

A Random Collection of Tips and Suggestions to Help Foster Interaction with International Students

1. If the person appears not to understand you, speaking LOUDER will not help. They can probably hear you just fine; they just don't know what you are saying. Try rephrasing using different, simpler, or fewer words. Here is a chance to explore your vocabulary!
2. Don't assume that a smile and a nod always denote understanding---it may just mean that the person is politely acknowledging that you have their attention. Similarly, the person may be embarrassed to admit that s/he does not understand, or may feel that it would embarrass you if it was perceived that you were not adequately explaining something to them in an understandable manner.
3. Avoid the use of slang, colloquialisms, idioms, inferences, acronyms, and abbreviations. This is easier said than done because these words and phrases are so ingrained in our daily speech that you may not even be cognizant that you are using them.
4. Ask confirming questions that require a summary response of what you have said to be certain understanding has occurred --- avoid questions that can be answered simply "yes" or "no".
5. Likewise, ask questions in the affirmative rather than in the negative. In some languages a negative question is answered in the affirmative to indicate agreement with the negative statement rather than answering in the negative to show disagreement as in English. For example, instead of asking "don't/didn't you...?" say "do/did you...?"
6. Explore the possibility that you both share a common third language that you can use to communicate.
7. If possible, find someone else who speaks the person's native language to help interpret for you.
8. Try using a pen and paper if the verbal approach isn't working. Write down important points. Sometimes reading comprehension is better than listening comprehension. In this way the person will also have the written information to refer back to later, or they might be able to ask a friend who is more fluent to translate or explain.
9. Consider drawing pictures, diagrams or maps which may be more easily understood than words if language comprehension is limited. Conversely, you can invite the person to respond back in like manner.
10. On-line or mobile translation apps can be helpful, but use with caution, as they may not always be accurate or convey the meaning that you are intending.
11. Lack of eye contact does not necessarily mean insincerity or lack of respect. On the contrary, in many cultures it is considered a sign of disrespect to look at someone when speaking to them, especially when talking to an authority figure.
12. Be sensitive to differing cultural perceptions of gender roles---for example, in some cultures, even verbal interaction between an unrelated male and female may be unacceptable, if not forbidden.
13. Be cautious about touching. Americans are generally "touchy" people, especially among friends. However, touching, especially between genders, may be taboo in some cultures. On the other hand, the seemingly uninhibited "hugs and kisses" greetings of other cultures may make an American feel uncomfortable.
14. The concept of personal space varies among cultures. Americans tend to keep a "bubble" of about 18 inches or more when interacting with others. Be mindful that in some cultures individuals may come very close having bodily contact when engaged in conversation.

15. Be sensitive to accommodating cultural nuances, within reason. For example, if you go to a room and notice that everyone else in the room has removed their shoes before entering, you might offer to remove yours as well.
16. Understand that the American ideal of individualism is not shared by everyone. A collective loyalty may instead be the norm in certain cultures.
17. There is no global standard for the concept of time and punctuality. An established meeting time in some cultures may simply be taken as a suggestion to start thinking about when to go. Be clear when setting up a meeting time that it is understood that the agreed upon time is the actual time that the activity begins.
18. Business before pleasure, or pleasure before business? Americans tend to want to “get to the point”. In many cultures, one would never consider discussing business with someone with whom s/he had not first made a personal connection.
19. Expect that what may seem like routine behavior to you may be done entirely different by someone from another culture --- that doesn't necessarily mean they are doing something wrong--- it is just different from what you may be used to. They probably think that what you are doing seems odd to them as well.
20. If you are curious about a behavior you don't understand, then ask, but do be respectful in the way that you ask. Most people are more than willing, and often even eager, to discuss their culture. Likewise, be open to discussing nuances of your culture with them.
21. Don't generalize about people from the same country or culture. Remember that each person is a unique individual.

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