



## MODULE

# 3

## Communicating across Cultures

### Module Outline

- What is culture?
- What is Canadian culture?
- How does culture affect business communication?
- With so many different cultures, how can I know enough to communicate?
- How can I make my documents bias free?

### Review of Key Points

### Assignments for Module 3

### Polishing Your Prose: Using Idioms

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and applying the information in Module 3, you'll be able to demonstrate

#### Knowledge of

- The components of culture
- Workplace diversity
- The importance and variety of non-verbal communication symbols
- Bias-free language

#### Skills to

- Consider diversity as part of your audience analysis
- Apply your awareness of others' values to your spoken and written messages
- Use bias-free language and photos

The Conference Board of Canada  
Insights You Can Count On



Please see the OLC to preview the key skills from the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ covered in this module.



## FYI

Many experts consider “race” a socio-cultural construct. Because of the Human Genome Project, we know that all humans are 99 percent genetically matched, and our closest genetic relative is the chimpanzee. Thus, the concept of “race” may have neither genetic nor biological validity.

Source: Nicholas, Wade. “Articles Highlight Different Views on Genetic Basis of Race”, *The New York Times* (online), October 27, 2004, p.1. <http://www.howard.edu/newsevents/announcements/1-10-27/genetics.htm>, retrieved October 23, 2006.



## FYI

Exchanging business cards with people from Asia is an important cultural ritual. Chinese and Japanese businesspeople expect your card to be written in their language on one side and English on the other. Hold your card with two hands, the English print facing your recipient, and hand it over with a slight bow. When you receive the other person’s card, study it carefully before putting it away.

All human beings conform to a culturally determined reality. Our culture shapes the way we “see” reality. Often we are unaware of our cultural assumptions until we come into contact with people whose cultural biases differ from ours. If we come from a culture where cows and pigs are raised to be food, for example, that may seem normal until we meet people whose cultures consider these animals sacred, or unclean, or people who consider raising any animal for consumption to be cruel and barbaric. Regardless of our cultural convictions, our ability to communicate flexibly and sensitively with others is a standard for success. Moreover, multicultural acuity makes sound economic, ethical, and legal sense.

## What is culture?

*Our culture is a learned set of assumptions that shape our perceptions of the world, and of appropriate values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours.*

We learn our culture. Perceptions about gender, age, and social class are culturally based, as are our ideas about

- race
- ethnicity
- religious practices
- sexual orientation
- physical appearance and ability, and
- regional and national characteristics.

No culture is monolithic. Nor is cultural diversity restricted to ethnicity. (◀▶▶ Module 2, discourse communities) Linguistics professor and gender communications expert Deborah Tannen maintains that women and men often communicate according to very different cultural norms. A study of work team behaviours validates this hypothesis. Professors Jennifer Berdahl, University of Toronto, and Cameron Anderson, University of California, Berkeley, studied the teamwork and leadership behaviours of students enrolled in a course in organizational behaviour. Students were divided into teams. “The researchers found that all the teams [whether] predominantly male or female[,] started off with leadership concentrated in one person.” However, the teams made up mostly of women evolved into shared leadership; “those with mostly men continued taking direction from one person.” The teams with shared leadership performed better and received higher grades.<sup>1</sup>

## What is Canadian culture?

*Canada is a cultural polyglot.*

Our cultural diversity is now very much a part of the Canadian identity. Canada, home to “... more than 200 different ethnic groups, and a foreign-born population second only to Australia’s ...” is becoming the most culturally diverse country in the world. Almost a quarter of a million people from all over the world choose to immigrate to Canada every year.

Because two out of three of these immigrants settle in our largest cities, Toronto is the most “... ethnically diverse city in North America and probably the world,” with Vancouver close behind. Indeed, by 2016, “... visible minorities will account for one-fifth of Canada’s citizens.”<sup>2</sup>



Asian Business  
Etiquette



### Statistics Canada: 2001 Census



#### FYI

Extensive studies prove that cultivating fluency in two languages contributes to reading and learning success.

Source: James Crawford, "A Nation Divided by One Language," in *Learning English*, *The Guardian Weekly*, February 2001, 3.



#### FYI

Statistics Canada's ethnic diversity survey found that "... almost one-quarter (23 percent) of Canada's population aged 15 and over, or 5.3 million people, were first generation [immigrants born outside Canada]. Not since 1931 has the proportion of people born outside the country been this high." The survey also found that recent immigrants felt stronger ties with their ethnic groups than "those who were two or more generations in Canada." However, loyalty to their ethnic origins also varied within groups of people. People from countries with a longer history of immigration to Canada were more likely to view themselves as Canadian first.

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada (2002), *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, *The Daily*, September 29, 2003; retrieved November 20, 2005, from <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030929/d030929a.htm>; And, Omar El Akkad, "Canadians in Poll Value Diversity, but Demand Loyalty above All," *The Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2005, p. A3.

Besides contributing to our architecture, visual and performing arts, fashion, festivals, festivities and food, literature, medicine, music, and science—among others—immigrants to Canada are essential for business productivity. Without our immigrant population, Canada would not have had the labour force necessary to prosper during the boom times of the late 1990s: "skilled immigrants who arrived in the past ten years accounted for 70 percent of the growth in Canada's labour force during the same period."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as the workforce continues to age (half of North America's Boomers will be 55 or older by 2011), skilled worker shortages will be filled by new Canadians.<sup>4</sup>

Recognition of, and respect for the diverse views of others is also legally responsible behaviour. Legal support for the heterogeneous population in Canadian workplaces is articulated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (1985), the *Multiculturalism Act* (1985), the *Official Languages Act* (1988), the *Pay Equity Act* (1990), and the *Employment Equity Act* (1995). "Provinces and territories also have laws, human rights commissions and programs that promote diversity."<sup>5</sup>

Globalization demands effective intercultural communication. Foreign trade is essential to the growth of both individual businesses and Canada's economy. Although the United States remains our primary trading partner, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the economic interests of countries worldwide, like China and India, represent opportunities for Canadian businesses.

## How does culture impact business communication?

*Cultural assumptions and expectations determine both the form and the content of every business interaction.*

Cultural anthropologist E. T. Hall theorized that people's cultural values and beliefs determine their communication style. Hall characterized these communication behaviours as high context and low context.

- In **high-context cultures**, most of the information is inferred from the context of a message; little is "spelled out." Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Latin American cultures could be considered high context.
- In **low-context cultures**, context is less important; most information is explicitly spelled out. German, Scandinavian, and the dominant North American cultures could be considered low context.

As David Victor points out in Table 3.1, high-context and low-context cultures value different kinds of communication and have different attitudes toward oral and written channels.<sup>6</sup> As Table 3.1 shows, low-context cultures favour direct approaches and perceive indirectness as dishonest or manipulative. The written word is seen as more important than spoken agreements, so contracts are binding but promises may be broken. Details, logic, and time constraints matter. North American communication practices reflect these low-context preferences.

Thus, culture influences every single aspect of business communication: how to show politeness and respect, how much information to give; how to motivate people; when, how much, and how loudly to talk and laugh; how to organize a letter; even what size paper to use.

**TABLE 3.1**  
Views of Communication in High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

	High Context (Examples: Japan, United Arab Emirates)	Low Context (Examples: Germany, Canada, the United States)
Preferred communication strategy	Indirectness, politeness, ambiguity	Directness, confrontation, clarity
Reliance on words to communicate	Low	High
Reliance on non-verbal signs to communicate	High	Low
Importance of written word	Low	High
Agreements made in writing	Not binding	Binding
Agreements made orally	Binding	Not binding
Attention to detail	Low	High

Source: Adapted from David A. Victor, *International Business Communication* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), Table 5.1, p. 148. Reprinted by permission of Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc.

**FIGURE 3.1**  
National Culture, Organizational Culture, and Personal Culture Overlap



Communication is also influenced by the organizational culture and by personal culture, such as gender, race and ethnicity, social class, and so forth. As Figure 3.1 suggests, these cultures intersect to determine the communication needed in a given situation. Sometimes one kind of culture may dominate another culture. For example, in a study of aerospace engineers in Europe, Asia, and the United States, researchers John Webb and Michael Keene found that the similarities of the professional discourse community (one kind of culture) outweighed differences in national cultures.<sup>7</sup>

## ■ Values, Beliefs, and Practices

Values and beliefs, often unconscious, affect our response to people and situations. Most Canadians, for example, value “fairness.” “You’re not playing fair” is a sharp criticism calling for changed behaviour. In some countries, however, people expect certain groups to receive preferential treatment. Most North Americans accept competition and believe that it produces better performance. The Japanese, however, believe that competition leads to disharmony. U.S. businesspeople believe that success is based on individual achievement and is open to anyone who excels. Canadians prefer co-operation to blatant competition. In England and in France, success is more obviously linked to social class. And in some countries, the law prohibits people of some castes or races from participating fully in society.

Many North Americans value individualism. Other countries rely on group consensus for decision making. In traditional classrooms, North American students are expected to complete assignments alone; if they receive too much help from anyone else, they’re “cheating.” In Japan, however, groups routinely work together to solve problems. In the dominant North American culture, quiet is a sign that people are working. In Latin American, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, people talk to get the work done.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, the extroverted behaviours rewarded in the classrooms and boardrooms of North America are considered rude and crazy in Japanese culture.



## EXPANDING A CRITICAL SKILL

### Dealing with Discrimination

Although two-thirds of us believe that our treatment of visible minorities is better today than in 1975, many Canadians deal with discrimination daily. Aboriginal peoples and Canadians of East Asian, Middle Eastern, and Asian background often face prejudice. In the Greater Toronto Area, where visible minorities compose more than 50 percent of the population, black people in particular have real concerns. And no ethnic group is more stigmatized than the Jamaican community. Three-quarters of Jamaicans polled believe that the media misrepresents the black community and that the police treat them unfairly. And two-thirds believe that Canada Customs and the courts treat them inequitably.

### Media Misrepresentation

Anthropology professor and Caribbean community and anti-racism expert Frances Henry agrees. Her study of racist discourse in the media demonstrated that one-third of the Toronto newspaper articles featuring Jamaicans focused on “... crime, justice, deportation, immigration and social programs. Another 38.3 percent of articles ... involved sports and entertainment.” when reporting about Jamaica, the stories are about crime in Jamaica, political tension, or police brutality,” Henry says. “Where are the stories about the general vibrancy of Jamaican culture, the superb accomplishments of its people, its serious musicians, its excellent literature and poetry?” Henry found racism “... rampant in schools.... There have been a lot of good education initiatives, but they don’t touch down into the day-to-day experiences in the classroom.” According to Henry, only Vietnamese Canadians come close to receiving similarly negative media coverage.

### Race, Class, or Cultural Discrimination?

Other black Canadians speak of different experiences. According to Ilias Abdurhman, who immigrated to Toronto from Ethiopia a decade ago, “Everything is 100 percent better here. I don’t have any fear of being discriminated against. I’m not saying everything is perfect here, but overall, Toronto is a wonderful place.” Barbadian-born business analyst David Grant offers a similar perspective, “I’m sure there are stereotypes but I don’t let it be a problem.... My attitude is ‘That’s

their problem.’ I go about my business and try to be respectful of other people.... I believe in trying to get along with people without giving up your identity. I like my culture, but I truly believe in the corporate world, there are no differences.... I love Toronto....” Moreover, Grant suggests that discrimination may be class- rather than race-based, “I think if you survey professional blacks and non-professionals, the answers would be dramatically different. It all depends on the people you associate with.” Although Ontario provincial Parliament member Alvin Curling, who was born in Jamaica, agrees that the media foster discriminatory attitudes, he believes that ignorance of cultural character contributes to racist stereotypes, “It comes from a positive assertiveness of Jamaicans. If it’s discrimination or a job opportunity, they will go after it in a very aggressive and assertive way.”

### Positive Cultural Identity Promotes Success

Many community leaders feel that increasing awareness of ethnic Canadians’ cultural identities—and of their contribution to Canadians’ pride in their pluralistic society—will change attitudes. Worrick Russell, head of the Caribbean and African Canadian Chamber of Commerce, asserts that this awareness is reflected in our education, legal, and social systems. Political involvement, he believes, will create the greatest attitudinal change, as such involvement did for waves of other immigrants.

Meanwhile, school systems across the country are experimenting with educational choices that provide young people with a positive sense of their cultural identity. Edmonton’s Amiskwacyi Academy public school, which opened in the fall of 2000, follows the provincial curriculum within the context of significant aboriginal cultural norms: “elders provide guidance through storytelling, sweat lodges, ghost dances, and other ceremonies.” Amiskwacyi Academy is one of many alternative education choices—including parent-run charter schools, home schools, and private schools—that not only address a growing aboriginal student population, but also meet a specific “customer” need within the Edmonton public school system. Similarly, the Toronto school board’s parents, teachers, and trustees have fought successfully to retain its programs in international languages and black culture at 17 schools across the city. While students’ continuity in their mother tongue is preserved, they learn about their cultural heritage and

heroes. Language learning facilitates all learning, according to Jack Jedwab, executive director of the Association for Canadian Studies at the University of Quebec, Montreal. Equally important, the success of these students will transform the Canadian cultural landscape.

Sources: Brian Bergman, “Edmonton Experiments with a Diversity of Choice,” *Maclean’s*, May 14, 2001, 25; Catherine Dunphy, “‘My Boys have Done Well,’” *Toronto Star*, May 27, 2001, A7; Elaine Carey, “Black Pride, City Prejudice: Discrimination Lingers on—Racism Remains a Concern for 71% of Those Polled,” <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2381/tobeblack1.html>, retrieved October 18, 2006; and Ashante Infantry, “You Don’t Have to be Black to Suffer Prejudice. You Just Have to Sound Black,” <http://www.geocities.com/obarri.geo/tobeblack.html>, retrieved October 18, 2006.



**Media Coverage of Minority Groups: Ryerson University**

Values and beliefs are often influenced by religion. Christianity coexists with a view of the individual as proactive. In some Muslim and Asian countries, however, it is seen as presumptuous to predict the future by promising action by a certain date. Some Amish and Jewish communities live and work in strict adherence to traditional customs. The Puritan work ethic, embraced as a cultural value throughout the northeastern United States regardless of race or religion, legitimizes wealth by seeing it as a sign of divine favour. In other Christian cultures, a simpler lifestyle is considered to be closer to God.

These differences in values, beliefs, and practices lead to differences in the kinds of appeals that motivate people, as Table 3.2 below illustrates.

## ■ Non-verbal Communication

**Non-verbal communication**—communication that makes meaning without words—permeates every part of our lives. Facial expressions, gestures, our use of time and space—even our pauses and vocal intonations—all communicate pleasure or anger, friendliness or distance, power, and status.

Non-verbal communication is older and more powerful than spoken language. And its symbols can be misinterpreted just as easily as can verbal symbols (words). For example, a woman brought a new idea to her boss, who glared at her, brows together in a frown, as she explained her proposal. The stare and lowered brows symbolized anger to her, and she assumed that he was rejecting her idea. Several months later, she learned that her boss



**Test Your Intercultural IQ with “Culture Connect”**

**TABLE 3.2**  
**Cultural Contrasts in Motivation**

	North American	Japan	Arab Countries
Emotional appeal	Opportunity	Group participation; company success	Religion; nationalism; admiration
Recognition based on	Individual achievement	Group achievement	Individual status; status of class or society
Material rewards	Salary; bonus; profit sharing	Annual bonus; social services; fringe benefits	Gifts for self or family; salary
Threats	Loss of job	Loss of group membership	Demotion, loss of reputation
Values	Competition; risk taking; freedom	Group harmony; belonging	Reputation; family security; religion

Source: Adapted from Farid Elashmawi and Philip R. Harris, *Multicultural Management 2000: Essential Cultural Insights for Global Business Success* (Houston: Gulf, 1998), 169.



## FYI

British language expert and researcher David Graddol claims that we will all attempt to learn at least a smattering of other languages, as a result of living in the global village. English will no longer dominate, and over the next ten years Mandarin will become the most popular second-language choice.

Source: David Graddol, "English Won't Dominate as World Language," *Science* 27 February 2004: Vol. 303, no. 5662, <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/303/5662/1329?rbfvrToken=E1e6644aa44adba34388a5b25475a0eeeb85a9e98> and <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/4387421/>, retrieved October 18, 2006.

always “frowned” when he was concentrating. The facial expression she had interpreted as anger had been intended to convey thinking.

Misunderstandings are even more common in communication across cultures, since non-verbal signals are culturally defined. An Arab student assumed that his North American roommate disliked him intensely because the roommate sat around the room with his feet up on the furniture, soles toward the Arab roommate. Arab culture sees the foot in general and the sole in particular as unclean; showing the sole of the foot is an insult.<sup>9</sup>

As is true of any aspect of communication, knowledge is power: learning about non-verbal symbols gives you the information you need to project the image you want and makes you more conscious of the signals you are interpreting. Since experts claim that 93 percent of all our communication is based on non-verbal symbols, your awareness and correct interpretation of non-verbal communication is vital to your personal and professional development. Remember, however, always to check your perceptions before making assumptions about others' non-verbal signals.

## ■ Body Language

Posture and **body language** connote self-concept, energy, and openness. North American **open body positions** include leaning forward with uncrossed arms and legs, with the arms away from the body. **Closed or defensive body positions** include leaning back, arms and legs crossed or close together, or hands in pockets. As the labels imply, open positions suggest that people are accepting and open to new ideas. Closed positions suggest that people are physically or psychologically uncomfortable, that they are defending themselves and shutting other people out.

People who cross their arms or legs claim that they do so only because the position is more comfortable. Certainly crossing one's legs is one way to be more comfortable in a chair that is the wrong height. Canadian women used to be taught to adopt a “ladylike” posture: arms close to their bodies and knees and ankles together. But notice your own body the next time you're in a perfectly comfortable discussion with a good friend. You'll probably find that you naturally assume open body positions. The fact that so many people in organizational settings adopt closed positions may indicate that many people feel at least slightly uncomfortable in school and on the job.

People of eastern cultures value the ability to sit quietly. They may see the North American tendency to fidget and shift as an indication of a lack of mental or spiritual balance. Even Canadian interviewers and audiences usually respond negatively to nervous gestures such as fidgeting with a tie or hair or jewellery, tapping a pencil, or swinging a foot.



## INSTANT REPLAY

**Culture** is a learned set of assumptions about the norms and values that we internalize and accept as true. Our culture shapes our perceptions of the world around us and influences our communication styles and content.

## Eye Contact

Canadians of European background see eye contact as a sign of honesty. But in many cultures, dropped eyes are a sign of appropriate deference to a superior. Puerto Rican children are taught not to meet the eyes of adults.<sup>10</sup> The Japanese are taught to look at the neck.<sup>11</sup> In Korea, prolonged eye contact is considered rude. The lower-ranking person is expected to look down first.<sup>12</sup> In Muslim countries, women and men are not supposed to make eye contact.

These differences can lead to miscommunication in the multicultural workplace. Supervisors may infer from their eye contact that employees are being disrespectful, when, in fact, the employee is behaving appropriately according to the norms of his or her culture.

## Gestures

Canadians sometimes assume that, if language fails, they can depend on gestures to communicate with non-English-speaking people. But Birdwhistell reported that “although we have been searching for 15 years [1950–65], we have found no gesture or body motion which has the same meaning in all societies.”<sup>13</sup>

Gestures that mean approval in Canada may have very different meanings in other countries. The “thumbs up” sign that means “good work” or “go ahead” in Canada, the United States, and most of Western Europe is a vulgar insult in Greece. The circle formed with the thumb and first finger that means OK in Canada is obscene in Southern Italy and Brazil, and it can mean “you’re worth nothing” in France and Belgium.<sup>14</sup>

In the question period after a lecture, a man asked the speaker, a Puerto Rican professor, if shaking the hands up and down in front of the chest, as though shaking off water, was “a sign of mental retardation.” The professor was horrified: in her culture, the gesture meant “excitement, intense thrill.”<sup>15</sup>

## Space

Concepts of space are also culturally understood. **Personal space** is the distance someone wants between himself/herself and other people in ordinary, non-intimate interchanges. Observation and limited experimentation show that most North Americans, North Europeans, and Asians want a bigger personal space than do Latin Americans, French, Italians, and Arabs. People who are accustomed to lots of personal space and are forced to accept close contact on a crowded elevator or subway react in predictable and ritualistic ways: they stand stiffly and avoid eye contact with others.

Even within a culture, some people like more personal space than do others. One study found that men took up more personal space than women did. In many cultures, people who are of the same age and sex take less personal space than do mixed-age or mixed-sex groups. Latin Americans stand closer to people of the same sex than North Americans do, but North Americans stand closer to people of the opposite sex.



Concepts of space are culturally understood.

## Touch

Repeated studies prove that babies need to be touched to grow and thrive, and that older people are healthier both mentally and physically if they are touched. But some people are more comfortable with touch than others. Some people shake hands in greeting but otherwise don’t like to be touched at all, except by family members or lovers. Other people, having grown up in families that touch a lot, hug as part of a greeting and touch even casual friends. Each kind of person may misinterpret the other. A person who dislikes touch may seem unfriendly to someone who’s used to touching. A toucher may seem overly familiar to someone who dislikes touch.

Studies indicate that in North American culture, touch is interpreted as power: more powerful people touch less powerful people. When the toucher has higher status than the recipient, both men and women liked being touched.<sup>16</sup>

Most parts of North America allow opposite-sex couples to hold hands or walk arm in arm in public but frown on the same behaviour in same-sex couples. People in Asia, the Middle East, and South America have the opposite expectation: male friends or female friends can hold hands or walk arm in arm, but it is slightly shocking for an opposite-sex couple to touch in public. In Iran and Iraq, handshakes between men and women are seen as improper.<sup>17</sup>

### Spatial Arrangements

In North America, the size, placement, and privacy of a person's office connote status. Large corner offices have the highest status. An individual office with a door that closes suggests more status than a desk in a common area.

People who don't know each other well may feel more comfortable with each other if a piece of furniture separates them. For example, in most Canadian interviews, a desk, which both people perceive as part of the interviewer's space, separates the interviewer and the applicant. It's considered inappropriate for the applicant to place his or her property (notebook, purse) on a desk or to lean on the desk. In some situations, a group may work better sitting around a table than just sitting in a circle. In North America, a person sitting at the head of a table is generally assumed to be the group's leader. However, one experiment showed that when a woman sat at the head of a mixed-sex group, observers assumed that one of the men in the group was the leader.<sup>18</sup>



In low-context cultural settings, the size, placement, and privacy of a person's office connote status.

### ■ Time

Canadian organizations—businesses, government, and schools—keep time by the calendar and the clock. Being “on time” is seen as a sign of dependability. Other cultures may keep time by the seasons and the moon, the sun, internal “body clocks,” or a personal feeling that “the time is right.”

Canadians who believe that “time is money” are often frustrated in negotiations with people who take a much more leisurely approach. Part of the miscommunication stems from a major perception difference: people in many other cultures want to take the time to establish a personal relationship before they decide whether to do business with each other.

Miscommunication occurs because various cultures perceive time differently. Many Canadians measure time in five-minute blocks. Someone who is five minutes late to an appointment or a job interview feels compelled to apologize. If the executive or interviewer is running half an hour late, the caller expects to be told about the likely delay when he or she arrives. Some people won't be able to wait that long and will need to reschedule their appointments. But in Latin American and other cultures, 15 minutes or half an hour may be the smallest block of time. To someone who mentally measures time



Tips for Doing Business Internationally



A Beginner's Guide to Culture and Communication

in 15-minute blocks, being 45 minutes late is no worse than being 15 minutes late to someone who is conscious of smaller units.

Edward T. Hall distinguishes between **monochronic cultures**, where people do only one important activity at a time, and **polychronic cultures**, where people do several things at once. Researchers see the United States as monochronic. When U.S. managers feel offended because a Latin American manager also sees other people during “their” appointments, the two kinds of time are in conflict. However, people who eat breakfast while they drive are doing more than one thing at a time. In a few organizations, it is even acceptable to do other work during a meeting. Such “multi-tasking” may indicate that some North American companies are evolving from a monochronic culture to a somewhat polychronic culture.

According to some scholars, Europeans schedule fewer events in a comparable period than North Americans. Perhaps as a result, Germans and German Swiss see North Americans as too time-conscious.<sup>19</sup>

## ■ Other Non-verbal Symbols

Many other symbols can carry non-verbal meanings: clothing, colours, age, and height, to name a few.

In Canada, certain styles and colours of clothing are considered more “professional” and more “credible.” Certain cloths and fabrics—silk and linen, for example—carry non-verbal messages of success, prestige, and competence. In Japan, clothing denotes not only status but also occupational group. Private-school students wear uniforms. Company badges indicate rank within the organization. Workers wear different clothes when they are on strike than they do when they are working.<sup>20</sup>

Colours can also carry cultural meanings in a culture. In Canada, mourners wear black to funerals, while brides wear white at their wedding. In pre-Communist China and in some South American tribes, white is the colour of mourning. Purple flowers are given to the dead in Mexico.<sup>21</sup> In Korea, red ink is used to record deaths but never to write about living people.<sup>22</sup>

North American culture values youth. More and more individuals choose to colour their hair and have surgery to look as youthful as possible. In Japan, younger people defer to older people. North Americans attempting to negotiate in Japan are usually taken more seriously if at least one member of the team is noticeably grey-haired.

Height connotes status in many parts of the world. Executive offices are usually on the top floors; the underlings work below. Even being tall can help a person succeed. Studies have shown that employers are more willing to hire men more than 1.85m tall than shorter men with the same credentials. Studies of real-world executives and graduates have shown that taller men make more money. In one study, every extra inch of height brought in an extra \$600 a year.<sup>23</sup> But being too big can be a disadvantage. A tall, brawny football player complained that people found him intimidating off the field and assumed that he “had the brains of a Twinkie.”

## ■ Oral Communication

Effective oral communication also requires cultural understanding. As Table 3.3 shows, both purpose and content of business introductions differ across cultures.

**TABLE 3.3**  
**Cultural Contrasts in Business Introductions**

	North America	Japan	Arab Countries
Purpose of introduction	Establish status and job identity; network	Establish position in group, build harmony	Establish personal rapport
Image of individual	Independent	Member of group	Part of rich culture
Information	Related to business	Related to company	Personal
Use of language	Informal, friendly; use first name	Little talking	Formal; expression of admiration
Values	Openness, directness, action	Harmony, respect, listening	Religious harmony, hospitality, emotional support

Source: Adapted from Farid Elashmawi and Philip R. Harris, *Multicultural Management 2000: Essential Cultural Insights for Global Business Success* (Houston: Gulf, 1998), 113.



Deborah Tannen



FYI

Progressive sponsorship programs in Manitoba and the Maritimes fast-track healthy, security-approved immigrants—who have money to invest—to these provinces. Indeed, Nova Scotia appointed Canada's only provincial minister of immigration to attract skilled workers, business people, and entrepreneurs. Because of our low birth rate and sparse population, immigrants represent the economic future of Canada, according to Nova Scotia's Rodney MacDonald.

Source: Adapted from Kelly Toughill, "Maritimes Lure Rich Immigrants," *Toronto Star*, 14 March 2005, <http://list.web.net/archives/onip-practitioners-l/2005-March/000562.html>, retrieved August 8, 2006.

Deborah Tannen uses the term conversational style to denote our conversational patterns and the meanings we give to them: the way we show interest, courtesy, social decorum.<sup>24</sup> Your answers to the following questions reveal your own conversational style:

- How long a pause tells you that it's your turn to speak?
- Do you see interruption as rude? Or do you say things while other people are still talking to show that you're interested and to encourage them to say more?
- Do you show interest by asking lots of questions? Or do you see questions as intrusive and wait for people to volunteer whatever they have to say?

One conversational style is not better or worse than another, but people with different conversational styles may feel uncomfortable without knowing why. A boss who speaks slowly may frustrate a subordinate who talks quickly. People who talk more slowly may feel shut out of a conversation with people who talk more quickly. Someone who has learned to make requests directly ("Please pass the salt") may be annoyed by someone who uses indirect requests ("This casserole needs some salt").

In the workplace, conflicts may arise because of differences in conversational style. Generation Xers often use a rising inflection on statements as well as questions. Xers see this style as gentler and more polite. But Boomer bosses may see this speech pattern as hesitant, as if the speaker wants advice—which they then proceed to deliver.<sup>25</sup>

Daniel N. Maltz and Ruth A. Borker believe that differences in conversational style may be responsible for the miscommunication that sometimes occurs in male–female conversations. For example, researchers have found that women are much more likely to nod and to say yes or say *mm hmm* than men are. Maltz and Borker hypothesize that to women, these symbols mean simply, "I'm listening; go on." Men, on the other hand, may decode these symbols as "I agree" or at least "I follow what you're saying so far." A man who receives nods and *mmms* from a woman may feel that she is inconsistent and unpredictable if she then disagrees with him. A woman may feel that a man who doesn't provide any feedback isn't listening to her.<sup>26</sup>

### Understatement and Exaggeration

Closely related to conversational style is the issue of understatement and overstatement. The British have a reputation for understatement. Someone good enough to play at Wimbledon

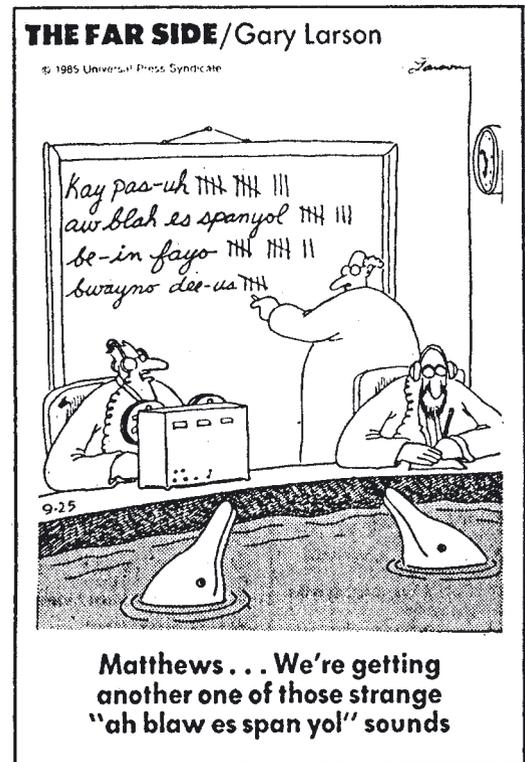
may say he or she “plays a little tennis.” Or ask a Canadian how the meeting yesterday or last night’s game went, and the answer will be “Not bad!” even if the event was a roaring success. On the other hand, many people in the United States exaggerate. A U.S. businessman negotiating with a German said, “I know it’s impossible, but can we do it?” The German saw the statement as nonsensical: by definition, something that is impossible cannot be done at all. The American saw “impossible” as merely a strong way of saying “difficult” and assumed that with enough resources and commitment, the job could, in fact, be done.<sup>27</sup>

**Successful intercultural communicators attempt to understand the communication style the other group prefers.**

### Compliments

The kinds of statements that people interpret as compliments and the socially correct way to respond to compliments also vary among cultures. The statement “You must be really tired” is a compliment in Japan since it recognizes the other person has worked hard. The correct response is “Thank you, but I’m OK.” A Canadian who is complimented on giving a good oral presentation will probably say “Thank you.” A Chinese or Japanese person, in contrast, will apologize: “No, it wasn’t very good.”<sup>28</sup>

Statements that seem complimentary in one context may be inappropriate in another. For example, businesswomen may feel uncomfortable if male colleagues or superiors compliment them on their appearance: the comments suggest that the women are being treated as visual decoration rather than as contributing workers.



Source: The Far Side © 1985 Earworks, Inc. Used by permission.

### Silence

Silence also has different meanings in different cultures and subcultures. North Americans have difficulty doing business in Japan because they do not realize that silence almost always means that the Japanese do not like the ideas.

Different understandings of silence can prolong problems with sexual harassment in the workplace. Women sometimes use silence to respond to comments they find offensive, hoping that silence will signal their lack of appreciation. But some men may think that silence means appreciation or at least neutrality.

## ■ Writing to International Audiences

Most cultures are more formal than ours. When you write to international audiences, use titles, not first names. Avoid contractions, slang, and sports metaphors.

**TABLE 3.4**  
**Cultural Contrasts in Written Persuasive Documents**

	North America	Japan	Arab Countries
Opening	Request action or get reader's attention	Offer thanks; apologize	Offer personal greetings
Way to persuade	Immediate gain or loss of opportunity	Waiting	Personal connections; future opportunity
Style	Short sentences	Modesty, minimize own standing	Elaborate expressions; many signatures
Closing	Specific request	Desire to maintain harmony	Future relationship, personal greeting
Values	Efficiency; directness, action	Politeness; indirectness; relationship	Status; continuation

Source: Adapted from Farid Elashmawi and Philip P. Harris, *Multicultural Management 2000: Essential Cultural Insights for Global Business Success* (Houston: Gulf, 1998), 139.

## PAIBOC

### Questions for Analysis

Use the PAIBOC questions to prepare to communicate interculturally

- P** What are your **purposes** in communicating?
- A** Who is your **audience**? What are their values and expectations? How will they react to the content of your message? What form will make your message accessible to your audience? How should you frame your message to your audience's expectations?
- I** What **information** will meet the needs of your audience and your purposes?

(continued)

The patterns of organization that work for Canadian audiences may need to be modified for international correspondence beyond the United States. For most cultures, buffer negative messages (◀▶ Module 12) and make requests (◀▶ Module 13) more indirect. As Table 3.4 suggests, you may need to modify style, structure, and strategy when writing to international readers. Make a special effort to avoid phrases that your audience could interpret as arrogant or uncaring. Cultural mistakes made orally may float away on the air; those made in writing are permanently recorded.

## ■ With so many different cultures, how can I know enough to communicate?

### *Focus on being sensitive and flexible.*

The first step in understanding people of another culture is to realize that they may do things very differently and that they value their way as much as you do yours. Moreover, people within a single culture differ. The kinds of differences summarized in this module can turn into stereotypes, which can be just as damaging as ignorance. Don't try to memorize the material here as a rigid set of rules. Instead, use the examples to get a sense for the kinds of things that differ from one culture to another. Test these generalizations against your experience. When in doubt, ask.

If you work with people from other cultures or if you plan to travel to a specific country, read about that country or culture and learn a little of the language. Also talk to people. That's really the only way to learn whether someone is wearing black as a sign of mourning, as a fashion statement, or as a colour that slenderizes and doesn't show dirt.

As Brenda Arbeláez suggests, the successful international communicator is

- Aware that his or her preferred values and behaviours are influenced by culture and are not necessarily "right"
- Flexible and open to change
- Sensitive to verbal and non-verbal behaviour

- B** What reasons or audience **benefits** can you use to support your position?
- O** What **objections** can you expect from your audience? What negative content must you de-emphasize or overcome?
- C** What is the **context** of the message, and how will the context affect your audience's response? What is your relationship with your audience? What time of day are you delivering your message? What cultural differences should you be sensitive to? What special circumstances should shape the form and content of your message?



#### INSTANT REPLAY

The successful international communicator is

- Aware that his or her preferred values and behaviours are influenced by culture and are not necessarily “right”
- Flexible and open to change
- Sensitive to verbal and non-verbal behaviour
- Aware of the values, beliefs, and practices in other cultures
- Sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture

- Aware of the values, beliefs, and practices in other cultures
- Sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture.<sup>29</sup>

## ■ How can I make my documents bias free?

*Start by using non-sexist, non-racist, and non-agist language.*

**Bias-free language** is language that does not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, physical condition, race, age, or any other category. Bias-free language is fair and friendly; it complies with the law. It includes all readers; it helps to sustain goodwill. When you produce newsletters or other documents with photos and illustrations, choose a sampling of the whole population, not just part of it.

### ■ Making Language Non-sexist

**Non-sexist language** treats both sexes neutrally. Check to be sure that your writing is free from sexism in four areas: words and phrases, job titles, pronouns, and courtesy titles. Courtesy titles are discussed in ◀▶ Module 9 on format. Words and phrases, job titles, and pronouns are discussed in this module.

#### Words and Phrases

If you find any of the terms in the first column in Table 3.5 in your writing or your company's documents, replace them with terms from the second column.

Not every word containing *man* is sexist. For example, *manager* is not sexist. The word comes from the Latin *manus*, meaning *hand*; it has nothing to do with maleness.

Avoid terms that assume that everyone is married or is heterosexual.

Biased: You and **your husband or wife** are cordially invited to the dinner.

Better: You and **your guest** are cordially invited to the dinner.

#### Job Titles

Use neutral titles that imply that a person of either gender could hold the job. Many job titles are already neutral: *accountant, banker, doctor, engineer, inspector, manager, nurse, pilot, secretary, technician*, to name a few. Other titles reflect gender stereotypes and need to be changed. (See Table 3.5 for specific examples.)

#### Pronouns

When you write about a specific person, use the appropriate gender pronouns:

In **his** speech, **John** Jones said that...

In **her** speech, **Judy** Jones said that...



Some developing countries have gone straight to cell phones, skipping the expensive step of laying cables. Many owners of cellphones have become entrepreneurs, making calls on their phones for a small fee. Now farmers can call to find out what prices are in the cities, so they aren't at the mercy of brokers' claims.

**TABLE 3.5**  
**Eliminating Sexist Terms and Phrases**

Instead of	Use	For this reason
The girl at the front desk	The woman's name or job title: "Ms. Browning," "Rosa," "the receptionist"	Call female employees women just as you call male employees men. When you talk about a specific woman, use her name, just as you use a man's name to talk about a specific man.
The ladies on our staff	The women on our staff	Use parallel terms for males and females. Therefore, use ladies only if you refer to the males on your staff as gentlemen. Few businesses do, since social distinctions are rarely at issue.
Manpower Manhours Manning	Personnel Hours or worker hours Staffing	The power in business today comes from both women and men. Use non-sexist alternatives.
Managers and their wives	Managers and their guests	Managers may be female; not everyone is married.
Businessman	A specific title: executive, accountant, department head, owner of a small business, men and women in business, businessperson	Gender-neutral title
Chairman	Chair, chairperson, moderator	Gender-neutral title
Foreman	Supervisor	Gender-neutral title
Salesman	Salesperson, sales representative	Gender-neutral title
Waitress	Server	Gender-neutral title
Woman lawyer	Lawyer	Gender-neutral title. You would not describe a man as a "male lawyer."
Workman	Worker, employee, or use a specific title: crane operator, bricklayer, etc.	Gender-neutral title

When you are not writing about a specific person, but about anyone who may be in a given job or position, avoid using traditional gender pronouns.

Sexist: a. Each supervisor must certify that the time sheet for his department is correct.

Sexist: b. When the nurse fills out the accident report form, she should send one copy to the Central Division Office.

Business writing uses four ways to eliminate sexist generic pronouns: use plurals, use second person (you), revise the sentence to omit the pronoun, and use pronoun pairs. Whenever you have a choice of two or more ways to make a phrase or sentence non-sexist, choose the alternative that is the smoothest and least conspicuous.

The following examples use these methods to revise sentences *a* and *b* above.

1. Use plural nouns and pronouns.

Non-sexist: a. Supervisors must certify that the **time sheets** for **their departments** are correct.

Note: When you use plural nouns and pronouns, other words in the sentence may need to be made plural too. In the example above, plural supervisors have plural time sheets and departments.

Avoid mixing singular nouns and plural pronouns.

Non-sexist: but a. Each supervisor must certify that the time sheet for their lacks agreement: department is correct.

Since *supervisor* is singular, it is incorrect to use the plural *they* to refer to it. The resulting lack of agreement is acceptable orally but is not yet acceptable to many readers in writing. Instead, use one of the four grammatically correct ways to make the sentence non-sexist.

2. Use *you*.

Non-sexist: a. **You** must certify that the time sheet for **your** department is correct.

Non-sexist: b. When **you** fill out an accident report form, **send** one copy to the Central Division Office.

*You* is particularly good for instructions and statements of the responsibilities of someone in a given position. Using *you* frequently shortens sentences, because you write “Send one copy” instead of “You should send one copy.” It also makes your writing more direct.

3. Substitute an article (a, an, or the) for the pronoun, or revise the sentence so that the pronoun is unnecessary.

Non-sexist: a. The supervisor must certify that the time sheet for **the department** is correct.

Non-sexist: b. **The nurse will**  
 1. **Fill out the accident report form.**  
 2. **Send one copy of the form to the Central Division Office.**

4. When you must focus on the action of an individual, use pronoun pairs.

Non-sexist: a. The supervisor must certify that the time sheet for **his or her** department is correct.

Non-sexist: b. When the nurse fills out the accident report form, **he or she** should send one copy to the Central Division Office.

## ■ Making Language Non-racist and Non-agist

Language is **non-racist** and **non-agist** when it treats all races and ages fairly, avoiding negative stereotypes of any group. Use these guidelines to check for bias in documents you write or edit:

- **Give someone’s race or age only if it is relevant to your story.** When you do mention these characteristics, give them for everyone in your story—not just the non-Caucasian, non-young-to-middle-aged adults you mention.

- **Refer to a group by the term it prefers. As preferences change, change your usage.** Sixty years ago, *Negro* was preferred as a more dignified term than *coloured* for North Americans of African origin. As times changed, *black person* and *African American* replaced it in the United States. In Canada, *black person* is generally preferred to *African Canadian*, which is more often used for recent immigrants from Africa and thus might not include, for example, black Canadians from Caribbean nations, or black Canadians who came to Nova Scotia as Loyalists in the late eighteenth century.

*Asian* is preferred to *Oriental*, which may be considered offensive.

*East Indian* is frequently misused to include people of non-Indian origin, such as new Canadians from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. *South Asian* is more accurate, and *Pakistani*, *Sri Lankan*, and *Bangladeshi* are preferred.

*Eskimo* is a negative label. A better term is *Inuit*, which means *the people*.

Aboriginal peoples is generally used to refer to Canada's indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. But usage will vary depending on the preference of the individual or group referred to. For example, most Aboriginal peoples consider *Indian* offensive or at least a source of confusion with people from India. Where possible, consider referring to the specific band or nation of the individual (for example, Métis, Mohawk, Cree, Haida).

*Older people* and *mature customers* are more generally accepted terms than *senior citizens* or *golden agers*.

- **Avoid terms that suggest that competent people are unusual.** The statement “She is an intelligent Métis woman” suggests that the writer expects most Métis women to be stupid. “He is an asset to his race” suggests that excellence in the “race” is rare. “He is a spry 70-year-old” suggests that the writer is amazed that anyone that old can still move.

## ■ Talking about People with Disabilities and Diseases

A disability is a physical, mental, sensory, or emotional impairment that interferes with the major tasks of daily living. A March 2000 study identified 14.5 percent of the working-age Canadian population as having a disability. The number of people with disabilities will rise as the population ages.<sup>30</sup>

- **People-first language** focuses on the person, not the condition. Use it instead of outdated adjectives used as nouns that imply that the condition defines the person.
- **Avoid negative terms, unless the audience prefers them.** Preference takes precedence over positive emphasis: use the term a group prefers. People who lost their hearing as infants, children, or young adults often prefer to be called *deaf*. But people who lose their hearing as older adults often prefer to be called *hard of hearing*, even when their hearing loss is just as great as someone who identifies as part of deaf culture.

Just as people in a single ethnic group may prefer different labels based on generational or cultural divides, so differences exist within the disability community (see Table 3.6). Using the right term requires keeping up with changing preferences. If your target audience is smaller than the whole group, use the term preferred by that audience, even if the group as a whole prefers another term.

Some negative terms, however, are never appropriate. Negative terms such as *afflicted*, *suffering from*, *the victim of*, and *struck down by* also suggest an outdated view of illness.

**TABLE 3.6****Eliminating Terms and Phrases That Discriminate against People with Disabilities**

Instead of	Use	For this reason
The mentally retarded	Developmentally delayed	The condition does not define the person or his or her potential
The blind	People with vision impairments	
Cancer patients	People being treated for cancer	

## ■ Choosing Bias-Free Photos and Illustrations

When you produce a document with photographs or illustrations, check the visuals for possible bias. Do they show people of both sexes and all races? Is there a sprinkling of various kinds of people (younger and older, people using wheelchairs, etc.)? It's OK to have individual pictures that have just one sex or one race; the photos as a whole do not need to show exactly 50 percent men and 50 percent women. But the general impression should suggest that diversity is welcome and normal.

Check relationships and authority figures as well as numbers. If all the men appear in business suits and the women in maids' uniforms, the pictures are sexist even if an equal number of men and women are pictured. If the only black people and Filipinos pictured are factory workers, the photos support racism even when equal numbers of people from each race are shown.



Don't use biased clip art or stock photos: look for alternatives to the kind of clip art shown at left, or create your own bias-free illustrations.



## Employability Skills 2000+

Please see the OLC to preview the key skills from the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ covered in this module.

## Review of Key Points

1. Define culture. Give five examples of your cultural norms.
2. What five behaviours do successful intercultural communicators adopt?
3. What four methods can you use to make a sentence non-sexist?
4. What policies and laws recognize diversity in the workplace?
5. What is bias-free language?
6. Identify and explain six nonverbal symbols that differ among cultures.

## Assignments for Module 3

### Questions for Critical Thinking

- 3.1 It's sexist to always put the male pronoun first in pronoun pairs (e.g., he or she rather than she or he or s/he). Why do the authors of this book recommend that method? Which method do you prefer?
- 3.2 Suppose you know your audience is sexist, agist, racist, or otherwise prejudiced. How should you adapt your message to your audience? What are the ethical implications of your adapting?
- 3.3 You can't possibly learn what every symbol means in every culture. How can you avoid offending the people you work with?
- 3.4 What other cultures are you most likely to work with? How could you learn about those cultures?

### Exercises and Problems

#### 3.5 Revising Sexist Job Titles

Suggest non-sexist alternatives for each of the following:

cleaning lady  
alderman

mailman  
night watchman

garbage man  
male nurse  
mail boy  
actress

repairman  
salesman  
waitress  
stewardess

#### 3.6 Eliminating Biased Language

Explain the source of bias in each of the following and revise to remove the bias.

1. We recommend hiring Jim Renker and Elizabeth Shuman. Both were very successful summer interns. Jim drafted the report on using rap music in ads, and Elizabeth really improved the look of the office.
2. All sales associates and their wives are invited to the picnic.
3. Although he is blind, Mr. Morin is an excellent group leader.
4. Unlike many Caribbean Canadians, Yvonne has extensive experience designing Web pages.

5. Chris Gottlieb  
Pacific Perspectives  
6300 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC  
Gentlemen:
6. Enrique Torres is very intuitive for a man.
7. Twenty-First-Century Parenting shows you how to persuade your husband to do his share of child-care chores.
8. Mr. Paez, Mr. O'Connor, and Tonya will represent our office at the convention.
9. Sue Corcoran celebrates her 50th birthday today. Stop by her cubicle at noon to get a piece of cake and to help us sing “The Old Grey Mare Just Ain’t What She Used to Be.”
10. Because older customers tend to be really picky, we will need to give a lot of details in our ads.

### 3.7 Dealing with Discrimination

Despite Canada’s reputation for tolerance, courtesy, and fair play, many of its citizens frequently experience discriminatory behaviour. Some believe that prejudice is systemic—that bias against visible minorities, women, people with disabilities, and seniors is built into our legal and judicial systems and demonstrated daily in our assumptions and attitudes.

Recent media attention has focused on such culturally sensitive issues as racism among members of the police force and discriminatory hiring and

promotion practices in Canadian post-secondary institutions.

Find a specific, relevant news story of cultural bias or discrimination. Or use your own experience to identify a serious miscommunication based on cultural assumptions. Write a summary of the news story or of your experience. Using what you have learned in Modules 1 and 2, write a memo to your classmates and your professor, providing specific ideas about how to deal positively with such a situation.

### 3.8 Identifying Sources of Miscommunication

In each of the following situations, identify one or more ways that cultural differences may be leading to miscommunication.

- a. Alan is a Canadian sales representative in Mexico. He makes appointments and is careful to be on time. But the person he’s calling on is frequently late. To save time, Alan tries to get right to business. But his hosts want to talk about sightseeing and his family. Even worse, his appointments are interrupted constantly, not only by business phone calls, but also by long conversations with other people and even the customers’ children who come into the office. Alan’s first progress report is very negative. He hasn’t yet made a sale. Perhaps Mexico just isn’t the right place to sell his company’s products.
- b. To help her company establish a presence in Japan, Susan wants to hire a local interpreter who can advise her on business customs. Kana Tomari has superb qualifications on paper. But when Susan tries to probe about her experience, Kana just says, “I will do my best. I will try very hard.” She never gives details about any of the previous positions she’s held. Susan begins to wonder whether the résumé is inflated.
- c. Stan wants to negotiate a joint venture with a Chinese company. He asks Tung-Sen Lee if the Chinese people have enough discretionary income to afford his product. Mr. Lee is silent for a time, and then says, “Your product is good. People in the West must like it.” Stan smiles, pleased that Mr. Lee recognizes the quality of his product, and he gives Mr. Lee a contract to sign. Weeks later, Stan still hasn’t heard anything. If China is going to be so inefficient, he wonders if he really should try to do business there.
- d. Elspeth is very proud of her participatory management style. On assignment in India, she is careful not to give orders but to ask for suggestions. But people rarely suggest anything. Even a formal suggestion system doesn’t work. And to make matters worse, she doesn’t sense the respect and camaraderie of the plant she managed in Canada. Perhaps, she decides gloomily, people in India just aren’t ready for a female boss.

### 3.9 Advising a Hasty Subordinate

---

Three days ago, one of your subordinates forwarded to everyone in the office a bit of email humour he'd received from a friend. Titled "You know you're a Newfie

when..." the message poked fun at Newfoundland and Labrador speech, attitudes, and lifestyles. Today you get this message from your subordinate:

Subject: Should I Apologize?

I'm getting flamed left and right because of the Newfoundland message. I thought it was funny, but some people just can't take a joke. So far I've tried not to respond to the flames, figuring that would just make things worse. But now I'm wondering if I should apologize. What do you think?

Answer the message.

### 3.10 Responding to a Complaint

---

You're the director of corporate communications; your office produces the employee newsletter.

Today you get this email message from Caroline Huber:

Subject: Complaint about Sexist Language

The article about the "Help Desk" says that Martina Luna and I "are the key customer service representatives 'manning' the desk." I don't MAN anything! I WORK.

Respond to Caroline, and send a message to your staff, reminding them to edit newsletter stories

as well as external documents to replace biased language.

### 3.11 Asking about Travel Arrangements

---

The CEO is planning a trip to visit colleagues in another country (you pick the country). As executive assistant to the CEO of your organization, it's your job to make travel plans. At this stage, you don't know anything except dates and flights. (The CEO will arrive in the country at 7 A.M. local time on the 28th of next month, and stay for three days.) It's your job to find out what the plans are and communicate any of the CEO's requirements.

Write an email message to your contact.

*Hints:*

- Pick a business, non-profit organization, or government agency you know something about, making assumptions about the kinds of things its executive would want to do during an international visit.
- How much international travelling does your CEO do? Has he or she ever been to this country before? What questions will he or she want answered?

### 3.12 Sending a Draft to Japan

---

You've drafted instructions for a product that will be sold in Japan. Before the text is translated, you want to find out whether the pictures will be clear. So you send an email to your Japanese counterpart, Takashi Haneda, asking for a response within a week.

Write an email message; assume that you will send the pictures as an attachment.

### 3.13 Creating a Web Page

Create a Web page for managers who must communicate across cultures.

Assume that this page can be accessed from the organization's intranet. Offer at least seven links. (More links are better.) You may offer information as well as links to other pages with information. At the top of the page, offer an overview of what the page covers. At the bottom of the page, put the creation and update date and your name and email address.

*As your instructor directs,*

- Turn in two printed copies of your page(s). On another page, give the URLs for each link.
- Turn in one printed copy of your page(s) and a disk with the HTML code and .gif files.
- Write a memo to your instructor identifying the audience for whom the page is designed and explaining (1) the search strategies you used to find

material on this topic, (2) why you chose the pages and information you've included, and (3) why you chose the layout and graphics you've used.

- Post your memo in an email message to the class.
- Present your page orally to the class.

*Hints:*

- Limit your page to just one culture or country.
- Try to cover as many topics as possible: history, politics, notable people, arts, conversational style, customs, and so forth. For a culture in another country, also include money, living accommodations, geography, transport, weather, business practices, and so forth.
- Chunk your links into small groups under headings.
- See  Module 5 on Web page design.

### 3.14 Requesting Information about a Country

Use one or more of the following ways to get information about a country. Information you might focus on could include

- Business opportunities
  - History and geography
  - Principal exports and imports
  - Dominant religions
  - Holidays
  - School system
  - Political system
- Visit Industry Canada's Strategis Web site for International Market Research and Country Commercial Guides at <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inibi-iai.nsf/vwGeneratedInterE/Home> and click Country/Region Information.

- Check the country's trade office, if there is one in your city.
- Interview someone from that country or someone who has lived there.
- Read published materials about the country.

*As your instructor directs,*

- Share your findings orally with a small group of students.
- Summarize your findings in a memo to your instructor.
- Present your findings to the class.
- Email your findings to the class.
- Join with a group of classmates to write a group report on the country.

### 3.15 Answering an Inquiry about Photos

You've just been named vice president for diversity, the first person in your organization to hold this position.

Today, you receive the following memo from Sheila Lathan, who edits the employee newsletter:

Subject: Photos in the Employee Newsletter

Please tell me what to do about photos in the monthly employee newsletter. I'm concerned that almost no single issue represents the diversity of employees we have here.

As you know, our layout allows two visuals each month. One of those is always the employee of the month (EM). In the last year, most of those have been male and all but two have been white. What makes it worse is that people want photos that make them look good. You may remember that Ron Olmos was the EM two months ago; in the photo he wanted me to use, you can't tell that he's in a wheelchair. Often the EM is the only photo; the other visual is a graph of sales or something relating to quality.

Even if the second visual is another photo, it may not look balanced in terms of gender and race. After all, 62 percent of our employees are women, and 70 percent are non-white. Should the pictures try to represent those percentages? The leadership positions (both in management and in the union) are heavily male and white. Should we run pictures of people doing important things and risk continuing the imbalance?

I guess I could use more visuals, but then there wouldn't be room for as many stories—and people really like to see their names in print. Plus, giving people information about company activities and sales is important to maintaining goodwill. A bigger newsletter would be one way to have more visuals and keep the content, but with the cost-cutting measures we're under, that doesn't look likely.

What should I do?

As your instructor directs,

- a. Work in a small group with students to come up with a recommendation for Sheila.
- b. Write a memo responding to Sheila.
- c. Write an article for the employee newsletter about the photo policy you recommend and how it relates to the company's concern for diversity.

## Polishing Your Prose

### Using Idioms

Idioms are phrases that have specific meanings different from the meanings for each individual word.

Idiom	Meaning
Cut to the chase	Express your main point immediately
Read between the lines	Look for a hidden message

Like idioms, slang changes the definitions of words. *Bad*, a word that is negative, becomes positive when used in slang to denote something good or desirable. Dictionaries often are slow to adapt to slang, which changes constantly.

You need to understand a culture to make sense of its idioms. Because idioms usually violate the rules of standard edited English, they are particularly troublesome for people new to the language.

To learn idioms,

1. Study native speakers in person and on television. When possible, ask native

speakers what unfamiliar words and phrases mean.

2. Underline unfamiliar passages in newspapers and magazines. Ask a friend or your instructor to explain their meaning.
3. Practise what you learn with a conversation partner.

### Exercises

Explain what these 10 common idiomatic phrases mean in business.

1. Race the clock
2. From A to Z
3. Juggle a schedule
4. Catch a plane (or cab)
5. Punch the clock
6. Sign on the dotted line
7. Cold call a customer
8. In the black/in the red
9. Open up new markets
10. Slam dunk the competition

**Check your answers to the odd-numbered exercises on page 571.**

## ■ Online Learning Centre



Visit the Online Learning Centre at [www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/locker](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/olc/locker) to access module quizzes, a searchable glossary, résumé and letter templates, additional business writing samples, CBC videos, and other learning and study tools.