

## Unit 1 – Practical exercises on application of various methods

**Recommended duration:** 15 hours

**Description:** In this unit, learners are introduced to several methods of developing and improving their intercultural competencies. Each method, namely questionnaires, critical incidents, cultural assimilators, communication exercises and story circles, is looked at in separate unit topics, which are accompanied by comprehension and reflection activities.

**Methods:** For each topic, a variety of methods and tools are recommended to be used. To start with, a warm-up activity is designed to set the context of the topic (quote or discussion question) and/or test the learners' prior knowledge on that particular subject. After that, the main content of the topic is presented through text/reading paragraphs, diagrams, and illustrations. Comprehension and "Think and Discuss" questions are embedded in the text and at the end of each topic. Reflection as discussion questions is encouraged. Finally, each topic ends with references, recommended links to additional materials, resources, and videos that could be used according to adult educators' needs. The provided resources are merely a recommendation. Adult educators are encouraged to supplement this material with their own resources and additional sources of information.

At the end of the unit, learners may complete a self-evaluation form to reflect on their progress and comprehension of the material of the unit.

### Questionnaires

#### ☑ Warm-up

Look at these quotes. To what extent do you agree with them?

**"The questionnaire is a simple first step toward becoming more self-aware"** – Nick Morgan

**"Man is rated as the highest animal, at least among all animals who returned the questionnaire"** – Robert Breault

**"The power to question is the basis of all human progress."** – Indra Gandhi

#### ☑ Learn



Source: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/what-is-a-questionnaire>



A questionnaire is a research instrument for collecting data about one or more specific topics. It is a set of standardized questions, often called items, which follow a fixed scheme and focus on identifying issues that the researchers aim to identify/measure/evaluate. It can address a large group of people who could not otherwise be reached.

The way the investigator builds the system is very important: its wording does not have to suggest the answer. Also, the items must be constructed in a comprehensible manner so that a wide range of people can answer them, no matter their age, education or social status. The way in which the items are formulated depends on the target population the questionnaire addresses and also on the diversity of the respondents.

Also, the answers must contain answer variants that will be useful for the investigators to clearly identify certain issues. They can have closed (yes/no) or open options (the respondent's answer is large with comments or opinions). Likert-type responses can also be used, enabling the investigator to identify an increase or decrease in certain behaviours/traits/habits.


**Open and Closed-Ended Questions**

|               |  |  |
|---------------|--|--|
| <i>Open</i>   | Not a "yes" or "no" answer.<br>Used when you want more of a response.<br>Encourages the caller to open up to you.                                  | WHY<br>WHERE<br>WHAT<br>WHEN<br>HOW    |
| <i>Closed</i> | Typically a "yes" or "no" response.<br>Used when you want a short, specific answer.<br>Allows you to control the conversation and keep it focused. | DO<br>MAY<br>WOULD<br>IS / ARE<br>DOES |

QuestionPro

**LIKERT SCALE EXAMPLES**

1



**AGREEMENT**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2



**FREQUENCY**

- Very Frequently
- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never


3



**IMPORTANCE**

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Moderately Important
- Slightly Important
- Not important at all

4



**INTEREST**

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Neutral
- Somewhat uninterested
- Very uninterested

Source: <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4082843.html>

Source: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/what-is-likert-scale>

Taking into account the above, the construction of a questionnaire is based on research and its elaboration is carried out scientifically and not randomly. How the questionnaire is constructed depends on the way the data will be collected (a questionnaire collects data that reflects the target situation).

Some questionnaires are built by researchers/professors/academic staff and that can be applied to other contexts (countries or populations). To this end, before being used, they must be calibrated to be suitable for the respective population (for example, if a questionnaire aims to assess migrants' satisfaction with the food in the host country, then the selected food items must be specific to the country of adoption; therefore, when we use a questionnaire in our country we have to replace the examples with dishes specific to our country). Thus, whenever we use a questionnaire, we have to verify first if the tool is adapted to the target population/situation.

The investigators need to respect the above-mentioned rules in order to obtain reliable results that could be used for the research.



**Think and discuss:**

What is a questionnaire? What are the main rules governing its elaboration?

Have you ever been administered a questionnaire on intercultural issues? Share your experience with your peers.



**Predict:**

What dimensions of intercultural competence (IC) do we have to consider when assessing our students' intercultural competence?

When assessing students' intercultural competence, we must take care about the following dimensions (Fantini, 2007):

- a) intercultural knowledge
- b) intercultural attitudes
- c) intercultural skills
- d) intercultural awareness.



**Predict:** What are the issues the items of the IC questionnaires are related to?

In order to construct a questionnaire that evaluates the presence of intercultural competence, the investigators can formulate and include items related to issues such as:

- Implemented policies that assure the rights of all people regardless of their cultural background
- Increased links to networks of individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds
- Tolerance among individuals and groups with different cultural practices and beliefs
- People are encouraged to appreciate and experience different ways of doing things
- People from diverse cultural practices and beliefs are encouraged to work together
- Elimination of any forms of discrimination and prejudice
- Training and modelling intercultural competence
- Promotion of professional development courses/ forums that enhance intercultural competence
- An inclusive environment for everyone (understanding people with different cultural backgrounds)
- Group meetings and events that include people from different culture
- Celebrations and events that feature people from different cultures

**Learn**

The questionnaires assessing trainees' intercultural competence are necessary as culture affects everything (even the tone of the voice may be culturally shaped). Questionnaires give trainers important information concerning their students' ICC as well as the effectiveness of the intercultural competence training courses they organise. They teach trainees to:

Learn their cultural defaults (understanding the cultural differences in different contexts useful).

Look and listen with intercultural eyes and ears (notice differences and appreciate different perspectives)

Learn that misinterpretation is a misunderstanding.

Understand cultural values (creating a calm/inclusive work environment where problems are handled easily).



**Think and discuss:** What other benefits can you add? Share them with your peers.

You can use paper or computer-based questionnaires. Here is a list of [Top 20 Online Quiz Makers For Teachers and Educators](#)

### ▣ Answer questions

1. How would you define a questionnaire?
2. What are the advantages of the questionnaires?

### ▣ Reflect

- Have you ever been administered a questionnaire on intercultural issues? Share your experience with your peers.
- Would you recommend your students do a questionnaire on ICC? Paper or computer-based? Why?
- Would you recommend your colleagues to do a questionnaire on ICC? Why?
- What would you prefer: a paper or a computer-based questionnaire? Why?

### ▣ Learn more

Links to all mentioned sources and additional materials:

- [How to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings in VET](#)
- [Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence](#)
- [Test your intercultural competence](#)
- [Top 20 Online Quiz Makers For Teachers and Educators](#)

Video:

- [KyLeads, Questionnaires, types, definition, examples, and how to design your own](#)

Critical incidents

### ▣ Warm-up

Look at the quotes. To what extent do you agree with them?

**“I am polite and I expect others to be polite.”**

**“The person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool.”** – Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003

**“People forgive you for your grammar mistakes but your cultural mistakes may get you in trouble.”**

## Learn

### *Critical incidents and cultural differences*

Critical incidents in intercultural contexts are experiences generated by cultural differences in which at least one of the interaction partners feels unpleasant. Cultural differences involve 'the integrated and maintained system of socially acquired values, beliefs, and rules of conduct which impact the range of accepted behaviours distinguishable from one societal group to another' [Adler, 1997]. In our diverse world, we need to be aware that it is normal that cultural differences and similarities exist and we should not judge people or label these differences as 'right or wrong'. Critical incidents stem from the lack of awareness and knowledge about these cultural differences.



Source: <https://absoluteinternship.com/blog/east-vs-west-5-cultural-differences-international-student-should-know>

References with more information:

- [Empathy – Accept Others For Who They Are](#)
- [Understanding a different culture](#)
- Adler, N. J. (1997). International dimensions of organizational behavior (3rd ed.). Cincinnati, OH: Shout-Western College Publishing.



### Think and discuss:

Have you ever experienced situations that were unfamiliar to you due to cultural differences? Share them with your peers.

How can you raise your awareness about cultural differences and understand cultures?

Use the links in the reference box and share your findings with peers.

### *What are Critical Incidents in intercultural communication?*

Critical incidents in intercultural training are short descriptions of situations in which a misunderstanding, problem or conflict arises as a result of the cultural differences of the interacting parties or a problem of cross-cultural adaptation and communication.

“Most of my important lessons about life have come from recognizing how others from a different culture view things” - Edgar H. Schein

“Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity” - Robert Alan.

Critical incidents are short dialogues and scenarios, which highlight an unfamiliar or challenging aspect of intercultural communication. The method was introduced by the American psychologist Harry C. Triandis in the 1960s. The tool addresses learners at a personal, meaningful level and encourages them to analyse attitudes and behaviour that might be critical in communication processes between persons from different cultural backgrounds. The critical incidents exercise (CIE) follows the design and assumptions of an experiential learning methodology.

The incident sets the stage and describes what happened and sometimes the feelings and reactions of the people involved without giving any explicit or overt information about the cultural differences existing among the people present in the situation. In the CIE, trainees are not given interpretations to choose from but are required to come up with their interpretation and solution and to explain and defend the interpretation and solution they propose. Trainees use their own experience and resources to interpret and reflect on critical incidents. The process has two stages: analysis and interpretation. First, students critically evaluate the scenarios and write down short answers. Secondly, students exchange and discuss their interpretations in small groups. With the CIE, trainees discuss and compare their responses with those of the other participants and resource persons. In conclusion plenaries, participants share their ideas, summarize findings and reach final conclusions.

*References with more information:*

- *Critical incidents*, <https://casework.eu/lesson/critical-incidents-introduction/>



**Think and discuss:**

Why do you think critical incidents do not give any explicit or overt information about the cultural differences existing among the people involved in the situation?

How important are discussions in a critical incident exercise? Why?



**Predict:**

What are the main purposes of using Critical Incidents as means to develop intercultural competence?

**Analysis of a critical incident**

The purpose of the CIE is to confront participants with examples of difficult, confusing, frustrating problems or conflict situations they can encounter when interacting with people from another culture or adjusting to a new culture.



Read the critical incident below and answer the questions in the box. Use these questions to explore the ideas and underlying values and beliefs in the story.

Some years ago we ran an international course we had planned and organised carefully in advance. We also included warm-up activities which aimed at introducing the topics of the course in memorable and creative ways at the beginning of each morning session. They had been tested and worked very well with previous groups. However, we soon noticed that a group of participants from Eastern countries did not favour our warm-up activities. We asked them and they told us that they considered them a waste of time. They admitted they liked focusing their attention on those tasks directly related to their learning achievement and did not care at all for fun activities, which, they thought, were irrelevant to learning. They had enrolled in our course to learn and not to have fun. They confessed they felt confused and even angry because the warmers created a lot of noise and they generally like to be disciplined and silent during classes. On the other hand, the other participants supported the integration of fun activities into the course highlighting the role of warm-up tasks as a good incentive for their involvement in class.



Source: <https://guideinc.org/2017/06/26/team-building-activity-birthday-line-up>



### Think and discuss:

What is the context? What is happening? What are the issues?

Try to find a number of explanations! Share them with peers.

Read the following potential explanations for the awkward atmosphere above and their corresponding feedback and answer the questions in the box:

1. Most European students do not like studying; they come to school to have fun. That is why teachers have to integrate fun activities into their courses. So, it is ok for students who are interested in learning to show their dissatisfaction with warm-up activities.
2. Courses are serious work and should not be interrupted by trivial activities such as warmers. It is improper to have fun during a course.
3. European students like talking and having fun a lot wherever they go, no matter the situation.
4. The incident is mainly due to cultural differences. Eastern cultures discourage some types of learning behaviour. Learners should focus mainly on learning achievement and success. Western studies have repeatedly highlighted the role of warm-up tasks as facilitators for student involvement in class.

Feedback on responses:

1. This is not a good explanation. It is a kind of overgeneralization and stereotyping, which must be avoided.
2. This is not true. Courses are serious work but warmers help students retain knowledge and motivate them to study.
3. See number 1.



- This is the best explanation. Due to cultural differences, people have different practices ('Rigorous learning' vs 'learning with entertainment').



**Think and discuss:**

How different were your explanations? Who or what helped you to find them?

Can you relate to this event? Why? How? Imagine that this happened in your country.

How would the situation be different or similar?

**Handling critical incidents. Looking for cultural clues**

Identifying and looking into both characters' perspectives in the story help you to spot cultural clues and thus handle critical incidents and develop your intercultural competence.

*Read and reflect on the stages suggested by Milton and Jane Bennett to analyze critical incidents and answer the questions in the box.*

- Describe the situation.
- Without using adjectives list the behaviour of both characters.
- List statements of inference/ evaluation.
- Consider people's behaviour from your perspective.
- Attempt to understand the second individual's thinking about the first person's behaviour and values.
- Think about an interaction you have had with someone from a different culture. Confirm or reject your understanding through further communication or observation.



**Think and discuss:**

Why do you have to ignore adjectives when analyzing a critical incident?

Whose perspective do you have to analyse?

Why is it important to consider behaviour from your perspective?

Why do you have to analyze the situation from several points of view?

**Writing about a critical incident**

To what extent do you agree with the following definitions of reflection? Do you use reflection in your practice? Why?



"Reflection is indicative of deep learning, and where teaching and learning activities such as reflection are missing... only surface learning can result." Biggs 1999 in King 2002



"Reflection leads to growth of the individual – morally, personally, psychologically, and emotionally, as well as cognitively". Branch & Paranjape, 2002, p. 1187



Reflecting on and writing about a critical incident enable you to see situations from different perspectives and develop a more realistic sense of the challenges involved in intercultural situations. Reflection can help trainees learn at a deeper level by identifying and questioning values and beliefs, perspectives, areas of potential bias or discrimination, inadequacies or areas for improvement. Reflection can lead to greater self-awareness and positive changes.

Read and reflect on the stages of writing about a critical incident and then write your own!

- Identify the event or occurrence.
- Describe the context and the incident. What happened, where and when?
- Identify the problem that occurred. What made the incident 'critical' or significant for you?
- What were your immediate thoughts, feelings and responses? Concerns?
- Which culturally influenced values and/or communication differences led to the incident?
- What format do you choose to write the incident in? A dialogue or text format?
- Share your critical incident with peers to see whether they can identify the cultural differences.
- Edit, revise, and share.

*References with more information:*

- [Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication](#)
- [Reflective writing and critical incidents](#)
- [Critical incidents](#)
- [Critical incidents +](#)
- [Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgement](#)



### **Think and discuss:**

What is the role of reflection in writing a critical incident?

What have you learned about yourself from writing the critical incident?

How can critical incident reflection be used?

### **Answer questions**

1. How would you define critical incidents?
2. How can you handle critical incidents?
3. What are the main stages in analysing a critical incident?

### **Reflect**

- Why do I view the situation from several points of view?
- What assumptions have I made about the people involved in the incident or problem or situation?
- How else could I interpret the situation?



- What other action could I have taken that might have been more helpful?
- What will I do if I am faced with a similar situation in the future?

### Learn more

Links to all mentioned sources and additional materials:

- [Spencer-Oatey, H. \(2013\) Critical incidents. A compilation of quotations for the intercultural field. GlobalPAD Core Concepts. Available at GlobalPAD Open House](#)
- [Critical reflection framework](#)
- [Turning Our Intercultural Stories into Critical Incidents](#)

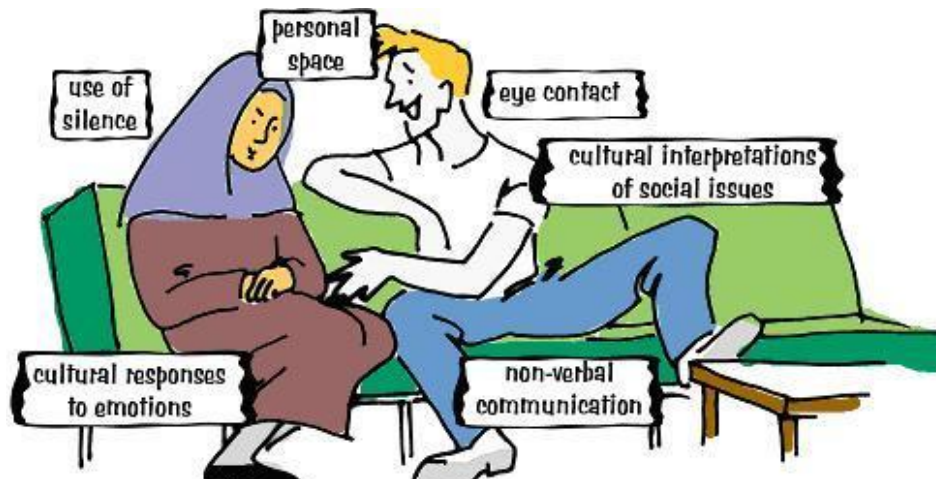
Video:

- [Cross cultural communication | Pellegrino Riccardi | TEDxBergen - YouTube](#)

Cultural assimilators

### Warm-up

Look at the picture. What cultural differences does it illustrate?



Source: [https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/9362/Sterilisation%20disk%203/lo/7373/7373\\_00.htm](https://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au/MCS/9362/Sterilisation%20disk%203/lo/7373/7373_00.htm)

### Learn

**What are culture assimilators and attributions?**

Most intercultural misunderstandings result from the different ways in which people evaluate (and often judge) a given situation or behaviour. The culture assimilator is a programmed learning instrument that can be used to teach people from two different cultures to cope with such situations and make similar inferences/evaluations (isomorphic attributions) about the behaviour of people from a specific culture (Triandis, 1977). These ways of evaluating a situation are called attributions and the term isomorphism means sameness (iso) of a form

(morphism). Triandis (1975) introduced the concept of isomorphic attributions to discuss the situation in which a person from a different culture learns to make the same attributions/inferences about the behaviour of another person as that person himself/herself. Attributions are subjective perceptions based on one's cultural background and experience. What is considered rude in one culture (looking into a person's eyes) might be acceptable and normal in another one. The method teaches learners why others have acted the way they have. The culture assimilator enables people to learn how and why other people have perceptions of and make attributions about certain behaviours or events so that they learn to make the same attributions.

*References with more information:*

- [Cushner, K. & Brislin, R.W. 1996. \*Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide\*](#)



**Think and discuss:**

- Can you explain the culture assimilator in your own words?
- Can you give examples of misunderstandings that you experienced?
- Do you think the cultural assimilator is a good technique to use?

***How to use the culture assimilator***

Culture assimilators may introduce to trainees a variety of situations representing a wide range of significant differences between cultures. The culture assimilator is based on a critical incident (a scenario) presenting a cultural clash between people from two different cultures.

Each incident is followed by three, four, or even five interpretations.

- The trainee is asked to read the critical incident (the scenario).
- The trainee selects one of the interpretations that best explains the problem from the point of view of the person in the incident who is not from the same culture as the trainee.
- Then the trainees check to see whether their interpretation is the right one. If not, they have to go through additional alternatives until they find the right interpretation. Each interpretation is accompanied by an explanation providing valuable background information. The right interpretation has been selected by the experts who designed the assimilator, based on their research.
- Such experiences stimulate discussions on the lessons learned.

The Culture Assimilator method is often classified as a *cognitive* and *experiential* technique because it focuses on the acquisition of knowledge or information in a trial-and-error process. The method simulates the experience of entering a new culture but without the risks of encountering any problems.



**Think and discuss:**

- Why is the cultural assimilator method an experiential technique? What are the benefits?

Enjoy a cultural assimilator experience!

*Look at these pictures presenting different classroom settings. Where would you like to learn? Why? What factors have determined your choice? How would you feel if you learned in an unusual setting?*



Source: <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-biology-majors-women-gender-gaps.html>; <https://www.albany.edu/news/38748.php>

*Read the text about a critical situation and then choose the best explanation for the awkward atmosphere by following the instructions above:*

During an international course, our institution organised some years ago some of our participants complained about other trainees' behaviour who repeatedly interrupted trainers with their questions. They said that they were used to a one-way lecture in which the professor taught and the students took notes. Thus, there would be complete silence in the room and they could concentrate and understand the lecture. The way the session had unfolded based on a dialogue between the trainer and the participants made them feel uncomfortable with the information overload in the discussions; they complained that such sessions lacked structure and guided instruction. They stated that they preferred to have more guidance from their trainers.

They were even more surprised when one of the trainees did not agree with the trainer's point of view and started to justify their reasons and contradict the trainer.

What's going on here? Choose the best explanation and be prepared to defend your choice.

1. European students enjoy talking no matter what the situation or where they are. They are talkative and this is how they show they are interested in a topic.
2. In the European culture, people are loud, impolite and disrespectful to others, even to teachers. This is reflected in the students' behaviour towards their professor by contradicting him.
3. European young people disregard older generations and look down upon them. Thus, they are arrogant even in front of a professor.
4. The gap between Asian and European students is mainly due to cultural differences. Asian trainees tend to be more reserved and quiet while Europeans are used to playing an active role in the learning process. This may also relate to directness and authoritativeness in the different cultures.

Feedback on responses/ Trainer's Guide

1. This is not a good explanation. Whether a person is talkative or not depends on their personality or background and not nationality. Try again!

2. This is not true. The European school encourages a more open learner-centred approach focused on interaction and participation and based on dialogue between trainer and participants. If students show their disagreement with a professor and justify their arguments, this does not mean that students are rude; they have just a different opinion. Try again!
3. This is an example of overgeneralization and stereotyping. In this case, the students show their disagreement with the professor because they have a different viewpoint not because the professor is older than them. Having a contradictory discussion with your educator and challenging him/her is not rude in the European culture. Try again!
4. This is the best explanation. Due to cultural differences, people have different practices: the difference is 'direct' versus 'indirect' communication, the way people prefer to engage in direct or indirect communication. Asian people are more reserved and therefore, more indirect in expressing themselves. This indirectness helps them to preserve dignity and harmony. That is why they do not challenge the professor so directly to save his face. On the other hand, Europeans are usually more direct. They try to avoid ambiguity and get directly to the point. Thus, students ask questions whenever they do not understand and raise their hands to express their opinions. So, people from other cultures may feel uneasy about their directness in expressing themselves.



### Think and discuss:

Have you ever had a similar experience? What have you learned from this experience?  
What are the benefits of such exercises?

References with more information:

- [The Culture Assimilators](#) (The Intercultural sensitizer)
- [Intercultural Sensitizers](#)

### Answer questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between a critical incident and a cultural assimilator?
2. What are the advantages of experiential learning?

### Reflect

- Which learning approach is more suitable for you when acquiring knowledge about other cultures?
- Have you had any experience with the above-mentioned approaches?

### Learn more

Links to all mentioned sources and additional materials:

- [The Culture Assimilators](#) (The Intercultural sensitizer)
- [Intercultural Sensitizers](#)
- [Cushner, K. & Brislin, R.W. 1996. Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide](#)

Video:

- [Learn a new culture | Julien S. Bourrelle | TEDxArendal - YouTube](#)





## Story circles

### ☐ Warm-up

Look at these different quotes on listening and think about what they mean. Do you agree with any of them?

**“The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.”**

**“Understanding, as we understand it, is misunderstanding.”**  
— Elias Canetti

**“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”** — Ernest Hemingway

### ☐ Learn

#### What is the Story Circles method?

The UNESCO Story Circles method is a state-of-the-art adaptable and practical method that can be used in a wide range of contexts and situations around the world for developing individuals' intercultural competencies and bridging divides. Story Circles method promoted by Darla Deardorff, looks into fundamental elements of intercultural competencies development, such as respect, listening, curiosity, self- and other awareness, reflection, sharing, empathy, and relationship building. The prompt is the key to developing the intercultural competencies and it is used to stimulate the sharing of personal experience. The tool works at its maximum potential when the experience-sharing is accompanied by a thorough debriefing/follow-up discussion with participants. The number of participants can vary dramatically since the main activities take place in small subgroups of 3 up to five people. The small groups must be as diverse as possible (age, gender, backgrounds) and all members speak and understand the same language. Participants have to remain in the same small groups until the end of the experience as this will create an atmosphere of trust, confidentiality and safety.

As ground rules, confidentiality and respect are key principles governing the activities. As each person shares his/her story, the others in the group are to *listen for understanding*; in no way are they to interrupt the story (making comments or asking questions) until all stories have been told. The advantage of 'Not interrupting' rule is twofold: demonstrating respect for the person sharing and forcing the listeners to listen more closely to what is being shared, *to be open*, to look for meanings to what they hear instead of the typical listening, preparing a response, judging, etc.



Source: <https://myedmondsnews.com/2019/11/i-am-edmonds-event-caps-off-project-to-share-experiences-through-storytelling>



References with more information:

- [Deardorff, D. K. \(2020\), The UNESCO Story Circles](#)



**Think and discuss:** What is listening for understanding? Why is it important?

### **How to stage a Story Circles experience**

There are at least two rounds of stories shared, the first is a “get acquainted” round and the second is about eliciting a personal experience that addresses intercultural competencies development. In each round, only one prompt (a question) is given to which participants respond and the others in the circle listen for understanding (not for response or judgment).

*The first “get acquainted” round* helps participants to meet each other, build trust, and begin to feel comfortable sharing interculturally (revealing something about their background; the prompt focuses on pleasant topics, such as food, holidays, and so on). The facilitator would only use one prompt. The trainer models an appropriate response for the participants to help participants know expectations for sharing. Examples of prompts: Please tell us your name and the story about your name. (What does it mean? How did you come to have this name?)/ What is your favourite holiday or festival, and why is this your favourite?

*The second “intercultural competencies” round* focuses on one prompt such as: What is a memorable cultural misunderstanding you have had, and what did you learn from this?/ What is your earliest memory of difference (when you first learned or realized that you were different from someone else)? This is also modelled by the trainer (it encourages trainees to share their personal experience). The intercultural prompt encourages the participants to share and reflect on their experiences with those who are different from them so that the experience is perceived from different perspectives.

### *Flashbacks*

Once the stories/experiences from the second round have been shared, the participants engage in flashbacks in response to the shared stories. The flashback encourages participants to listen for understanding, demonstrate respect, and make connections (all part of intercultural competencies development). The participants have to share quickly in 15 seconds or less the most memorable points of the stories they heard in round two. To do this, the group starts with the first person who shared his/her story in round two, and everybody in the group tells that person the most memorable point of his/her story. Then the group moves to the second person who shared his/her story and the others share their flashbacks for that person and so on. This is a relatively quick activity that does not develop into a discussion. This is a very important part of the Story Circles experience and demonstrates respect and *listening for understanding* each participant in the Story Circle.

*Debriefing/discussion questions* After the two rounds of personal sharing/storytelling and flashbacks, the participants get involved in guided group reflection and discussion (a minimum of 30 minutes of debriefing time is recommended). Debriefing is an integral part of the Story Circle experience and is key in supporting the development of intercultural competencies (thanks to the value of “stepping back” and reflecting on the process itself and in learning from that process). Debriefing/discussion can be organized first within the small Story Circle groups and then later in plenary. The possible debriefing/discussion questions are given to participants in a handout. Possible questions stimulating discussion: 1) What is memorable to you in what you heard? 2) What surprised you? 3) What challenged you in the stories you heard? 4) What did you learn about yourself through this experience (this refers to the goal of increased cultural self-awareness)? 5) What common themes did you hear from the stories? 6) What do you want to explore further after hearing these stories?

### Answer questions

1. What are the fundamental elements of intercultural competencies the Story circles method focuses on?
2. Why is the *Debriefing* session at the end of the experience so important?

### Reflect

- How has the Story circles experience helped you practice listening for understanding?
- What lessons have you learned from this experience?

### Learn more

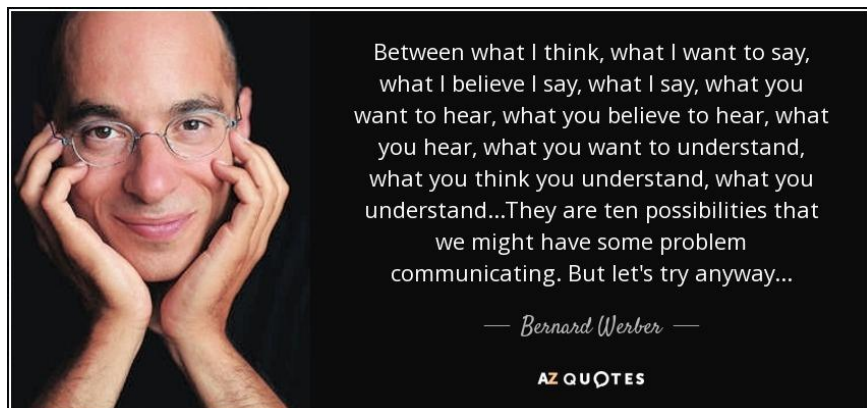
Links to all mentioned sources and additional materials:

- [Deardorff, D. K. \(2020\), The UNESCO Story Circles](#)
- <https://iccglobal.org/resources/resources/>
- [Intercultural Communication Resource Pack. SALTO Youth](#)
- [Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication: An interactive tool for developing awareness, knowledge, and skills](#)
- [Intercultural Training Pack](#)

Communication exercises

### Warm-up

Read the poem and reflect on its message.



Source: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/802362>

Read the definition of intercultural communication below and then reflect on the question. Share and discuss your answers with peers.

## What is Intercultural Communication?

Intercultural communication refers to the effective communication between people/workers/ clients of different cultural background. It also includes managing thought patterns and non verbal communication.



Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/DhanBharathi/intercultural-communication-presentation>; <https://youtu.be/sGRkVar8EII>

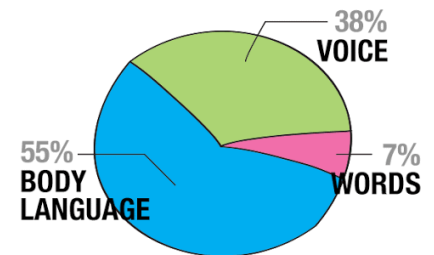


### Predict:

What are the main components of communication and how much do they affect the meaning of the message?

### Learn

Being able to communicate effectively is one of the most important life skills. Communication is vital in all our actions, when we build relationships, share ideas, negotiate issues, delegate responsibilities, work in a team, etc. There are basically three elements in any communication, which affect the meaning of the message. Have a look at the image to see how much each element accounts for the message!



Metrabian & Ferris' research results of communication during a presentation.  
"Inference of Attitude from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels"  
The Journal of Counselling Psychology 31,  
S. 248-252, 1987

Source: <http://www.aoc-training.de/communication/non-verbal-communication>

These three components, verbal (words), non-verbal (body language) and paraverbal (voice, tone, intonation, etc), are interrelated and culture specific and they differ dramatically across and within cultures. The message conveyed by words and phrases which differ from one language to another can't be understood without a clear understanding of the accompanying nonverbal and paraverbal elements. The meaning of the message depends on all three elements. Therefore, people who get into contact with individuals from other cultures must consider those culture-specific features and act accordingly.

References with more information:

- [Elements of Speech Communication](#)



### Think and discuss:

What are the main components of communication?

Why do they play an important role in communication?



## ▣ Learn

### ***What is verbal communication?***

Verbal communication refers to what you say: the contents of your message. Cultures vary in terms of the topics that are discussed in public; such topics, hotspots or taboos (i.e. death, money, politics etc) are situations that might cause a difficult atmosphere among the interacting persons if not handled carefully and sensitively. Also, there are words or phrases the meanings of which are culture-specific, ambiguous, cannot be described clearly nor can they be directly translated. Knowing them prepares you to handle them and enables you to improve your intercultural communication skills. For instance, 'How are you?' is usually perceived as a greeting and the speaker does not expect details about your health. British trainers were confused when people insisted on details about their health 'Hi, Anna, how are you?' 'I'm fine, thanks.'

### ***What is nonverbal communication?***

Nonverbal communication uses gestures and body language and it is the oldest form of communication. Non-verbal messages have much more ambiguity, situationally, and spontaneity and they depend on cultural contexts. Thus nodding or shaking your head as an expression of agreement or disagreement is not universal. It evolved differently in Bulgaria, for example.

### ***What is paraverbal communication?***

Paraverbal communication is how we say it. Tonality, pauses between sentences or words, inflexions (saying words lowering and raising your voice), pitch, quality of voice, etc. can influence the message. To be effective intercultural communicators, we need to align our gestures, appearance and tone with the words we're trying to get our message across and overcome any cultural differences across cultures.

*References with more information:*

- [Forms of communication: verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal](#)
- [Intercultural communication](#)
- [What is Intercultural communication?](#)
- [Intercultural communication](#)



### **Think and discuss:**

What is verbal communication? Can you share some examples of culture-specific words?

Can you share your own examples of hotspots or taboos? What is nonverbal communication?

Can you share some examples of culture-specific gestures?

What do you do if you perceive cultural hotspots in an interaction?

## Learn

The activities below aim at raising trainees' awareness about the role that body language and paraverbal elements of communication play in intercultural relations. Debates and discussions, role-plays, simulations, action-oriented tasks, etc. help improve not only verbal but also other culturally determined aspects of communicative competence.

**Role-play** is a very effective technique raising participants' awareness about communication channels and practising verbal, paraverbal or non-verbal communication in an intercultural context. Role-plays also help trainees to identify and observe features of other cultures, which are not accessible otherwise. Role plays provide learners with opportunities to practice real-life situations. Thus, learners will know how to react in unfamiliar intercultural settings. Role-plays are suitable for all language levels and age groups.



Source: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1337091/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

The trainer sets the scene: trainees are participants in a reception (a party or a meeting) and observers. They get role cards and colourful ribbons according to the country they represent (red, blue, and white). Participants have to wear the ribbons as ties or necklaces during and after the game. What they have to do is to meet and talk with as many people as possible according to their role. The participants come from three different countries: Redland (You like to talk with foreigners, but you don't like being touched by strangers. You always avoid eye contact. You eat with a spoon.); Blueland (People in your country gently each other's arms all the time when they talk. You eat with your hands. You avoid people from Whiteland; Whiteland (You love to meet and talk with people. You are enthusiastic and use a lot of gestures. When you meet someone, you touch your earlobes and bow a little to say "hello" politely. You eat with chopsticks.).

After about eight to twelve minutes of partying they should be asked to sit down in groups of four or five, having representatives from all countries as well as one or two observers. Participants get a set of questions for the discussion, answer the questions and discuss the issues in their groups. Their answers and conclusions are presented in the plenary (possible focus on intercultural misunderstandings with people from other cultures; share own similar experiences).

### Questions:

What did you learn about the three different cultures?

What is the role of physical contact?

What caused (or could have caused) conflicts? How did you avoid/solve conflicts?

Are there any similarities between your culture and any of these three cultures?

What are some of the differences?

Which culture did you find the strangest of all? What else would you like to learn about these cultures?

How did you feel while you were participating in the game?

What did you notice when you were observing the role-play?



**Games: Babel Tower/ Mission Impossible** Source Intercom TC, Lorenzo Nava

*Activity description*

This exercise is based on the “Mission Impossible” team-building game in a multicultural context. The group should be divided into subgroups in order to complete some tasks; they can only use body language and their mother tongues but are not allowed to use foreign languages a common language, English. Samples of tasks: Make a birthday list of everybody in their team, write a poem together, dance something all together, say a tongue twister in all the languages in their group, design a poster promoting cultural diversity, draw a favourite landscape, etc.

*Debriefing and evaluation*

Start with a summary of the activity and general questions on how the activity went. Was it enjoyable? Why yes/no? Then proceed to a discussion on learning what was the most difficult task and why.

What was the easiest task and why? How much easier would it have been if all had spoken in English?

Is it really necessary to have a common language in order to understand each other?

What tools did you use to communicate and make sure everybody understood correctly?

**Games: Guess the word** through several communication channels (Source Lorenzo Nava, Filiz Ayseli)

*Aims: Understanding different levels and channels of communication*

Prepare beforehand small pieces of paper on which you have written a word expressing an object. Split the group into subgroups of four. Give a person in each group a piece of paper with the word. Tell them to read it and draw the object it represents on a piece of paper for Person 2. Person 2 has to figure out the meaning of the drawing and describe it verbally to Person 3. Person 3 has to identify what word person 2 has described and go to the last person, Person 4, and mime the word. Person 4 returns to the trainer and says the word. If it's right Person 4 gets another word; if the word is wrong then they have to start again with the first word. A team wins when they have completed five words and stops when all teams have finished.

*Debriefing and evaluation*

The debriefing is very important. Ask the participants to get together in a large group for the discussion and invite them to talk about what happened in the role-play.

Start with a summary of the activity and general questions on how the activity went. Was it enjoyable? Why yes/no? In the feedback, the discussion will focus on these questions: What was the most difficult stage? What was the purpose of this exercise?/How were communication channels different from each other?/ Was it equally easy/difficult to use various channels of communication?/ Which of these channels do you use more/less often? Why?

*Reflection*

- Which communication tool would you use more comfortably in a multicultural context?
- Which communication tool do you feel less comfortable using?
- Would you share with us an interesting experience related to communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds?
- How can you make communication more effective with people?

**Cultoons** (cartoons on cultural misunderstandings) are like visual culture assimilators. Learners are given a series of (usually) four pictures depicting points of surprise or possible misunderstanding for people coming into the target culture. Their task is to describe the pictures and say whether in their opinion the reactions of the characters seem appropriate or not. *Variation:* Give learners a set of emojis (pictograms, logograms, ideograms and smileys) and ask them to write detailed descriptions for a person who has never used them.



## What is the source of the problem?



Figure 9.1 The cultural meanings of 'Yes'. (Source: Feign, 1987.)

Source: <https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/397513104592256128>; <https://slideplayer.com/slide/5834255>

### Action-oriented task: “All around the world” (Source Isabel Alonso-Belmonte & María Fernández-Agüero)

This activity can be carried out in small groups over several weeks. The participants focus on a country and have to find cultural similarities and differences with their own country. Their task is to present common intercultural communication hotspots to peers with the help of visuals such as PowerPoint presentations or posters. To do this participants need to do research on the internet and read articles, blogs or watch online videos related to the topic etc. The presenters should also be ready to answer personal questions (“Why did you choose that topic?”, “What makes it special?”).

### Discussions and debates: “What would you do?”

The participants are presented with a problem related to intercultural encounters and in groups invited to discuss and solve it. The solutions are presented in the plenary. Trainees have to take sides, discuss the options and, if possible, agree on a common solution. The trainer stimulates the discussion through thought-provoking questions or “for and against” statements. *Other applications:* We invite trainees to contextualize the topic of discussion of the debates.

### Using videos to observe body language

The activity aims to develop trainees' ability to attend to the body language of others; to enable trainees to speculate on the meaning of some important elements of nonverbal communication.

This activity provides an opportunity for learners to pay active attention to the body language of people they see, and to speculate on what people may be trying to communicate in non-verbal ways, either consciously or unconsciously. The trainer preselects a three or four-minute video showing some elements of interaction or communication between people in another country or culture of interest. The trainer provides some basic background information about the context in which the video is set: then s/he describes who the participants are and what situation they are in. The trainer asks participants to watch the video whose sound has been switched off and closely observe how people greet and interact with each other (focus on handshaking, smiling, faces, touching, emotions, their gestures and eye contact). Trainees reflect on what the individuals concerned are trying to communicate and share their findings with their peers. What are the individuals concerned trying to communicate through their greetings? What are the individuals trying to communicate through their gestures and

personal space? It is also useful to ask the learners to speculate on how their own body language is similar (or dissimilar) to that of the individuals they observe.

References with more information:

- [Nonverbal Communication and Body Language](#)
- [Bennett, J., 2026, Interactive Methods for Teaching about Cultural Differences](#)
- [Intercultural communication Resource Pack](#)
- [Role Play: A Practical Way to Teach Intercultural Communication](#)
- [A Practical Way to Teach Intercultural Communication](#)
- [Intercultural encounters](#)
- [8 Strategies for Teaching Intercultural Communication through Film](#)
- [Keynote: The Power of Nonverbal Communications | Joe Navarro](#)



### Think and discuss:

Were the activities useful? Why? What did you learn from the activities?  
Which would you use with your learners?

### Answer questions

1. What are the main components of communication?
2. Give examples of verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal communication

### Reflect

- Is it equally easy/difficult to use various channels of communication?
- Which is your most/least favourite? Why? Did you experience any unpleasant experience? Would you share it with your peers?
- How did you feel while being involved in the above-mentioned activities?
- Which activity would you use with your trainees? Why? How would you change the activities to match your context and meet your trainees' needs?
- What other activities would you suggest? Why?

### Learn more

Links to all mentioned sources and additional materials:

- [Forms of communication: Verbal, Paraverbal and Non-Verbal](#)
- [Case work - Hotspots: Talks](#)
- [Defining intercultural communication](#)
- [Intercultural dialogue](#)
- [World Council on Intercultural and global competence](#)
- [Non-Verbal Communication | Leyla Tacconi | TEDxBritishSchoolofBrussels](#)

## ▣ Self-evaluation questionnaire

1. What are the three things you have learned in this unit?
2. What are other learners doing in discussions that you like and would like to incorporate in your own discussion responses?
3. When you were feeling challenged in understanding a new concept, what did you do to get “unstuck”?
4. What did you find easy about learning the material in this unit?
5. What did you find most difficult about learning the material in this unit?
6. What is one thing you were doing really well while learning the material in this unit?
7. What is one thing you need to improve? What is your plan for making that improvement?

