



International Orientation Guide

A GUIDE TO:

- DEALING WITH CULTURE SHOCK
- AMERICAN CULTURE
- OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION FOR LIVING IN AMERICA

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CULTURE SHOCK

People usually experience a variety of emotions when adapting to a foreign culture. There are five fairly distinct phases to culture shock. Each phase is experienced for various amounts of time, depending on your general adaptability, amount of experience away from home and other individual factors.

1. **Initial excitement:** Everything is new, different, and exciting. This phase begins with your arrival in the new country and ends when the excitement is gone.
2. **Disorientation:** This happens in different ways, but it is the experience where you just can't seem to get a handle on what is going on. It may be the longest of the phases if this is your first experience abroad.
3. **Alienation:** This is a healthy and normal reaction. You feel annoyed with the cultural differences. You are frustrated about not being able to do things the way that you can at home.
4. **Resentment:** Now you are angry at the situation. You may be tempted to pack up and leave. This is the most intense part of the experience, but it is also the shortest part.
5. **Adaptation and Adjustment:** Your sense of "foreignness" decreases significantly and you may even begin to feel a part of the host culture. You accept your new culture and environment.

Culture shock may vary from a feeling of confusion and uncertainty to depression and illness. One basic cause of negative reactions to another culture is equating what is different with what is inferior. Sometimes you don't realize that the frustrations and emotions you are experiencing are effects of culture shock; later, this becomes apparent. It is almost always temporary, and it is important to work through it. The important thing is to expect discomfort, and know that you are not alone. Remember that the cultural differences are just that: differences. It's not a question of better or worse. It's not a question of whether you are un-spiritual or not, although how you deal with trials is a spiritual issue. Consider culture shock as an opportunity to trust the Lord more.

COPING WITH CULTURE SHOCK

1. Remember that culture shock is common. You are not the only one experiencing it. One idea is to focus on helping other people.
2. Ask questions when things seem strange or different or you don't understand something.
3. Make an effort to get to know other people, to participate in group activities, and to have fun.
4. Avoid the temptation to withdraw from social interaction or to only socialize with people from your own culture.
5. Maintain your daily routines.

6. Keep a positive attitude and a sense of humor.
7. Talk to a staff member about any difficulties adjusting.
8. Pray and trust the Lord to help you.

COPING WITH LANGUAGE SHOCK

1. **Make mistakes.** There is no way to learn a foreign language other than to make mistakes. If you wait until you can say things without a mistake, you'll never learn to speak fluently and will probably never learn to speak at all. Mistakes help us to learn.
2. **Don't take yourself and your mistakes too seriously.** Don't feel sorry for yourself or get overly embarrassed when you make a mistake. Everyone who has learned a language has experienced the same thing.
3. **Gratefully accept correction.** If a person corrects your language, remember that it is not because they do not like you or they think badly of you. They are trying to help. Encourage people to correct your mistakes, and be thankful when they do offer correction.
4. **Ask questions when you don't understand.** You will not learn a language by smiling and nodding your head when you don't understand. You need to ask questions.
5. **Have a method.** Children have a method of language: learning: endless repetition. They have a method of cultural investigation: "Why, mommy, why?" You also need to find out what helps you to learn the language and then focus on those techniques.
6. **Be motivated.** Language learning is HARD WORK. Learning a language requires a deep commitment to continue studying even when it is extremely difficult.
7. **Force yourself to speak English.** Although it is easier to be with people who speak your language, you must force yourself to interact with English speaking people. Also, you should try to speak English even when the other person knows your language.

AMERICAN CULTURE

The purpose of this section is to make you aware of general American culture so that you will be prepared for things that may be different from your own culture. As with any culture, individuals vary with regard to specific behavior.

TIME

Being on time.

If an American invites you to do something at 6:00, then they expect you to arrive at 6:00. If you cannot

arrive within 10 minutes of the time, then it is good to call the person and let him know that you will be late.

Schedules

If a person wants to meet with you, they will usually give you a specific time. People tend to call before visiting friends. It is not common to visit people without giving prior notice. People also plan sometimes a week or more in advance when they want to meet

Doing things quickly

Many Americans work, eat, and do just about anything quickly. They want to get as much done in a day as possible. This may make it hard for them to relax, to be spontaneous, or to enjoy a long conversation with someone.

Wasting time

For Americans, wasting time usually involves sleeping through the day, working slowly, or working inefficiently. Most people focus on getting things done and being busy. At the end of the day it is common to ask “What did you do today?” The person then responds by listing what they have accomplished.

COMMUNICATION

Say what you mean.

In some cultures, it's polite to refuse two or three times if someone offers something to you. But in the U.S., it is polite to answer, ‘Yes, please’ the first time someone offers you something that you want. If an American asks you, “Do you want a drink?” and you say, “No, thank you”, then the American will not offer you another drink.

If an American needs something, then they directly express their need. If they need help, then they specifically ask for help. If you do not ask for help, then the American will assume that you don't need any help.

However, there are ways to be direct and still be polite. For example, you would not directly say, “You're wrong.” Instead, you might say, “I'm not sure that you're right about that.”

State the main point quickly.

Americans are direct in how they speak. If they want to ask a question, they do not talk about something else for a long time before asking the question. They try to state the issue clearly and concisely.

Short, simple, and direct sentences

Most writing includes the minimum content necessary to make the point clear. Writing is linear and logical as it moves from point to point.

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Keep talking.

Most Americans feel uncomfortable with silence. For this reason, they often keep talking even about superficial subjects.

Volume

Because American culture encourages assertiveness. Americans tend to talk loudly. This does not mean that the person is angry. He is only trying to make sure that the other person hears and understands him well.

Basic Conversation

Typical questions to start a conversation:

- How are you?
- Where are you from?
- Where do you live?
- Do you work?
- What do you do? (your profession or work)
- What did you do today/ last week/ during your vacation?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- How is your family?

Questions that people do not ask:

- How much money do you make? (salary)
- How much did you pay for (something)?
- How old are you?
- How much do you weigh?

(If an American really wants to know something about a person, he will quietly ask someone else or he will listen carefully to see if that person reveals the information.)

INFORMAL LIFE

Americans are not formal in most situations. When you go to a person's home, they will often encourage you to make yourself at home. They will tell you to "help yourself" to what you want or need.

People lean against walls, slouch in their chair, put their feet up on chairs or desks, and use slang in most

situations. But there are also times when this is not acceptable such as at church, in the classroom, in front of a judge, in your boss' office, or at an interview.

Many people address older people and younger people with the same form of language.

However, to be more polite in a conversation, you should use "Mr., Mrs. or Miss" when speaking to someone who is older than you are or to someone in a position of authority. It is also polite to use "Yes/No, sir" and "Yes/No ma'am" when speaking to these people.

EMOTIONS

Americans generally feel free to express emotions. If they are happy, then they smile a lot. If something is funny, then they laugh loudly. If they are talking about something serious, then they have a serious expression.

Americans have a difficult time expressing sadness. They may appear sad, but will not cry loudly and for a long period in public. People normally cry in private.

If someone appears sad, the American will try to cheer the person. The American becomes frustrated if the person does not respond but remains sad.

RELATIONSHIPS

Privacy

Americans are often willing to talk about personal issues, but they usually will not ask personal questions. They do not want to invade the other person's privacy. When asked, "how are you?" the person responding can simply say "Fine" or he can go in depth about his personal life.

It is customary to knock and wait for an answer before entering a room or house. Even if the front door of a house is open, you should not enter until someone in the house has told you to enter.

Independence

Because of the American value of independence, Americans will not always be looking out for you, or making sure that you are getting acquainted with other people. They assume you are taking care of yourself.

Americans are slow to interact with new people in a group or with strangers. In order to make friends, it is important for you to take the initiative to meet people.

If an American tries to talk with you or invite you places and you do not respond, then they will assume that you want to be alone and they will not try again. If you repeatedly refuse invitations, even if you have

good reasons, Americans will likely believe that you do not want their company. They will probably not invite you again.

Physical Contact

Most people do not like to have a lot of physical contact with others, especially strangers. Normally, Americans stand an arm's length way (2-3 feet) and they feel uncomfortable if people stand closer. You may find people backing away from you during a conversation because they want more space between you and them. This is not because they do not like you.

If there is a row of chairs, an American will often leave at least one chair between himself and the other person.

If you need to go through a crowd and must touch people, then it is polite to say, "Excuse me" and wait for the person to move to the side before going forward. It is normally considered rude to push people in order to get where you want to go.

Men do not touch other men except for a handshake or pat on the back. Two men never hold hands with each other and very rarely hug.

Women may touch each other more, but most contact is brief. They do not hold hands, although they might give a short hug as a greeting.

Public physical contact between husbands and wives, such as holding hands or hugging, is considered acceptable.

Greetings

When people greet each other for the first time, they shake hands. They rarely hug the person until they have become well acquainted with him or her. Kisses on the cheek are only for family members.

People generally smile, and say 'hello', 'hi', or 'how are you doing?' to friends as well as strangers, especially in smaller towns. To Americans, this kind of greeting and behavior is considered very friendly; they feel they are being outgoing and welcoming. However, it does not mean a commitment to friendship.

Eye Contact

When greeting a person or speaking to them about something, people normally look at the eyes. If you look at the floor or at something else when someone is talking to you, then the person will think that you are not listening or that you are not interested in talking to him. However, Americans do not stare at the person. Instead, they look at the eyes, but glance away every few seconds.

Manners

It is customary to say, “thank you” whenever you receive something from another person. If someone thanks you, then you should respond with “you’re welcome”.

THE BATHROOM

The following are some things to notice: (these may already be customs in your country, but they aren’t customs in all countries).

- Toilet paper is thrown in the toilet (not in the garbage) after use.
- Facial tissue or handkerchiefs are used to blow one’s nose.
- The shower curtain should be placed inside the bottom edge when you are taking a shower.
- The person in the bathroom should always close and lock the door.
- Knock and wait for a response before entering a bathroom or any room when the door is closed.
- Wash your hands with soap and water when you finish.

HYGIENE

Americans are not used to smelling other people’s body odor. If you do not normally take the precautions below, be sensitive to how your friends react. Think about a change in your behavior while you are in the U.S.

Americans usually take a shower or bath *every day*. Water is readily available and bathing is convenient. If involved in heavy physical activity, they may take more than one shower daily. They, however, may not wash their hair daily if not needed.

Americans wash their clothes frequently: shirts, socks, and underwear (anything that gets sweaty) are normally washed after being worn only one day; other clothes such as pants and dresses are usually worn several days between washings.

Americans wear deodorant every day.

TIME SCHEDULES

Families

It is courtesy to make phone calls generally after 8:00am and before 9:00pm. You may also want to avoid the dinner hours (5:30pm - 7:00pm) to phone someone at his home.

Businesses

Most businesses and shops are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm, with many shops opened back to work. People often fix meals that require little time and preparation.

on Saturdays and Sundays. Very few shops are open after 9:00pm, except for supermarkets, drug stores, and convenience stores. Some banks are open on Saturday morning, but closed on Sundays, although you can use the automated teller machines (ATM) at any time to withdraw or deposit money. Mail is not picked up nor is it delivered on Sundays. Professional offices, such as doctor's offices, usually run by appointment schedules. It may be necessary to call several days in advance to ensure being able to see someone. Promptness is expected for business and professional appointments.

EATING

In the U.S. most foods are eaten with a fork and knife. Soups and other liquid foods are eaten with a spoon. Breads, snack foods, raw vegetables, and fried chicken can be eaten with your hands.

There may be foods you do not like in the beginning, but nearly all international students will become accustomed to 'American style' food. Be patient. Try to enjoy the experience of American food instead of always thinking about your country's food.

Time

Daily meals are not considered a major social event. People sometimes eat quickly so that they can get back to work. People often fix meals that require little time and preparation.

Typical times for meals:

- Breakfast: 7am to 8am
- Lunch: 12 noon to 1:30pm
- Dinner: 6pm to 7pm, but rarely after 8pm.

Spices

Most American food is not spicy and does not have a lot of seasoning. If you prefer spicy food, you can normally buy spices at the local Indian, Asian, and Hispanic stores and then add the spices to your meals. (Do not bring your own spices if you are invited to a person's home or out to a restaurant. This would be considered rude.)

Typical meals

- Breakfast: cereal with milk, coffee or tea, toast with butter or jam, and juice
- Lunch: sandwich, potato chips, fruit
- Dinner: meat, pasta or potato with butter, vegetable, bread and dessert

Invitations

If someone invites you to go out to eat, you should assume that you will pay for your part of the meal. It is considered rude to say 'yes' to the invitation and then not show up. When someone invites you to go somewhere, you should give him a direct answer as soon as possible. It is not polite to wait until the last minute to give an answer. It is okay to decline the invitation by saying. "Thank you for inviting me, but I can't come this time. Maybe another time."

Manners

At the table it is common to say, “please” when you ask for a food or condiments. It is customary to pass food around the table. Some families, however, serve a plate with food already on it. It is considered rude to reach in front of others to get food. If what you need is not in front of you, then you should ask the closest person to pass it to you. After someone passes the salt (or anything you asked for) it is common to say “thank you” or “thanks.”

When you are a guest it is okay to stop eating when you are full instead of finishing the food on your plate. You may also politely decline food or drink by saying, “No, thank you.”

It is generally considered rude to:

1. Burp at the table
2. Talk with food in your mouth
3. Chew food with your mouth open
4. Slurp drinks or soup (or do other things that make noise such as chewing ice)
5. Start eating before the others at your table have their food, unless the host has told you to start eating (this is at a restaurant or a home, not at school)
6. Drink from a bowl
7. Pick food from your teeth while you are at the table
8. Lick your fingers (you should use a napkin instead to remove food)
9. Put your elbows on the table

Tips

At a restaurant it is common to leave an additional amount of money in cash on the table for the waiter or waitress to show that the person did a good job. This is called a tip. Normally, people leave %15-%20 of the bill amount. This is only at restaurants where you sit down to order food (not fast food places such as McDonald’s, Wendy’s, etc.). People usually leave dollar bills for the tip, not coins.

Weight gain

It is not unusual for international students to gain weight while in the U.S. If you do gain a little weight you should not worry about it. However, if you find you begin to gain weight too fast and none of your clothes fit you may want to discuss this with a staff member.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION FOR LIVING IN AMERICA

DRIVING

If you buy a car, you are required by law to:

1. Obtain a driver’s license and liability insurance.
2. Have the car registered annually.

If you wish to get a driver's license in the U.S., you must first get a Social Security number. You must then go to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) where you will take a written test in order to get a permit. The permit allows you to practice driving with a licensed adult. There is a fee to take the test. Prior to taking the test you can get a "South Carolina Driver's Handbook" from the DMV for free. You cannot drive alone until you return to the DMV and take and pass a road test. (The road test involves you driving with an official who evaluates you.)

Normally, Americans can get a driver's permit at age 15 or 15 1/2 which allows them to drive with a licensed adult. Then at age 16, they can get a driver's license. Licenses must be renewed every 5 years or so, depending on the law of each state.

MONEY

Coins

¢ = cent

(These picture are roughly the actual size. The penny is a bronze color. All other coins below are a silver color.)

penny = 1 cent



nickel = 5 cents



dime = 10 cents



quarter = 25 cents



Paper bills

\$ = dollar



The slang term for a dollar bill is a 'buck' - so \$50 may be referred to as "fifty bucks".

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 dollar bill = 100 cents | 5 dollar bills = 500 cents | 10 dollar bills = 1000 cents | 20 dollar bills = 2000 cents |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|

Most banks and some major airports and hotels will exchange foreign paper currency for a service fee; very few, however, exchange foreign coinage.

As in most countries throughout the world, you should not carry a lot of cash on your person (no more than \$100), or send cash through the mail.

MEASUREMENTS AND CONVERSIONS

| U.S. Measurement | Metric Units | Conversion Factor* |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| inches | centimeters | 2.54 |
| pounds | kilograms | .4536 |
| feet | meters | .3048 |
| gallons | liters | 3.785 |
| miles | kilometers | 1.609 |
| Fahrenheit | Celsius | subtract 32 and multiply by 5/9 |

*multiply U.S. measurement by the conversion factor to get the equivalent metric units

SHOPPING

If you need certain items, someone will be glad to take you to the store. But you need to ask. Salespersons may ask to help you with a purchase. It is okay to say, “No, thank you”, or “I’m just looking”.

Bargaining

Prices are fixed. Shoppers *do not* bargain for a lower price, but pay the price that is labeled on the merchandise. The exception of this rule is at informal stores such as yard sales or flea markets.

Sales Tax

There are taxes on every item that you purchase. Be aware: the labeled price will be increased by that city or state’s percentage of sales tax.

Receipts

Keep sales receipts. In certain stores, if a purchase is defective you can return it if you still have the receipt. With the receipt you can potentially receive your money back or exchange it for another purchase.

Coupons

Newspapers and magazines may contain coupons, which are certificates stating that you may buy an item at a discounted price. For example, if a coupon reads “\$.50 off”, this means you can buy the product for 50 cents less than the listed price if you take the coupon to the store with you and buy the exact item. Many food stores “double the coupon” up to \$1.

A FEW U.S. HOLIDAYS AND CUSTOMS

January 1: New Year’s Day. Welcome the New Year with parties starting the night before (New Year’s Eve on December 31). On New Year’s Eve, people gather with friends or family, watch the ‘big apple’ fall in New York, and make resolutions for the coming year.

February 14: Valentine's Day. Celebrate love and romance by exchanging cards, candy, or gifts.

March 17: Saint Patrick's Day. Celebrate the patron saint of Ireland with parades and parties decorated in Irish green and shamrocks.

Easter: Celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Special church services. Easter egg hunts. Easter bunny brings basket of candy and gifts to children.

April 1: April Fool's Day. Play a clever (but harmless) trick or tell a joke to someone with a good sense of humor.

2nd Sunday in May: Mothers Day. Honor mothers with gifts and cards.

Last Monday of May: Memorial Day. Remember the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

3rd Sunday in June: Fathers Day. Honor fathers with gifts and cards.

July 4: Independence Day. View public displays of fireworks as Americans mark the date in 1776 when thirteen U.S. states declared their independence from England. Display American flags.

1st Monday in September: Labor Day. Honor the contributions and efforts of hard workers throughout the country. Popular day to go to the beach or mountains.

4th Thursday in November: Thanksgiving Day. Feast on a traditional meal that commemorates the dinner of Pilgrims (first settlers of the American colonies) and the Native Americans. Traditional meal includes turkey or ham, dressing, sweet potato casserole, pecan or pumpkin pie, cranberry sauce.

December 25: Christmas Day. Celebrate the birth of Christ. Special church services are held on December 24. People exchange gifts with family and friends on December 25. Families enjoy a traditional meal similar to the one prepared for Thanksgiving Day and decorate a Christmas tree.

Birthdays. Birthdays are important in the U.S. and are normally celebrated each year. On your birthday, friends and family give cards and gifts. They may also give you a party or prepare a special meal for you. It is traditional to have cake, ice cream, and balloons at a birthday party. Special birthdays are at ages 16, 21, 50, and 80.

Anniversaries. Couples celebrate the number of years they have been married on the anniversary of their wedding day. For a couple's 25th anniversary and/or 50th anniversary, their children may give them a party.