

Company culture in the United Kingdom

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL
Upper-intermediate

NUMBER
EN_BE_3906X

LANGUAGE
English

lingoda





Goals

- Can discuss business culture in the UK and how to make appropriate small talk there.
- Can express tactful criticism and regret in a business context.

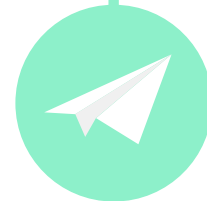




Communicating with people from Britain can be **very different** from speaking with people from other English-speaking countries.

Brits have a unique **sense of humour** and can seem very **polite and indirect**.

It is important to understand this, so you don't end up with **egg on your face!**





The United Kingdom

What do you already know about the United Kingdom?





The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is made up of four separate countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Have you ever visited any of these countries before? Where would you most like to visit in the UK, and why?



England



Scotland



Wales



Northern Ireland



UK fact file 1

The United Kingdom is located in the west of Europe. It is a sovereign country made up of the larger island of Great Britain, the northern part of the island of Ireland and a vast number of other smaller islands. The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and the current ruling monarch is King Charles III, though the country is governed by a parliament which is democratically elected.

The capital of the United Kingdom is London. London is also often thought of as the world's financial capital and for this reason the UK plays an important role in international business. There are many famous corporations based in the UK which you may have already heard of.



UK fact file 2

The UK's economy depends on foreign trade and the government is generally supportive of free and unrestricted international trade. At the time of writing, the UK's main trading partner is the EU, however in a 2016 referendum, the country voted to leave the EU and it is as yet unclear how this will affect the UK's trading agreements.





UK fact file 3



When doing business in the UK, it is advisable to be aware of some particular customs and formalities, as well as having a general understanding of British culture. It's particularly important to be aware of how significant politeness is in British culture, on the whole, where possible conflict is generally avoided in interactions. It's also useful to try to gain an understanding of the British sense of humour, which is often self-deprecating, dry, and also makes frequent use of sarcasm.



Apologising in British culture



- British people often **apologise** even when they have **done nothing wrong**.
- It is considered **polite** and very **normal** to **say sorry** a lot!
- You might say sorry if **someone else** walked into you in the street, for example.



I'm sorry! I was in your way.



Apologising – *excuse me*

- British speech is very polite. ***Excuse me*** is frequently used in British English.
- You can say ***excuse me*** when, for example, you **bump into someone by mistake**, or when you **need to leave** a meeting to take a phone call.
- You can use ***excuse me*** to **disagree** with something that has just been said or before **asking for clarification**.



You will have to **excuse me**. I need to get to another meeting.

Excuse me, but I don't quite understand your point. Could you please explain why this will help our customers again?





Apologising – more useful phrases

- Here are some more examples.



I'm afraid she's not available to meet this afternoon. Would it be possible to meet tomorrow morning instead?

I **beg your pardon**, could you repeat that please?



Pardon me, but can you remind me of your name please?



British humour



- The British sense of humour is **dry** and **witty**. It is important to be able to **laugh at yourself**.
- British people do not like **arrogance**. They prefer to tell stories about themselves when they have made **silly mistakes** or done something **badly**.



I couldn't find my keys this morning. **I'd lose my head if it wasn't screwed on!**



British humour – examples

- Here are some examples of humour you might hear in Britain.
- British humour often includes examples of **word play**, with **puns** being especially popular. Don't take things people say **too seriously**.
- **Never joke** about **serious** topics, like **politics** and **religion**. It is always better to **laugh at yourself** than **other people**.



You're an Arsenal fan?! Right, that's it – we can't work together.

I'm so glad that bus splashed me. I look like a drowned rat.





Funny or not?

Look at the topics on the cards below. Which topics would and wouldn't be appropriate to joke about in the UK? Why or why not? How does this compare to the humour in your country?





Indirect communication in British culture



- Brits are far **less direct** than Americans. They add lots of little phrases to sound less blunt and more polite when they speak.
- It is also common to make **small talk**. Discussing the **weather** is very popular.

What do you think the second question below means?



Would you mind telling David that I am going out for lunch?
Nice weather for ducks, isn't it?



Indirect communication in British culture

- Here are some more phrases that Brits use to sound **less direct**.



I was wondering if you could send that email before the end of the day.

Would it be possible for us to take a break for five minutes?



Let's discuss that tomorrow, **if it's not too much to ask**.



Constructive criticism



- When giving **constructive criticism** it's a good idea to open with a **compliment**, or by saying **something positive** before criticising someone.
- Being too direct could be viewed as rude or impolite in British culture.



I love how **ambitious** your ideas are, and your **enthusiasm** is admirable but I think we have to make sure we stay **realistic**. We are working with a **very limited** budget, and quite tight **time restrictions**.



Practise talking like a true Brit

Look at the cards below. Can you use the appropriate phrases from the lesson to handle each situation effectively and politely?



to correct
someone about
the time of a
meeting

to apologise for
bumping into
someone on the
stairs

to ask which
floor someone in
the lift would like
to go to

to interrupt
someone politely
to tell them the
client has arrived



Making small talk

On the cards below are some snippets of small talk. Which would you feel most comfortable using? In what kinds of situation might you personally find yourself having to make small talk?





Assisting a colleague



Imagine a colleague of yours is visiting the UK for the first time on business. What advice and tips would you give them based on what you have learnt so far in this lesson?



Small talk practice

Role play the situations on the cards below with your teacher and practise making small talk. You can use some of the example snippets from the previous slide if you like, or invent your own. Remember to stick to safe subjects for small talk though!

You have gone to reception to pick up a candidate for an interview

You have bumped into a work acquaintance at a conference tea break

You are visiting the British office of your company and have a meeting in a restaurant nearby

You are waiting for a meeting to start and are getting a cup of coffee with some British colleagues



Time to practise!

Keep in mind the tips from the previous slides. Can you handle each situation on the card below? Role play with your teacher and remember to remain polite and don't offend when expressing criticism or regret.

The sample presentation your employee showed you is too short and not in depth enough.

You want to inform someone that they have not been chosen for a promotion.

You disagree with a colleague's idea.

You are in a meeting and you want to make an objection.



Get ready to listen



Your teacher will now read out a short text.
Make notes based on what you hear.



Use your notes to answer the questions

What happened in the exchange?

What was the general desire of the second speaker?

What language did the second speaker use to express reluctance?

Would you describe the exchange as blunt or tactful?



Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





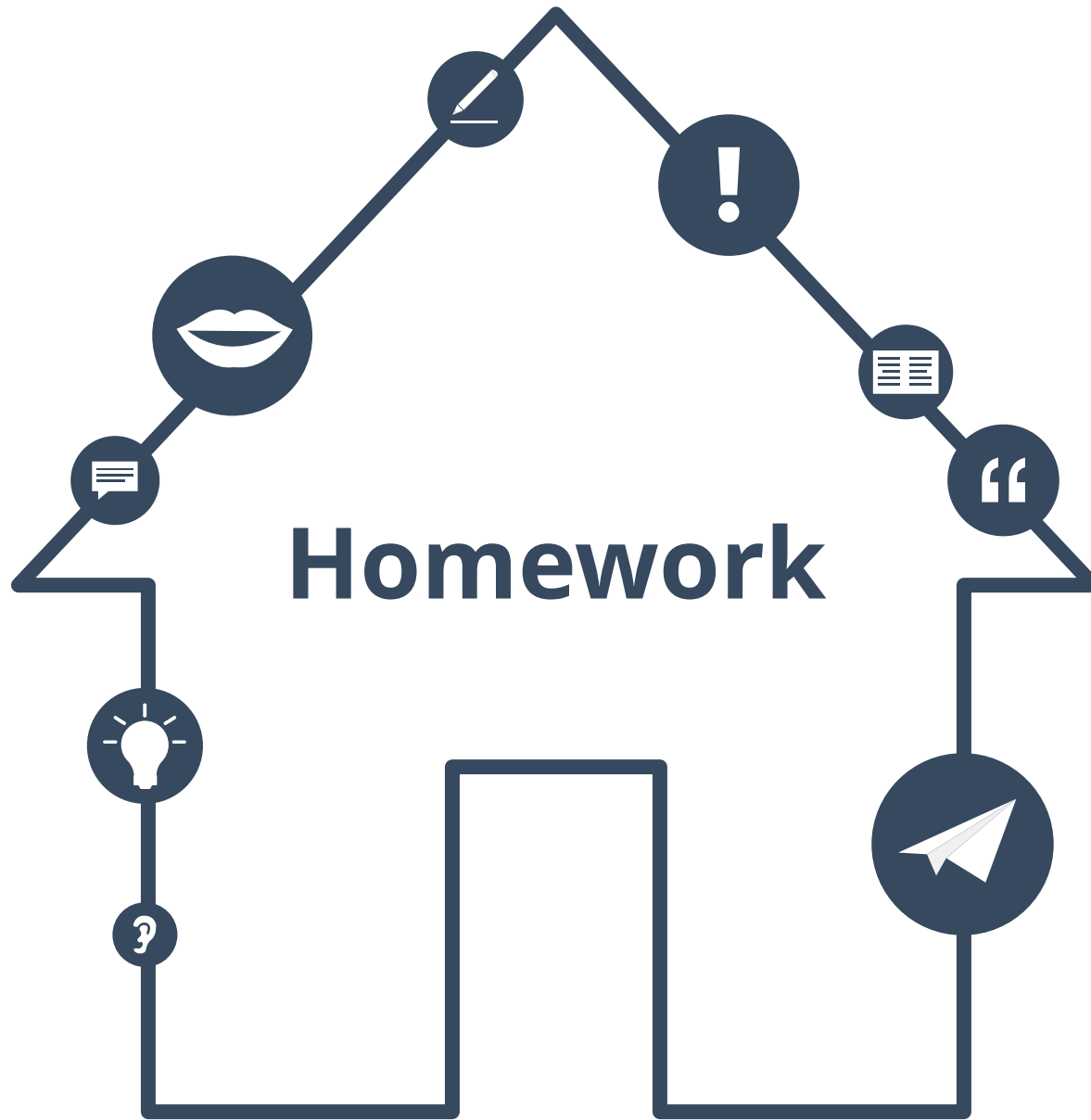
Transcription

"So, I was thinking that we could ask Gareth to lead the presentation, I know he doesn't have a lot of experience but he's very enthusiastic."

"Hmmm, yes, that's an interesting idea, I do think Gareth is an asset to the team but perhaps he would be better suited to a different role?"

"I know it might seem a bit risky but I'd be happy to spend extra time training him before the presentation..."

"I really appreciate your offer, and I do think Gareth has potential but I think it might be best to stick with Julie for this particular pitch. Maybe we can come back to this idea at a later stage though and review Gareth's progress closely over the next few months?"





Evaluation activity

How did you find this class? Which parts of the lesson did you find most challenging? Which were most useful? Which were not so relevant? Give your feedback here!





Writing activity

Several members of your team are shortly going to be visiting the UK on a business trip. They have never visited the country before and your manager has asked if you can write a short guide for their trip for them. Include facts about the UK and a brief guide to company culture and etiquette.

○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	
○	



About this material

Find out more at
www.lingoda.com



This material is provided by

lingoda

lingoda Who are we?



Why learn English online?



What kinds of English classes do we offer?



Who are our English teachers?



How do our English certificates work?



We also have a language blog!