

Working with Multicultural Patrons

(VAPAC 2.5hr)

Developed and presented by
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Commonly raised issues

- The 'yes' syndrome: *Have I been understood?*
- The 'life story' syndrome: *Get to the point!*
- The rude/polite gap: From 'Sir' to 'So?'
- The rule benders: *But my friend said that...*

All of these issues relate to differences in language use and culture.

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Outline of Workshop

PART I

- Pair Activity: Dos and Don'ts
- Understanding culture and cultural differences
- Cultural differences in communication style

PART II

- Group discussion activity
- Australian cultural values
- General tips: Handling clashing cultural rules
- Using clear English
- Summary and close

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Pair Activity: Dos and Don'ts

- Find a partner, preferably someone you don't know very well.
- Decide who will be the interviewer, and who will be the interviewee.
- Interviewers will receive an A4 sheet with a list of questions and space to take notes.
- Interviewees will receive the **secret A5 sheet**, which only they may read.

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Debrief of pair activity

This activity is a blind roleplay where:

- The interviewer is an English-speaking Australian
- The interviewee is someone from another culture

I would now like to hear from some interviewers.

- How did your interviewee behave? Did you notice anything unexpected?
- If so, how did this affect the interview? How did you feel? Did you adapt your behaviour?

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Red secret sheet

Norms: Shared ideas of 'normal' people use to interpret behaviour. Linked to comedy, taboos, stereotypes.

Personal space and physical contact

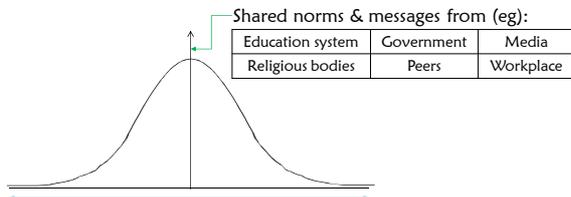
- Indicate intimacy, status between people
- Norms shaped by population density, geography, religion, history, etc.

Cultural differences: Examples

- Personal bubble: Arm's length vs breathing distance
- Sexual mores: Liberal vs conservative
- Physical contact: Active vs passive, what the society considers 'intimate' (type of contact, body parts)

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Culture and individual differences



How individuals respond to these shared messages, shaped by (eg):

Age	Personality	Place of residence
Sex	Education level	Personal experiences
Ethnicity	Socio-economic status	Exposure to other cultures

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Blue & yellow secret sheets

- Dos & Don'ts and concentration

Australian eye contact norms

- 'Just right' (80%), what too much/too little means
- Linked to attention, personality, honesty.
- Used to manage conversation, assess engagement, understanding, emotional response.

Cultural differences: Examples

- Link to relative status common (lower eyes to show deference)
- Can also link to group membership, repentance.

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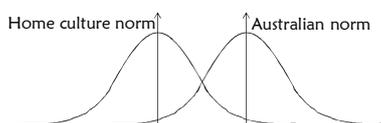
Successful ad



Unsuccessful ad



Entering an unfamiliar culture



Typical stages of adapting to a new culture:

1. Taking it for granted that home rules are universal.
2. The 'Dos & Don'ts' phase. Observing isolated rule clashes, trying to resolve them on a superficial level
3. Accepting that a different rulebook applies (and, ideally, starting to piece together and apply it)

Culture shock is 'rulebook failure stress'!

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Green secret sheet

Australian turn-taking norms

- Response expected in 2-3sec; more than that means rephrase, shift topic/speaker, etc.
- One speaker at once. New speaker reads cues and volunteers contribution when time is right.

Sources of communication challenges

- Internal translation
- The interruptible info dump
- Throwing to the floor

Common communication styles

1. Valuing spontaneity, assertiveness, quickness
2. Modesty, patience, reflection, invitation-only
3. Passion, conviction, loquaciousness; others

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Tips: Easing cultural transitions

- Most intercultural challenges stem from people having differing rules and norms.
- Be conscious of your own cultural guidebook. Beware “common” sense and assumed knowledge
- Minimise language stress. Be clear and accessible, allow translation time, avoid subtext.

Australian rules and expectations may be need to be explicitly explained. If you need to do this:

- Use their current behaviour as benchmark, or show them (avoid measurements, %, adjectives)
- Compare norms. What do they expect?

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Group discussion activity

- Form groups of about 4-6 people
- As a group, discuss the three questions on the next slide, making notes on the paper provided.
- You have about five minutes.

Discussion activity questions

1. Read the scenario on the pink A5 sheet.
 - How do you feel about your manager, and why?
 - What might you do in this situation?
2. How should a 17yo decide what career to pursue?
3. You have a 12:30pm appointment. When should you arrive if it's: (a) a job interview, (b) a barbecue at a friend's house?
4. You live in a block of flats. Outside in the bins area, your neighbor's bin fell over and spilled rubbish everywhere. It's still there two days later.
 - What might you do, and why?

Australian cultural values (1)

1. You are the personal assistant to the manager of a small organisation. A new manager takes over.

You arrive at work to find all your things shifted into a smaller office, with a note on the desk telling you to vacuum, wash the dishes and bring in tea and coffee for her and her client at 10am.

You have not met the new manager yet, and were not consulted about this.

- How do you feel about your new manager, and why?
- What might you do in this situation?

Common rule clashes (1)

Equality vs Seniority

- Consultative vs authoritative leadership
- Respect: Earned or assigned with role?
- Where ultimate authority rests: rules or boss?

What you may see:

- Conduct based on your perceived rank
- ‘Pulling rank’: demanding special treatment, wanting to speak to someone ‘higher up’
- Hagglng over rules, prices, deadlines, etc.

Australian cultural values (2)

2. What would be a good way for a 17yo to decide which career to pursue?

Common rule clashes (2)

Independence vs Interdependence

- Take personal responsibility vs Defer to leader
- Decision-making: Self-driven vs top-down
- Highest values: Integrity vs Team first

What you may see:

- People prioritising image, group expectations, social risk over rules, practical concerns
- People used to top-down decision-making, not researching & making decisions themselves.

Australian cultural values (3)

3. You have an appointment at 12:30pm. What time should you arrive if it's:
(i) a job interview?
(ii) an afternoon barbecue at a friend's house?
4. You live in a block of flats. Outside in the bins area, your neighbor's bin fell over and spilled rubbish everywhere. It's still there two days later. What might you do, and why?

Common rule clashes (3)

Perceptions of time and space

Different ideas about how:

- Punctuality, deadlines, etc. work
- Time is compartmentalised (personal time, work time, etc.)
- Space is allocated: individual portions, shared public space vs family/sacred space, outside space

General tips: Handling clashes

Most intercultural challenges stem from people having differing rules and norms. What to do?

Mitigate: Address immediate situation

Educate: Help both sides recognise and understand the rule clash causing the problem

Adjudicate: An authority figure can:

- Decide whose rule will be upheld, *OR*
- Forge a workable compromise between the rules

Legislate: Make official changes, e.g.

- Modify rules and policies
- Organise support and/or training

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Accessible language 1: Politeness

Situation 1



Situation 2



Politeness in English

In English, politeness tends to be about implying personal choice and acknowledging imposition.

- Polite words (e.g. please, thank you, sir/madam)
- Providing an explanation
- High, flowing intonation
- Grammar (question form, indirectness, conditional tense, convoluted phrasing)
"I was wondering if you could possibly..."

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Accessible language 2: Register

Situation 1



Situation 2



Accessible language 2: Register

Casual

Informal, slang, abbreviations, irony, idioms, contractions, euphemisms, profanity.

Formal

Passive voice, complex tenses obscure and/or technical vocabulary, convoluted phrasing.

Classroom

Straightforward grammar, literal, short sentences, no subtext

If you drink,
then drive,
you're a bloody idiot.

TAC

**Motorists are
advised to
refrain from
alcohol
consumption
prior to
operating their
vehicles**

**Please
don't drink
alcohol
then drive.**

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Politeness across cultures

Causes of rudeness across cultures

- Not understanding Australian etiquette rules
- Language: Using simple, direct grammar
- Equality vs Seniority issues

What you can do

- Be understanding, try not to take rudeness personally.
- Be ready to simplify elaborate 'polite' language and use simple, direct language.

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Making your English accessible

- Be literal. Minimise idioms, abbreviations, jargon, euphemisms, slang, etc.
- Shorten your sentences, simplify your grammar, use straightforward, everyday words.
- Show as well as tell. Use maps, pictures, graphs, diagrams, demonstrations. Give examples.
- Beware the 'interruptible info dump' and fear of silence! Break info into pieces, leave regular pauses.
- Avoid yes/no questions. Ask simple open questions to check understanding. Try multiple choice.
- Different languages organise information differently. Don't assume the point will come first.

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Summary

When giving service to customers who don't share your cultural background, it helps to:

- Be aware of your own cultural guidebook. Beware 'common sense' and things people 'just know'
- Remember Australian rules and expectations may be unfamiliar and need to be explicitly explained.
- Be respectful of other people's rules, even when they clash with your own.
- Minimise language stress. Make your English as clear and accessible as possible.