8 **Shoes indoors**	☐ Shoes often stay on.	☐ Shoes come off at the door.	
9 **Eye contact**	☐ Steady eye contact shows honesty.	☐ Looking down shows respect to older people.	

2 **What can go wrong when habit A meets habit B? Write the letter of each misunderstanding in the last column.**

a One side thinks they agreed, and the other thinks they refused.

b A guest walks dirt through the house.

c One person leans in, and the other steps back.

d Friendliness looks fake, or silence looks cold.

e The host isn't ready, or the guest seems careless.

f A polite student looks like they are hiding something.

g One feels crowded, and the other feels pushed away.

h A guest looks impatient without meaning to.

i The server feels insulted, or the visitor feels tricked.

3 **Add a situation from your own life. Where did you see a different habit?**

Situation: _____

Where I grew up: _____

What I saw somewhere else: _____

Answers 1 c · 2 g · 3 e · 4 i · 5 a · 6 d · 7 h · 8 b · 9 f

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN ENGLISH · B1-B2 · 15 min · alone or pairs

Say It Two Ways

The grammar is right, but the message lands wrong. Softeners keep the meaning and change how it sounds.

SOFTENERS

- I'm afraid ...
- I'm not sure ...
- Would it be possible to ...?
- Could you ... when you have a moment?
- It might be a bit ...
- I think there might be ...
- Thanks so much, but ...
- Would ... work instead?

REPAIR PHRASES

- Sorry, I didn't catch that.
- Could you say that again?
- What do you mean by ...?
- How do people usually do this here?
- Sorry, I didn't mean to be rude.
- Am I doing this right?

1 These lines are correct English, but they can sound rude. Rewrite each one in a softer way. Use the boxes.

1. **No. I can't finish it by Friday.**
2. **Your plan won't work.**
3. **I don't want to come to your party.**
4. **These numbers are wrong.**
5. **Send me the report now.**
6. **I don't understand you.**
7. **Your price is too high.**
8. **"How are you?" "Fine."**

2 Now the other way round. What does the speaker usually mean? Tick a or b.

"That might be difficult."
- ☐ a. It's possible with a bit more work.
- ☐ b. It's probably a no.

"Let's grab coffee sometime!"
- ☐ a. A friendly way to end the chat
- ☐ b. An invitation for this week

"Interesting idea. Let me think about it."
- ☐ a. I love it. Let's start.
- ☐ b. I'm not convinced yet.

"Could you possibly send it today?"
- ☐ a. Please send it today.
- ☐ b. Send it only if you have free time.

3 When is the direct version the better choice? Write one situation.

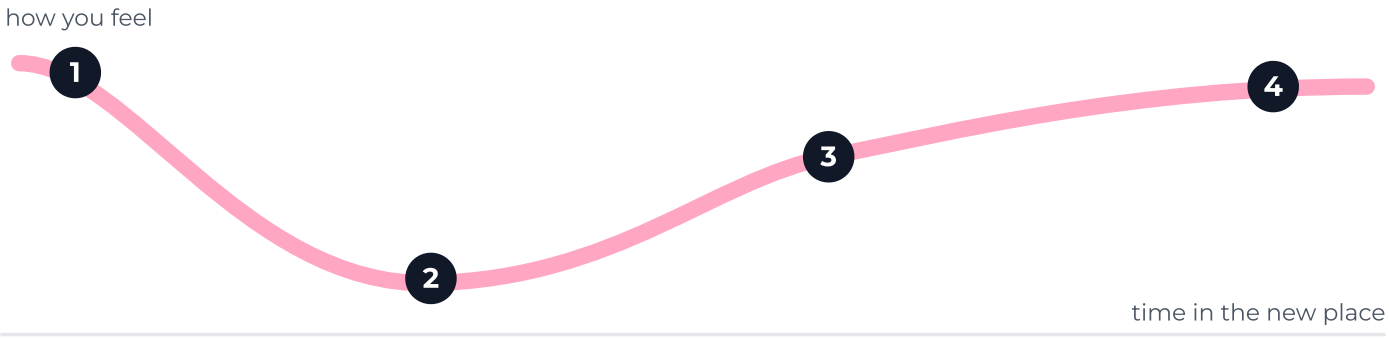
Sample answers 1 I'm afraid Friday is too soon. Would Monday work instead? · 2 I'm not sure the plan will work. Could we look at the budget again? · 3 Thanks so much for asking, but I'm afraid I can't make it. · 4 I think there might be a small mistake in these numbers. · 5 Could you send me the report when you have a moment? · 6 Sorry, I didn't catch that. Could you say that again? · 7 The price is a bit higher than we planned. Is there any flexibility? · 8 "Fine, thanks. It's been a busy week! How about you?"

Exercise 2 1 b · 2 a · 3 b · 4 a. These are the usual meanings in many English-speaking workplaces. Tone can change them.

STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK · B1-B2 · 15 min · alone, then pairs

The Culture Shock Curve

This is a popular model, not a law. Many people skip stages, repeat them or go through them in a different order.



1. Honeymoon
Everything is new and exciting.

2. Frustration
Small differences start to hurt. Homesickness sets in.

3. Adjustment
Routines form. You start to laugh at your mistakes.

4. Acceptance
The new place feels like a second home.

1 **Ten people describe life in a new country. Which stage is each speaker in? Write 1, 2, 3 or 4 in the box. Some quotes fit two stages, so be ready to say why.**

a *Everyone here eats dinner at six. At home we eat at nine, so for a month I was hungry every night at bedtime.* ☐

b *I love it here. Everything is so interesting!* ☐

c *After four months, I realized I didn't need a map to get home. That was the day the city started to feel like mine.* ☐

d *Why does everything have to be so complicated here?* ☐

e *In my first week, a cashier asked me how I was, and I told her about my headache. She looked confused.* ☐

f *OK, I'm starting to understand how things work.* ☐

g *My classmates said, "Let's grab coffee sometime," and I waited for the invitation. It never came.* ☐

h *I don't love everything here, but this is my life now, and I like it.* ☐

i *The first time I paid for lunch, the price on the menu wasn't the price on the bill. Nobody had told me about sales tax.* ☐

j *In a meeting, my manager asked what I thought of her plan. At home, I would never disagree with a manager in front of others, so I said it was perfect.* ☐

2 **Think of your first month in a new place: a new country, city, job or school. Draw an X on the curve where you were. Then finish the sentences.**

After one month, I was in the _____ stage because _____.

The thing that helped me most was _____.

Suggested answers a 2 · b 1 · c 3 · d 2 · e 1 · f 3 · g 2 · h 4 · i 1 or 2 · j 2 or 3. A different answer with a good reason is fine too.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS · B1-C1 · 20 min · pairs or groups

Culture Clash Question Cards

Twenty questions about everyday life: ten about your own experience and ten about your opinions.

HOW TO USE THE CARDS

1. Cut out the cards and put them face down in two piles.
2. Take a card, read it aloud and answer it. Then ask your partner one follow-up question.
3. Start with the experience cards. Move to the opinion cards when everybody is talking.

Follow-up questions: What happened next? · How did you feel? · Why do you think that is? · Would you do the same again? · Can you give an example?

YOUR EXPERIENCE · 1 Have you ever done something abroad that was normal at home but strange there?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 2 What surprised you most in the first foreign country you visited?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 3 Has a visitor ever misunderstood a custom in your country? What happened?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 4 Which part of your daily routine would surprise a person from another culture?
YOUR EXPERIENCE · 5 Have you ever felt homesick? What helped?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 6 Is there a rule about eating that everyone in your family follows?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 7 Have you ever been confused by a gesture or by body language?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 8 How do you greet a friend, and how do you greet your boss?
YOUR EXPERIENCE · 9 Have you ever lived away from home? Which stage of culture shock did you reach?	YOUR EXPERIENCE · 10 What would you tell a visitor to your city before their first week?	YOUR OPINION · 11 Should visitors follow every local custom, or should locals make allowances for them?	YOUR OPINION · 12 Should restaurants include the tip in the price?
YOUR OPINION · 13 Is small talk with strangers friendly or a waste of time?	YOUR OPINION · 14 What helps more in a new country, the language or local friends?	YOUR OPINION · 15 Can you fully understand a culture without living in it?	YOUR OPINION · 16 Do culture clashes happen more or less often now that so many people work online?
YOUR OPINION · 17 Should companies train employees before sending them abroad?	YOUR OPINION · 18 Is being direct honest or rude?	YOUR OPINION · 19 Which custom from another culture would you like to bring into your own?	YOUR OPINION · 20 Are some culture clashes funny once they are over? Why do we laugh at them later?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY · A2-B1 to B2 · 20 min · pairs

Misunderstanding Role Play

Six small clashes. Act each one twice: first the awkward moment, then the version where one line saves it.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Work in pairs. Cut out a card and fold the pink strip under, so you can't see it.
2. Round 1: act out the situation. Let the clash happen.
3. Round 2: act it out again. This time, open the strip and use the line that saves the moment, or your own line.
4. Talk about it: what was the unwritten rule in this situation?

Lines that save the moment: Am I early? · Sorry, should I ...? · How do people usually do this here? · Where I grew up, we ... · Sorry, I didn't mean to ...

1 Dinner invitation

A You were invited for 7:00, and you arrive at exactly 7:00.

B You are the host. Your guests usually come at 7:30, and your hair is still wet.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT A SAYS

Oh, am I early? I'm happy to help in the kitchen.

2 The elevator question

A You ask your coworker in the elevator, "How was your weekend?"

B You start a long story about your weekend. The doors open in five seconds.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT B SAYS

Good, thanks! Too long a story for an elevator. How was yours?

3 The impossible deadline

A You are the manager. Ask B to finish a report by Friday.

B You can't finish by Friday, but saying no to a manager feels rude.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT B SAYS

I'd like to do it well. Would Monday work instead?

4 Shoes at the door

A You visit B's apartment and see a row of shoes by the door. Your shoes are still on.

B You are the host. You see A's shoes, but you feel shy to say anything.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT A SAYS

Sorry, should I take my shoes off?

5 The gift

A You bring a gift for your host and wait for B to open it.

B You are the host. Where you grew up, people open gifts after the guests leave, so you put it aside.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT B SAYS

Thank you so much! Do you mind if I open it later? That's how we do it at home.

6 The bill

A Lunch with B, your new coworker. The bill comes, and you take it to pay for both of you.

B You take out your card to pay for your own half.

FOLD UNDER · ROUND 2 · STUDENT A SAYS

Shall we split it, or can I get this one and you get the next?

7 Your own clash

Write a small clash from your own life. Then act it out twice with a partner.

A _____

B _____

FOLD UNDER · THE LINE THAT SAVES IT

_____

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY | A2-B1 to B2 | 20 min · alone, then groups

Rules of My Country

Every place has rules that nobody teaches you. Visitors learn them by breaking them.

Unwritten rule: a rule that nobody writes down, but almost everybody follows.

1 Read five unwritten rules from a visitor's guide. Are they true where you live? Tick one box for each.

Don't call anyone after 9 p.m. unless it's an emergency.
- ☐ true for me
- ☐ not true for me
- ☐ it depends

If a host offers you food, say no the first time. They will offer again.
- ☐ true for me
- ☐ not true for me
- ☐ it depends

Bring something when you visit, even if it's just cookies.
- ☐ true for me
- ☐ not true for me
- ☐ it depends

Don't sit down on a bus if an older person is standing.
- ☐ true for me
- ☐ not true for me
- ☐ it depends

When you leave a party, say goodbye to everyone, not only the host.
- ☐ true for me
- ☐ not true for me
- ☐ it depends

2 Write five unwritten rules for a visitor to your country or city. Start with the frames in the box.

FRAMES

Always ... | Never ... unless ... | If ..., ... | When you ..., ... | Don't be surprised if ...

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

3 Compare your rules in a group. Write one rule in each row.

FIND	THE RULE, AND WHOSE RULE IT IS
A rule that surprised me	
A rule we share	
A rule my group didn't agree on	

4 Which rule from another place would you like to bring home? Why?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY · A2-B1 to B2 · 25 min · groups

Etiquette Comparison

Two countries, one topic. Find what is the same, what is different, and say it without a stereotype.

1 Choose a topic and two countries that people in your group know well.

☐ Gifts ☐ Dinner at a friend's home ☐ Business meetings ☐ Greetings ☐ Birthdays ☐ Weddings

Topic: _____ Country 1: _____ Country 2: _____

2 Write three similarities in the middle and three differences on each side.

ONLY IN COUNTRY 1	IN BOTH	ONLY IN COUNTRY 2

A MODEL FOR GIFTS

In both countries, people bring a gift to a birthday. In one, you open it right away and thank the guest. In the other, you wait until the guests leave, so nobody compares presents.

3 Check every sentence before you present. Tick each box.

☐ I wrote "many people" or "often", not "all" or "always".

☐ I know this from my own life, or from a person who lives there.

☐ A person from that place would probably agree.

☐ I describe what people do, not what they are like.

4 Write your report in three sentences. Use the frames.

FRAMES

In both countries, people ... | In my country ..., whereas in ... | Unlike ..., people in ... usually ...