

# **VOICES**

**Ohio State Residence Life Senior Staff Training 2018**

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**Dialoguing Where We Live: Learning from Many Voices  
Dialogue Workshop Prep Work Packet**

**SECTION VII:**  
**Cultural Communication Considerations**

## Cultural Communication Styles: Part A



The following statements describe different styles of communication that are often related to cultural customs. Choose the statement *in each pair* that you agree with most.

1. ☐ a. I am a “hugger”— I like to be physically close to people.  
☐ b. I feel uncomfortable when others invade “my space.”
2. ☐ a. I think young people should address their elders formally  
 (“Mr.” or “Mrs.”).  
☐ b. I think it’s OK for young people to call adults by their first name.
3. ☐ a. I want people to tell me what they think, and not “beat around  
 the bush.”  
☐ b. I feel uncomfortable when people are too direct with me.
4. ☐ a. I think that it’s important to be on time.  
☐ b. Being on time is not important to me.
5. ☐ a. I value individuality and independence.  
☐ b. Fitting into the group is important to me.
6. ☐ a. I take time to think about what I am going to say before I speak.  
☐ b. I just say whatever is on my mind.
7. ☐ a. I feel comfortable expressing my emotions.  
☐ b. I prefer to keep my emotions to myself.
8. ☐ a. It makes me uncomfortable when people yell at one another.  
☐ b. Raised voices don’t bother me.
9. ☐ a. I think disagreements can be productive.  
☐ b. I believe arguments lead to misunderstandings.

## Cultural Communication Styles: Part B



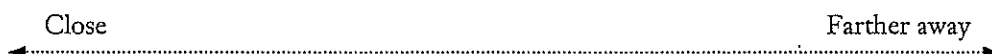
*Caution:* The communication styles described here are *generalizations* and do **not** hold true for all members of a cultural group. Understanding these basic cultural values can help us get along better with one another. But be careful not to *stereotype* individuals based on the descriptions below.

*Keep the following questions in mind as you do this exercise:*

- > How might cultural differences affect a small-group dialogue?
- > What will help my ability to facilitate a mixed group? What might be a barrier?
- > How are racial and cultural dynamics the same? How are they different?

NOTE: The numbers after each topic refer to the corresponding numbers in *Cultural Communication Styles: Part A*.

### Personal Space (1)



Some cultures value closeness; in others, people like to keep their distance. To learn how people in different cultures feel about personal space, watch the way people in the same cultural group greet one another. For example, Americans usually shake hands when they meet for the first time. In some other cultures, people may bow, or kiss one another on the cheek.

*What happens when people who have different “greeting styles” meet? What does this tell you about how people in different cultures think about “personal space”?*



## Cultural Communication Styles: Part B

(continued)

### Formality (2)



Social interactions may be formal or informal, depending on the culture. Some cultures are quite formal. For example, in some Asian cultures, it is impolite to call a person by name. Instead, you would say, “Oldest Aunt,” “Little Brother,” “Wise Doctor,” or “Honored Teacher.”

In contrast, American culture usually is quite informal. Children or employees often call people by their first names. But it isn’t the same for every generation or in every part of the country. For example, people who were born before 1950—or people who were raised in the South—often prefer formal terms of address (“Sir” and “Ma’am,” or “Mr.” and “Mrs.”).

Sometimes formality is built into a language. For example, in Spanish there are two levels of address, informal (“tú”) and formal (“ustedes”). Friends and family members use the informal vocabulary, and they use formal language with people they don’t know.

*What would happen in a typical American school if a student always said “Teacher,” instead of addressing the teacher by name? How would you feel if someone called you by your first name, the first time you met?*

### Directness (3)



Some cultures are more “direct” than others. Many Americans prefer directness. We like people to “get to the point,” or “tell it like it is.” We don’t like people to “beat around the bush.” We also think someone who doesn’t “look us right in the eye” is dishonest or rude.

Other cultures prefer the indirect approach. In some cultures, it would be considered very rude to confront someone about a problem. To “save face,” you would ask someone else to tell the other person about the problem. And in some Native American cultures, children are taught that it is rude and disrespectful to look a person directly in the eye.

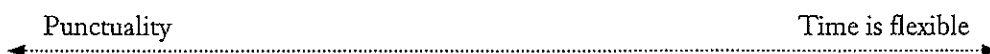
*What would happen if an employee didn’t look the boss in the eye? What might the boss think? Or, how would you feel if one of your co-workers told you that your boss was unhappy with you?*



## Cultural Communication Styles: Part B

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### Importance of Time (4)

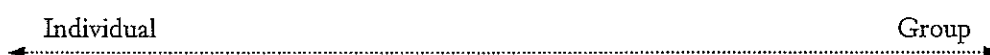


Cultural attitudes about time vary a lot. In some cultures, being on time is very important. People who are late are regarded as rude, lazy, or disorganized. Americans say, “time is money.” It’s more important “to make the most of your time” than to spend time building relationships.

In other cultures, the view of time is flexible. The meeting starts when everyone is present and ends when people are done talking. Taking time to build relationships between people may be more important than sticking to a timeline.

*How might a teacher react if parents are late for a 10-minute conference? When building relationships is very important to them, how would parents feel if they were allowed only 10 minutes to meet with a teacher?*

### Individual vs. Group (5)



Most Americans put the individual before the group. “I” comes before “we.” In our culture, we’re expected to “stand on our own.” It’s up to us whether we succeed or fail. At school and at work, we single out individuals and reward them. We teach our children to be independent, and many young people live on their own after they graduate from high school.

Some other cultures put a high value on *interdependence*. People in these cultures put teamwork first. They seldom give rewards for individual achievement. Sticking together and fitting in with the group is more important than individual success. Children usually live with their parents until they are married. And, often, the extended family lives together, or nearby. Children are taught that they bring shame on the whole family or community when they do something wrong.

*If a person in a company comes up with a great idea for a new product, who should get credit—the individual or the entire team?*

(continued)



Reserved/reflective

*What might a boss think about an employee who rarely speaks in meetings and always waits to be invited to join a project? What might people think when they see a diverse group of noisy, excited teenagers?*

Conflict is to be avoided

*What would people think if two of their co-workers started shouting at one another? What might you think about a person who talked about you behind your back instead of coming directly to you about a problem?*