

GETTING INTERNATIONAL.- Culture and people. Cultural differences and stereotypes.

Situation

Read the text and listen to the recording.



Is it polite to shake hands in China, or to smoke in a business meeting in Australia? Let's take a minute to stop and think about cultural differences.

When working with people from different countries, you have to understand and respect cultural diversity: the differences between regions, countries and cultures. You have to learn the skills of proper **etiquette**, **manners**, and intercultural communication.

First of all, when people go into another cultural environment, some of the things that can be different for them are such things as the verbal communication style, that can be radically different. And we're not just talking about a different language but **literally** the way that we use verbal communication.



Secondly, the non-verbal communication, body language, the gestures and the things that we do as part of our communication. For example, when you **greet** someone, body contact is generally **taboo** in most Asian countries but in other parts of the world **hugging** and kissing is acceptable. Even within France, some people kiss on one **cheek** only, some on two cheeks, some on three cheeks.

Another good example of cultural difference is in the way different cultures view time. Do we see time as a linear process with a fixed series of events following each other, or is time something much looser, much more flexible? People have different attitudes to time and experience time in different ways. **Westerners** feel that **Easterners** are **rude** when they come 20 minutes to half an hour late to an **appointment**. But when an Easterner says "11:00" he or she means "between 11 and 12". In contrast Westerners divide time into strictly-measured hours, minutes and seconds, into which one carefully **arranges** one's plans, appointments, and activities so as to fit exactly and not cause **delays** to one's own or anyone else's plans. When persons with different assumptions come into contact there is great room for misunderstanding!

You have to be very careful with stereotypes. A national stereotype is a system of culture-specific beliefs connected with the nationality of a person. This system includes beliefs **concerning** those properties of human beings that may vary across nations, such as appearance, language, food, habits, **psychological traits**, attitudes, values etc. When we stereotype someone, we assume that they will behave in a certain way. Don't stereotype people from other nationalities. Keep an open mind and remember that we all are individuals.



Now it's your turn

Activity adapted from <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>

Decide if the following are true or false:

In Japan you can introduce yourself if you are attending a large meeting.

- True.
 False.

In the USA, a handshake is not a common greeting.

- True.
 False.

Business is viewed as being very serious, and Germans do not appreciate humour in a business context.

- True.
 False.

In Hong Kong it is common to accept a gift the first time it's offered.

- True.
 False.

If you do not speak French, it is very important that you apologize to French people for your lack of knowledge.

- True.
- False.



Materiales formativos de FP Online propiedad del Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.

[Aviso Legal](#)

1.- Experiences of people living abroad.

If you were an exchange student in a different country, which cultural differences do you think would affect you the most? Which would you enjoy and which would **bother** you?

What cultural differences would exchange students in your country have **trouble** with? Which cultural differences might they enjoy?

We are going to watch a video in which some exchange students talk about some of the **quirky** differences between their **homelands** and the United States.



Now it's your turn

Watch the following video. Can you match the speakers to the topics they mention?



[Text summary](#)

Matching exercise

Topic	Match	Speaker
There's a lot of school spirit in America.	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Student 1 (boy from Spain).
Stuff is big in America.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A lot of food has peanut butter in it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Student 2 (boy from Germany).
Americans don't kiss each other on the cheeks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Measurements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Student 3 (girl from New Zealand).
American high schools have organized sports teams and cheerleaders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Student 4 (boy from Norway).
Americans drive on the wrong side of the road.	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Student 2 again (boy from Germany).

Activity adapted from <http://www.esl-blog.com/archives/003859.html>

Submit

A step ahead

There are a lot of nuances to life in the US that you can only learn by living here. Nevertheless, this website will help you to find out about some of the more important cultural differences:

[Studying in the USA.](#)

2.- Adjusting to a new culture.

Quotation

"Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Do you remember this song?

"I'm an [alien](#), I'm a legal alien.

I'm an Englishman in New York..."

"Englishman in New York" is a song by Sting, from his 1987 album *...Nothing Like the Sun*. Sting was inspired to write this song by the [eccentric](#) British author and actor Quentin Crisp, who lived in New York for many years. Read the [lyrics](#) and then listen to the song and watch its video.



[Englishman in New York \(Lyrics\)](#).



[Text summary](#)

Why do you think the singer describes himself as a "legal alien"?


Think about it

Give your opinion in the forum:

- ✔ Tell us about the experiences (good and bad) of a person from your country living or working abroad.
- ✔ Tell us about the experiences (good and bad) of a person from abroad living in your country.

Appendix.- Licenses of resources.

Licenses of Resources used in Culture and people

Resource (1)	Resource information (1)	Resource (2)	Re
	<p>By: The Advocacy Project. License: CC by-nc-sa 2.0. From: http://www.flickr.com/photos/advocacy_project/3807942317/</p>		<p>By: bodhi@kr License: CC I From: http://www.flic</p>
	<p>By: Francisco Barranco. License: CC by-nc-sa 2.0. From: http://www.flickr.com/photos/paco_barranco/5396809044/</p>		

