

Cultural Acuity Checklist

To sharpen your cross-cultural acuity skills, try these drills and exercises:

Do your homework. In a new environment, quickly make a preparation list that applies to your situation. In a business setting, be sure to scan the latest news, know the popular companies, and check the latest political headlines. In a casual setting, know something about popular culture or local sports, and be informed on popular dishes and traditions. You don't need to be an expert, but you should have enough information to ask informed questions.

People watch. Next time you are in a public park, a bus stop, or a shopping center, take 30 minutes to people watch. Make note of how fast people are moving, how much eye contact they share when they pass one another, how they exchange greetings, and how close people stand and walk by one another. As we discussed in chapter 1, all these cues can help you decide if you are in a low- or high-content culture.

Eavesdrop tactfully. Similar to people watching, be observant of how people communicate. You may need to be in a more enclosed environment, like an office or café, to gather data on this. Are people chitchatting? Is their volume high? How about their pace? Do people seem to be conversational or are they short and to the point? Can you tell if people are using singular or plural tense to greet newcomers? Gathering this information will give you some insight on the familiarity, formality, and context level of your new environment.

Check for message clarity. In the beginning of a presentation, or even a conversation, is the speaker quickly getting to the point? Does the story connect to a main topic or does it stand alone? Listen for the directness of messages in your new environment and you will quickly figure out if you are in a monochronic or polychronic time culture.

Write it again. In chapter 2, we discussed how important it is to simplify your English if you are communicating with a non-English speaker. Email is the perfect training ground. Find a complex email that you can practice simplifying, both in the message layout and sentence structure. Consider shortening long sentences, removing unnecessary words, or reformatting paragraphs. Take a minute after you write your own message to check for simple terms and conversational tone.

Watch TV. In a different country, the television is your number one tutor. Watch with your native language subtitles, then set up the subtitles corresponding with the local language, and finally, watch without any subtitles. This exercise will slowly train you to notice nonverbals that go with the verbals. You will learn to pick up on accents and regional expressions, and finally, you will develop acuity for tone, pace, volume, and overall rhythm of the new language.

Observe social media. As my classroom example shows, in which students commented on the show-off factor of their international friend's pictures on social media, there is a lot to learn by browsing social media messages posted by locals of the country you will be doing business in. What is trendy? What's the fashion? What do people do for hobbies and entertainment?

Customize your presentation deck. If you are presenting with the help of visuals, use them to build rapport with your audience. An introduction slide with a few of the words in the local language always compliments and connects with the audience. If you are visiting the country for the first time, a photograph of you at a famous landmark "playing tourist" will also show your hosts your authenticity and appreciation.

Observe virtual meeting behavior. It's no secret that the chemistry of a face-to-face interaction becomes more awkward when we go virtual. If you have a chance to observe some meetings with your international colleagues, or possibly watch meeting recordings before you lead them – do it. You will pick up on cues, accents, speaking cadence, and formality of interactions that will allow you to be more effective for the real event.

Links to Resources

[*Communicating Across Cultures with Tatiana Kolovou*](#)

[Country Navigator](#) – a platform for cultural intelligence and inclusion training

[Culture Map by Erin Meyer](#)

[GlobeSmart](#) – an online learning platform that promotes global collaboration and inclusion

[The Thagi Group](#) – a learning platform that provides myriads of performance improvement interventions and activities; their Communication Contrasts interactive game focuses on direct and indirect communication

[Unconscious Bias with Stacey Gordon](#)