
International Student Orientation
MBA & MSA
American English and Culture
August 8, 2013



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Mendoza College of Business

Welcome



Agenda

- Basic Communication
- Non-Verbal Communication
- Cultural Dynamics – Classrooms
- English Support Program
- Effective Meetings
- Teamwork
- Email Etiquette
- Authenticity of Work
- Hygiene Across Cultures

Basic Communication



“England and America are two countries divided by a common language.”

Attributed to George Bernard Shaw

American English vs. British English



Same language, but:

- Different words for the same thing
 - lorry/truck, underground/subway, rubber/eraser
- Different spellings for the same word
 - Programme/program, organisation/organization
- Different verbs for the same action
- Fahrenheit not Celsius
- Imperial not Metric

If you grew up in the Commonwealth – make sure you adjust your language/spell checker settings on your computer to U.S. English

Basic Communication



Cut to the Chase!

- No matter how banal it may sound, for Americans time is still money. So be aware of their time urgency and – if in doubt – spare them the details. This is true during presentations where some cultures go with a flood of data, as well as in negotiations where Americans prefer reaching a deal quickly. If Americans feel that you are wasting their precious time you will lose their interest immediately. Clearly justify why they need to listen to you. Get to the point.

Basic Communication



Familiarize yourself with (sports) jargon

- Americans love idiomatic language and use it in colloquial and in business situations. “Cutting to the chase” may be as unintuitive to non-native speakers as phrases borrowed from sports which aren’t very popular outside of the U.S. (like baseball). While many foreigners are familiar with terms like “home run” or “slam dunk”, few know how to interpret the meanings of “to punt”, “a Hail Mary”, “stepping up to the plate”, or “rain check” (to list just a few examples).
- So in order to perform under par in the American workplace foreigners need to play hardball and buckle down on improving their language skills.

Basic Communication



Be prepared for informality

- Like it or not, most Americans tend to be fairly informal. Depending on the industry you are dealing with, many foreigners will find that, compared to their home cultures, people in the U.S. have a desire to reach a low level of formality quickly. This can be reflected in their choice of clothes (khakis & button-down "business casual" vs. suit & tie), the type of language they use, and the posture they display.
- If you come from a formal culture you will find that in business situations Americans appear to be very relaxed and comfortable. You shouldn't mistake that for disrespect or for a lack of seriousness.
- You also shouldn't assume that just because you're calling each other by your first names in the U.S. you have bypassed the process of building rapport.
- Americans may give trust easily, they also revoke it just as quickly.

Basic Communication



Know about the unique qualities of American English

- American English is full of downgrading vocabulary like “would”, “could”, “perhaps” which makes messages less direct by some foreign standards. Germans, in contrast, are *upgraders*. The German language favors the use of reinforcing and emphasizing verbiage like “absolutely” or “definitely.” Since German culture ranks high on the [uncertainty avoidance scale](#) the German communication style tries to eliminate ambiguity. Americans, on the other hand, are in general more [uncertainty tolerant](#) and value a less direct approach.

Basic Communication



Try not to be offended by interruptions

- Since the American workplace and U.S. society are structured only very loosely around hierarchical principles, seniority, specialization or social status rarely regulate who can contribute to the conversation, or when.
- In an egalitarian culture the playing field of communication is even and everyone has the same right to join the conversation – regardless of rank or age. Sometimes this can be experienced in Americans contributing to the conversation in an open-forum-type modus. By American standards these interruptions aren't always rude. They are a sign of engagement and interest.

Basic Communication



Present inductively, not deductively

- Putting conclusions at the end of presentations drives American audiences nuts. Resist your desire to give presentations in a deductive style, meaning to present every aspect of your topic in a logical or chronological, step-by-step order which, at the end of your talk, will have shed light on the subject matter from every possible angle and will leave your audience with all the background information you think they need.
- Keep in mind that Americans want to be engaged, sometimes even entertained. A little humor goes a long way. So does being selective of the information you share. You'll get the best response if you leave your American listeners wanting more. Give them a reason to stay engaged with you and leave time for Q & A at the end of your presentation.

Basic Communication



- Generations of U.S. students have learned the principle of the 5-sentence paragraph: In the 1st sentence they introduce their thesis. In sentences 2 through 4 they present supporting evidence. The 5th sentence sums up the evidence and the thesis.
- “Tell them what you’re going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them.” – If you think that’s redundant or repetitive you’re probably not American.

Basic Communication



Brevity and Conciseness will earn you respect

- It is easy to accuse Americans of having a short attention span or – stereotype alert! – of being superficial. The truth, however, is that... well, Cut to the Chase! If you lack the ability to boil down your line of argument to concise bits you'll easily bore Americans. In return, foreigners who sense this boredom tend to feel patronized by Americans who don't seem to appreciate their love for detail and comprehensiveness.
- The U.S. is a young country with a young, blended culture. Don't underestimate the speed at which business is conducted here. Most Americans feel that they have a lot to do, and that their families/employers/companies/society as a whole is demanding much of them. There is no time to be wasted. By cultivating your skill to reduce your message to its essence you will become more successful in communicating with Americans.

Basic Communication



Remember: Silence is not golden

- The United States is often described as a loud culture. Something is always on: the TV, radio, computer, stereo system, tablet, phone... Sounds are everywhere and this wall of sound creates the illusion of being present, of not being alone, of partaking in the hustle and bustle of life.
- Silence, by contrast, is somewhat disturbing to many Americans. Whenever there is a silent pause during a conversation Americans may feel awkward and uneasy. This gives you two choices: Use silence as a tool to gain leverage in communicating with Americans, or avoid silence to accommodate them.

Non-Verbal Communication



Gestures and Touch

- Pointing with fingers or using a finger to say “come here” are not offensive in the U.S.; however, tread carefully with this
- Patting a child on the head is ok in the U.S.
- Using your left hand to pass things or touch another person is ok in the U.S.
- Handshakes are the common expected greeting
- Appropriate touching between genders is ok

Non-Verbal Communication



Eye-Contact

- In Western culture, eye contact is interpreted as attentiveness and honesty, we are taught to “look people in the eye when talking.”
- Women can look men in the eye, it is not a sign of sexual interest

Head Movement

- Nods vs. Wobbles

Cultural Dynamics - Classroom

- In U.S. classrooms, the professor's role is not only that of the expert, but also that of a coach, facilitator and discussion leader.
- Students are generally expected to ask questions, indicate areas of confusion, and ask for examples to support their understanding. In some cases, students are encouraged to debate their peers, challenge their professors' ideas, etc.

Cultural Dynamics - Classroom



- Traditionally, there has been a stronger emphasis in U.S. education on individual performance than on group work. Generally speaking, competitiveness, assertiveness, and outspokenness are encouraged in U.S. classrooms.
- U.S. classrooms are often informal: students do not rise when the professor enters the room; students are often encouraged to address the professor by first name; students sometimes bring drinks or food to class, etc.

Cultural Dynamics - Classroom



- While there are some general norms for classroom behavior across the U.S. (for example, students usually know to come in to the classroom and take a seat), classroom cultures are highly variable, depending on the teaching style of individual faculty members. Some instructors insist on a high degree of formality; others are very casual. Thus, U.S. students do not expect uniformity across classrooms, and learn to adapt to different instructional styles.
- Student Services can advise you on faculty members with a very specific instructional style.

English Support Program



Center for the Study of Languages and Culture

- The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program provides a variety of language support and enhancement resources to help international graduate students succeed.

Workshops

- Weekly, on a range of topics, including: advanced English grammar, reading and listening strategies, pronunciation techniques, etc. Each session provides participants with opportunities for individual or small group feedback as well as follow-up sessions.

<http://cslc.nd.edu/programs/eap/>

English Support Program



Coursework

- FALL SEMESTER: Pronunciation Strategies and Techniques for English Language Learners
- AL 73003 - Section 01: Pronounc Strats & Techs for ELL (CRN 17165) (3 credits)
Tues. & Thurs. 5:00 - 6:15pm

Tutoring and Consultations

- If you need individualized assistance with a paper, presentation or English language form (grammar, pronunciation, etc), you can make an appointment to meet with an EAP Fellow. While your EAP Fellow is available to help you, please note that they are not permitted to do any work for you.

Effective Meetings



- Graduate Business Programs involve a lot of meetings
- Poorly run meetings will increase your stress/anxiety levels and waste your time!
- Running an effective meeting is more than sending out a notice that your team is to meet at a particular time and place.
- Effective meetings need structure and order. Without these elements they can go on forever and not accomplish a thing.

Effective Meetings



- With a solid objective in mind, a tight agenda, and a commitment to involving the meeting participants in the planning, preparation, and execution of the meeting, you are well on your way to chairing great meetings.
- Effective meetings start on time.
- Given the frustration most people feel when their time is wasted, gaining a reputation for running efficient and successful meetings is good for you and your career.
- Note that there is a fine line between healthy debate and unresolvable conflict.

Effective Meetings



When you are in the meeting:

- If certain people are dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others for their ideas.
- At the end of each agenda item, quickly summarize what was said, and ask people to confirm that that's a fair summary. Then make notes regarding follow-up.
- Note items that require further discussion.
- Watch body language and make adjustments as necessary. Maybe you need a break, or you need to stop someone from speaking too much.
- Ensure the meeting stays on topic.
- List all tasks that are generated at the meeting. Make a note of who is assigned to do what, and by when.
- At the close of the meeting, quickly summarize next steps and inform everyone that you will be sending out a meeting summary.

Teamwork



- Collaboration is an important part of American culture
- You'll be expected to work in teams in business school and professionally
- Your class has an average of 60 months of work experience! Meaning? You can learn a tremendous amount from each other.
- Rely on your faculty member to define acceptable forms of collaboration

Electronic Etiquette



- Emails, Texts etc... should be **carefully** considered before being sent
- You don't want to be seen as a serial emailer/texter, i.e. "says a lot, and doesn't say anything"
- Never come across as desperate in an email – if it's that serious – use the phone!

Authenticity of Work



- The concepts of intellectual property and plagiarism are taken very seriously in the U.S. and especially at Universities
- Citing sources, quotes and paraphrasing are required
- Cheating and plagiarism are considered Honor Code violations
- Sanctions for cheating and plagiarism are harsh – failure, expulsion, etc... can be consequences

Authenticity of Work



- “Borrowing” an author’s idea or buying a paper from the internet
- Glancing at a classmate’s answer sheet
- Helping a friend with homework
- Helping a friend with a take-home exam
- “Turning in” a classmate who cheats
- Copying a friend’s correct answer

- What if you have trouble putting it into your own words?

Authenticity of Work



- Your professors are here to help you learn
- You can go to them for help with class, some have specific office hours when you can go see them
- You are not obligated to help your classmates, especially if it creates ethical quandaries
- ISSA, Mendoza Student Services and Graduate Career Services can help you with many other questions that arise outside of class
- See Honor Code if you have any doubt

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Do all modern societies have the same grooming and personal hygiene practices?
- Most people do recognize the need for hygiene
 - Basis for cleanliness and good health
- People in different cultures take care of themselves in different ways

“Take a bath once a week, whether you need one or not” – *Old American Proverb*

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Americans put great value on both grooming and personal hygiene.
- For some people, taking care of themselves has become almost a religion. "Cleanliness is next to godliness."
- Whether or not being clean and well-groomed brings one closer to God, it certainly brings one closer to others.

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Most Americans take a shower once a day, usually in the morning, to start the day fresh
- Most Americans wash and style their own hair
- Haircuts, coloring etc... usually happen in a barber shop or beauty salon
 - Ask us for local recommendations!
- An additional shower after working out is common

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Americans are known for having very sensitive noses
- B.O. (body odor) is socially unacceptable
- Americans consider the use of deodorant or anti-perspirant a must
- Too much cologne or perfume is also not desirable

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Another cultural no-no in the U.S. is bad breath
- Americans don't like to smell what other people ate for lunch-especially onions or garlic.
- Solution?
 - Mouthwash, breath mints and even brushing their teeth after meals.

Hygiene Across Cultures



- Most American men spend some time each day shaving or grooming their facial hair.
- Most American men who wear facial hair try to keep it nicely trimmed.
- American women, generally prefer not to be hairy at all. Many of them regularly shave their legs and underarms.

Sharing your culture



- Remember to share your culture and traditions with your classmates while you are here!
- Cathy Mae Favorito: Chief International Officer
cfavorit@nd.edu
- Yao Xie: President of Asian MBA Club yxie2@nd.edu
- Margot Romer: President of Hispanic MBA
mromer@nd.edu
- Emmanuel Malizu: President of Black MBA
omalizu@nd.edu
- Multiple clubs through Student Activities Office
sao.nd.edu/groups

Finally...



Be sure to enjoy your time at Notre Dame!

- American Sports
- American Holidays and Traditions
- Clubs, Hobbies, TV, Movies, Music