



Focus: Understanding how culture affects communication, tone, and business expectations, and how to adapt fluently and respectfully

Cultural Awareness & Communication Styles



The English Hub

Welcome & Objectives

Today, you will:

- Recognise different communication styles across cultures
- Understand direct vs indirect language, silence, and body language
- Learn how to adapt tone, structure, and word choice
- Practise responding appropriately in multicultural settings

Discuss: Have you ever been misunderstood in English not because of what you said — but *how* you said it?

Vocabulary Builder – Communication Styles

Discuss the following vocabulary with your tutor:

Term	Meaning
Direct	Clear, to-the-point, open language
Indirect	Soft, polite, often avoids saying “no” directly
High-context	Relies on shared culture, less verbal communication
Low-context	Messages are explicit, detailed and clear
Face-saving	Protecting someone from embarrassment or shame

Discuss: Which style are you the most familiar with?

Introduction – What Affects Our Communication?

Various things can affect communication and things cause misunderstandings. Factors include:

- **Cultural norms** (formality, seniority, privacy)
- **Language structure** (e.g. no word for “please” in some languages)
- **Tone & rhythm**
- **Expectations around silence and interruption**

Discuss: Is it polite to interrupt in your culture? Or is silence okay?

Activity – Which Style Is It?

Label the following statements as **direct** or **indirect**:

- “No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”
- “That might be a little difficult, but let’s see.”
- “I disagree — here’s why.”
- “We’ll consider that option carefully.”

Discuss: Which of these statements would you use and why?

Grammar – Softeners in Indirect Language

Softeners help us express disagreement or suggestions gently.

Common softeners:

- “I was wondering if...”
- “It might be better to...”
- “Would it be possible to...”
- “I’m not sure, but maybe...”

Task: Rephrase the following sentences to soften their tone:

- “You’re wrong.”
- “Change this.”

Example answer:

- “I’m not sure that’s quite right...”

Comparison Table – Direct vs Indirect Cultures

Feature	Direct Cultures	Indirect Cultures
Saying “no”	Common and clear	Avoided, softened
Feedback style	Open and blunt	Diplomatic and subtle
Small talk	Minimal	Often required
Silence	Awkward	Comfortable / respectful

Discuss: Does your company lean more direct or indirect? Do you find that difficult?

Listening Activity – Two Approaches

Your tutor will read out two versions of the same feedback:

- Version A: “This is not good. Change it.”
- Version B: “Thanks for your work. A few things might need tweaking — can we look at them together?”

Discuss: Which sounds more effective in a global team? Why?

Cultural Context Activity – Email Styles

Imagine you receive this email at work:

- “This is urgent. Finish it today.”

Discuss:

- Does this sound polite or rude to you?
- How would you rephrase this in a globally respectful way?

Expression Builder – Diplomatic Feedback

Have a go at building polite responses using these fragments:

- “Thanks for raising that...”
- “Let’s revisit this section...”
- “That’s a fair point. Could we also consider...”
- “I’m not entirely sure about this part...”

Task: Build a mini-feedback sentence using 2 of the fragments above, with your tutor.

Pronunciation & Tone – Practising Nuance

Have a go at saying the following phrases with a calm, respectful tone:

- “That’s a good suggestion, let’s look into it...”
- “We might want to change that timeline slightly...”
- “It’s mostly great, just one or two details...”

Tip: Your tutor can model the tone first. Then, you can repeat and practice for fluency and intonation.

Cultural Quiz – What's Typical?

Guess whether the statement is **true or false** in common workplace etiquette:

1. In Japan, it's normal to interrupt someone to share your idea.
2. In Germany, honesty is more valued than diplomacy.
3. In the UK, disagreement is often softened.
4. In India, hierarchy may affect how feedback is given.

Have a short discussion about each statement with your tutor.

Answers on the next slide:

Answers:

1. In Japan, it's normal to interrupt someone to share your idea. – False
2. In Germany, honesty is more valued than diplomacy. – True
3. In the UK, disagreement is often softened. – True
4. In India, hierarchy may affect how feedback is given. - True



Scenario Activity – Respond Across Cultures

- Scenario:

Imagine you are at work and have a client meeting which requires completed tasks from your colleagues. However, your colleague misses the deadline.

How would you respond in a:

- Direct style?
- Indirect style?
- Your own natural style?

Your tutor will provide feedback on appropriateness and tone.

Body Language Awareness

Did you know?

- US: eye contact shows confidence
- Korea: too much eye contact may seem aggressive
- Middle East: left hand gestures can be impolite
- Italy: hand gestures are expressive and expected

Discuss: What's one body language habit from your country others should know about?

Idioms to Avoid in Global Teams

Idiom	Safer Alternative
“Let’s kill two birds with one stone”	“Let’s handle both tasks at once”
“Hit the nail on the head”	“You made a great point”
“Ballpark figure”	“Rough estimate”

Activity: Replace the idioms from above in your own example sentence

Roleplay – Clarifying Across Cultures

Scenario: Imagine you're in a work video call with your project team. Your colleague is presenting updates and says:

“We’ll need to circle back on this after we align with stakeholders.”

You're not familiar with the phrase “**circle back**” and you're worried you might miss an important action point.

Practise Responding:

Try using polite, professional phrases to clarify what they mean.

Activity – Small Talk Styles

In the UK and US, small talk is often a way to build connection. In Germany or Finland, it may seem unnecessary.

Task: Practise opening a business conversation with small talk in a polite but non-intrusive way.

Use the following starters to help:

“How was your journey?” / “Have you worked with this client before?” etc.

Communication Styles Summary

Four useful communication style spectrums to remember:

- Direct ↔ Indirect
- Formal ↔ Informal
- Expressive ↔ Reserved
- Individual ↔ Group-focused

Discuss:

Where do you think *you* fit on these spectrums?

What do you think is the hardest thing to adjust when working with others?”

Challenge Round – Choose Your Tone

Have a go at rephrasing this message:

- “We’re behind on the project. Fix it by Friday.”

Rephrase it in 3 tones:

- Direct
- Polite/formal
- Indirect (soft and respectful)

Your tutor will support and give you feedback.