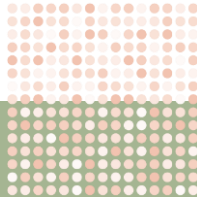




GLION SELF-HELP SERIES

Learning Support



Intercultural communication



Intercultural communication is the ability to communicate effectively, respectfully, and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds.

In today's global classrooms and hospitality workplaces, this skill is essential for building relationships, avoiding misunderstandings, and working successfully in diverse teams.



What is intercultural communication?

Intercultural communication involves understanding how culture influences:

- Behaviour
- Values
- Communication styles
- Expectations
- Approaches to conflict, feedback, hierarchy, and teamwork

It's not about knowing everything about every culture — it's about staying open, curious, and respectful.



Why it matters?

- Improves teamwork and collaboration
- Builds positive relationships with classmates, colleagues, and guests
- Reduces misunderstandings and conflict
- Helps navigate multicultural workplaces and international service environments
- Strengthens your ability to work globally
- Essential for internships and careers in hospitality, tourism, business, and customer service





Step-by-step: how to improve intercultural communication

1 Be aware of your own cultural lens

Everyone sees the world through their own cultural background — including you.

Ask yourself:

- What communication habits have I learned from my culture?
- Do I prefer direct or indirect communication?
- How do I express disagreement, give feedback, or show respect?

Greater self-awareness = better intercultural interactions.





2 Recognise common cultural differences

Here are key areas where cultures often differ:

Aspect	Examples of differences
Communication style	<i>Direct vs indirect, Emotional vs reserved</i>
Power distance	<i>Formal vs informal speaking to teachers/managers</i>
Individualism vs collectivism	<i>Personal goals vs group harmony</i>
Attitude toward time	<i>Strict punctuality vs flexible timing</i>
Feedback style	<i>Straightforward criticism vs gentle suggestions</i>
Non-verbal communication	<i>Eye contact, gestures, personal space</i>

Understanding these differences helps you adapt more effectively.

3 Practice active listening

- Listen without interrupting
- Pay attention to tone and body language
- Ask clarifying questions (“Do you mean...?”)
- Summarise what you understood

Listening builds trust, reduces assumptions, and ensures mutual understanding.



4 Be curious, not judgmental

Replace assumptions with questions:

- *"Can you tell me more about how this is done in your culture?"*
- *"How do you prefer to communicate about group work?"*
- *"What would feel respectful and comfortable for you?"*

Curiosity shows respect and supports positive collaboration.

5 Adapt your communication style

Flexibility is key to intercultural communication.

Try to:

- Slow down your speaking pace
- Use clear, simple language
- Avoid idioms, slang, or cultural references that may not translate
- Adjust directness according to the situation
- Check understanding gently

You don't need to change who you are — just adapt so communication is effective for everyone.





6 Manage misunderstandings gracefully

Misunderstandings are normal.

When they happen:

- Stay calm
- Clarify politely (“I may have misunderstood — could you repeat that?”)
- Rephrase your idea
- Avoid blame; focus on solutions

A respectful tone makes all the difference.

7 Show respect through behaviour

Across cultures, respect is universal — even if expressed differently.

- Be punctual for meetings
- Use names and titles correctly
- Be mindful of gestures and personal space
- Apologise when needed
- Appreciate perspectives different from your own





Example: Intercultural communication in group work

Situation:

You're working on a group project with students from several countries. Some members speak directly; others stay quiet unless invited.

What can you do?

- Ask each member for their input
- Agree on communication norms (e.g., weekly check-ins, deadlines)
- Encourage quieter members by giving space to speak
- Avoid interpreting silence as lack of interest — it may be cultural respect or reflection
- Summarise decisions clearly to ensure shared understanding

Result: better teamwork, less frustration, stronger final presentation.



Tips & Tricks

Avoid stereotypes: focus on individuals, not assumptions

Ask, don't assume: simply clarifying questions prevent conflict

Practice empathy: imagine how the message feels to the other person

Slow down: speed often causes misunderstanding

Learn cultural basics of your team or workplace (holidays, norms, communication preferences)

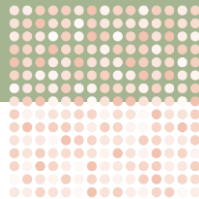
Use inclusive language: avoid idioms, sarcasm, or cultural references that may confuse others





Sample intercultural communication reflection template

Situation	What happened?	Cultural differences	Learning	Future adaptation
Group meeting	<i>Some spoke a lot; others stayed quiet</i>	Direct vs indirect communication	Silence can mean respect or thinking, not disengagement	Invite quieter members to speak, allow pauses
Email about tasks	<i>Message sounded "too direct" to one member</i>	Different expectations for tone and politeness	Tone can be interpreted differently across cultures	Add greetings and polite phrases, check tone
Giving feedback	<i>Direct comments discouraged a teammate</i>	Direct vs indirect feedback styles	Some prefer gently or positive-first feedback	Use "positive → improvement → positive" structure
Meeting timing	<i>One member arrived late and thought it was okay</i>	Strict vs flexible views on punctuality	People manage time differently	Agree on shared timing rules as a group
Internship guest interaction	<i>Guest avoided eye contact, I thought they were unhappy</i>	Different meanings of eye contact	Non-verbal cues vary culturally	Avoid quick assumptions, focus on overall context



Contact us

THE LEARNING SUPPORT TEAM

learningsupport@glion.edu

THE LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

library@glion.edu