

A culture adjustment period is normal for any visitor anywhere. Struggling with foreign ways and language can be stressful. You may even conclude that people in the U.S. are unresponsive, and you may wish you were back home. Understanding why Americans behave the way they do may help you understand your own feelings.

About 16 percent of all Americans move to a new home every year. Contrast this with the years—even centuries—of family relationships that you may be accustomed to in your home country. By necessity, Americans have learned to make quick friendships, but sometimes they feel few of them will become permanent relationships. This casual attitude may cause misunderstandings.

Good wishes are common, but different cultures express them in different ways. In the U.S. it is always polite to say, "This is new to me. Could you explain it, please?" Asking questions about our customs gives us a chance to learn about yours. We would like to know you better, but we do not always know what to ask. If a misunderstanding occurs, please help us learn how not to repeat it with someone else from your country. This booklet is trying to do the same thing for you.

Social Invitations

We hope that you will meet and visit Bloomington families and that these hints will make you feel comfortable when you are invited out.

Acceptance You may accept or refuse an invitation by telephone, e-mail, or letter. It helps the hosts, who usually do their own cooking, if you do so promptly. Never accept an invitation unless you really plan to go. To refuse, it is enough to say, "Thank you for inviting me, but I will not be able to come." If sickness or unavoidable problems make you change your plans, please be certain to tell your hosts as soon as possible before the time when you are expected. Because the table may be set and food prepared for a certain number of people, do not bring a friend with you unless you have asked and received permission. When you accept an invitation, be certain you understand where you are going and how

to get there. Ask for directions. If you are offered a ride, be certain the driver knows where to find you.

Food If you have dietary restrictions and you are invited for a meal, tell your hosts ahead of time. They will understand, and it will help in planning food and drink for everyone to enjoy together. If you must refuse something after it is prepared, simply say politely, "No, thank you." They may be able to offer a simple substitute. It is a compliment to ask for a second helping, if you see there is enough. *Don't refuse food out of politeness because it may not be offered a second time unless you take some the first time.*

Promptness Public meetings, plays, concerts, weddings, schools and classes, and formal dinners begin at the time scheduled. It is often considered impolite to be even a few minutes late. A cocktail party or reception may be attended any time between the scheduled hours. Any personal appointments with professors, doctors, and other professional people require you to be on time. However, sometimes emergencies delay these people. If this delay creates a hardship for you, discuss rescheduling your appointment with the office staff.

Informality When you eat with a family, you may find a formal dinner served in the dining room or an informal meal served in the kitchen or at a picnic table. The formality is an honor, but the informality means that we wish to know you and for you to know us. You may ask what to wear if the invitation doesn't give you an idea.

One informal American party custom is a "potluck" or "pitch-in" meal, often given by a school, church, or group of friends. Each participant or family brings a dish of food, enough to feed several people, to the party site, along with a serving spoon or fork. For a small potluck, participants may specify in advance what kind of food they will bring—a salad, a dessert, a main dish, etc.—for larger ones, the mixture of dishes is left to chance. People often take the opportunity to prepare a favorite regional or national dish. If your dish will be unknown to many guests, you might put a card by it listing its name and ingredients.

Thanks A short note is an adequate expression of gratitude for any entertainment or visit, even overnight. Guests may also, if they wish, take a bottle of wine or some flowers as a small token of appreciation. Aside from this, *Bloomington host families do not expect gifts from their guests and might even be embarrassed by them, unless they have done something out of the ordinary for you.* You might consider inviting host families to special events or to parties sponsored by your national group, or you might offer to cook your specialty in your friends' kitchen.

Favors or Offers of Help When you say thank you for a favor, Americans sometimes reply casually, "Oh, any time!" In most cases we mean, "I was happy to do it. I'd be willing to do it again." But, we seldom mean, "Ask me every time."

Meeting People You know that you are new here, but you may not realize that many of your neighbors also are newcomers, at least to Bloomington. Many people feel lonely because they hesitate to introduce themselves. If you want to meet a neighbor or classmate, feel free to introduce yourself and extend an invitation. The other person may have wondered how to meet you.

If you have met someone you like, or have received an invitation from someone, and then you do not hear from the person again, it is possible that he or she is waiting for you to take the initiative. Do not worry if your circumstances do not allow you to entertain lavishly. An invitation to share baked goods and coffee or snacks and lemonade, or a suggestion that you meet and do something together, will let the other person know that you are interested in continuing the relationship.

If your schedule is very crowded, but you wish to let a friend know that you have not forgotten him or her, it is perfectly proper to telephone or e-mail and inquire how the friend is and explain that you are busy. You might suggest a future time period, such as "Let's get together after exams" or "early next month." Busy Americans use the telephone and e-mail for socializing as well as for business and setting up appointments. The term usually used for this activity is "keeping in touch."

Social Equality

Equality of Manners We know that we have not yet achieved the U.S. dream of true equality for all, but generally we respect each individual regardless of occupation, sex, race, or religion. Thus, the professor, the student, the cab driver, the doctor, the custodian, the server, the shop clerk, or any person you meet will expect the same consideration and courtesy. On the other hand, our "good manners" are sometimes very informal. If people seem friendly, whatever their words, you can believe they mean to be courteous.

Multiculturalism Historically, many Americans have viewed the makeup of our country as a cultural "melting pot," where people of various backgrounds have sought to minimize their differences and meld together into a new, uniquely American composition. Currently, there is a trend toward recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals and the subcultures with which they identify, such as differences in religious tradition, national origin, racial and ethnic heritage, and sexual orientation. In addition, the status of women in our society as equals is a reality. A multicultural environment places value on the personal integrity of, and mutual respect among, all individuals and celebrates rich cultural diversity.

Women Women have an active part in community life. They often make the social arrangements for the family and participate in most activities with their husbands. Both parents take care of small children, especially if the mother is a student or has a job outside the home. Most families do their own cooking and housework. Both men and women may be responsible for home chores and family business records. Many working women hold responsible and respected jobs equal to men's. They may be insulted if you assume they are only assistants with no power to make decisions.

Conversation

With Strangers If you have come from a more formal society, it is easy to misinterpret the casualness of Americans. This is especially true when dealing with strangers. It is possible to be addressed, and even to be asked questions, by people whom you have never met: a check-out person in a store, a cab driver, a server in a restaurant, or someone standing with you in line or at a bus stop. *The questions such people ask might seem remarkably personal, even prying, to someone not accustomed to this informality.* However, the intention is usually friendly. The polite response is a smile and a pleasant but brief reply. You may ask the same or a similar question if you wish, or the person may volunteer similar information without being asked. Turning away or displaying an obvious interest in someone or something else usually puts an end to such a conversation, or you may find it pleasant to continue. The important thing is not to be offended by such overtures and not to feel rejected if they end rather abruptly.

Listening Styles It is common for people from some parts of the country (including Bloomington) to "encourage" someone who is speaking. This is done in a variety of ways, often by nodding one's head or adding sounds and words in the middle of the sentence. Examples might include "mm-hmm, really, oh my," or similar expressions. Persons making such noises while you speak are not bored, trying to interrupt, or wishing to speak themselves. Rather, they are indicating that they are interested and still listening.

Unspoken Language

A common cause of misunderstanding between persons of different cultures is the way in which we interpret gestures and other unspoken signals. These are seldom taught in language classes and are so automatic that we forget that they may mean different things in different cultures. It would rarely occur to someone from the U.S., for instance, that the right hand might be more acceptable than the left, whereas in some cultures it is offensive to offer someone something with the left hand. *Nor would it seem to most U.S. women that looking directly at a man could be interpreted as bold, flirtatious, or disrespectful.* Here it signals directness and honesty. Burping after a meal, a compliment in some countries, would be mildly offensive here, perhaps interpreted as overeating, and a "pardon me" is appropriate. The actual distance between people while they talk varies from culture to culture, but it is not consciously thought about. A light touch on shoulder or arm is usually only a way of gaining attention or reassuring someone. Some of the most subtle differences in "body language" or customs are described by anthropologist Edward Hall in his book *The Silent Language*.

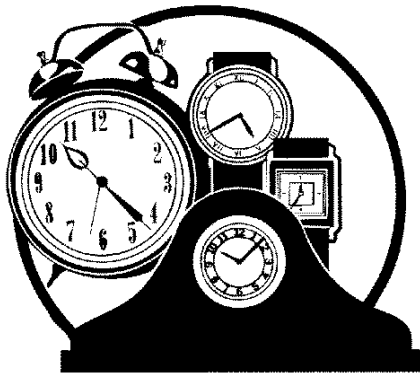
To avoid misunderstanding, keep in mind the possibility that the unspoken language that you exchange with people from other cultures may not say what you think it does. If their words and gestures seem to disagree, it might be safer to believe the words or simply to ask the individual.

Tipping

Service charges, or tips, are not added to the bill in U.S. hotels or restaurants but often are expected and needed by the employees.

Where Not to Tip You do not tip anyone at the Indiana Memorial Union, in a cafeteria or in motels, or in any place where you provide your own service. You do not tip on buses or airplanes.

Where to Tip A tip of 15 or 20 percent of the bill is suitable for a restaurant server, taxi driver, or hairdresser. Porters in a hotel, on a train, or at an airport may be tipped a dollar per bag.



Time Schedules

Families You can safely telephone most people between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. without waking them. Most families eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For many families, the biggest meal is the evening dinner. This meal is usually between 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., although dinner parties are often later. A supper is another term for an evening meal that is not just a snack.

Business Hours In addition to the business hours discussed throughout this booklet, the following are usual schedules. Many barber shops are closed all day Wednesday in Bloomington. Most offices are closed Sunday. Some close Saturday afternoon or do not open at all on Saturday. Many offices, including those of physicians and dentists, are closed Wednesday afternoon. Some have Saturday hours by appointment only. The staff at these offices will be happy to tell you their hours if you phone them.

Holidays

Federal government offices, including post offices, are closed on federal holidays and on all Sundays. Federal holidays are indicated below with an "F." Banks are closed on all federal holidays, the Friday before Easter, and on Election Day; however, ATM service is available 24 hours a day. The following are some of the major holidays:

New Year's Day—January 1. Nearly everything is closed. F.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday—Observed in mid-January. Martin Luther King Jr. was a civil rights leader who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. F.

Valentine's Day—February 14. People send cards of affection (or humor) to sweethearts, family, and friends.

Presidents' Day—Third Monday in February. In honor of U.S. Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. F.

Passover—March or April. A Jewish celebration in memory of the Israelites' escape from Egypt.

Easter—A Sunday in March or April. Christian celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. Children expect a mythical "Easter Bunny" to hide a basket of candy and colored, hard-boiled eggs for them to find.

Memorial Day—The Monday nearest May 30. Graves were originally decorated in memory of dead veterans from all wars; graves of all dead are now remembered. F.



Independence Day—July 4. On that date in 1776, the United States declared independence from Britain. There is a parade in town and evening fireworks. F.

Labor Day—First Monday in September. This day honors the working person. F.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—September or October. Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement.

Columbus Day—The Monday nearest October 12 celebrates the day in 1492 when Christopher Columbus landed in the Western Hemisphere. F.

Halloween—October 31. Children wearing costumes may knock at the door saying "Trick or Treat." They are asking for candy or small trinkets.

Election Day—First Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Banks, bars, and all liquor stores are closed. The same closings are in effect during "primaries," or party elections, in the spring.

Veterans Day—November 11. Honor is paid to veterans of all wars, and the end of World War I is remembered. F.

Thanksgiving—Fourth Thursday in November. In remembering the first U.S. Thanksgiving, a feast of Pilgrim and American Indian friends in 1621, we also indirectly celebrate religious freedom. Visitors in the home are especially welcome at this time. F.

Hanukkah—Early December. Jewish Feast of Lights.

Christmas—December 25. Christian celebration of the birth of Christ. It is a family time and a season of gift giving. Santa Claus is the U.S. version of St. Nicholas; children expect Santa to leave gifts the night before Christmas while they are sleeping. During the early weeks in December, children may visit a costumed "Santa" in a shopping center to tell him their wishes. The "Holiday Season" usually means the time from Thanksgiving until New Year's Day. Most stores and offices are closed. F.

Did you know that . . . ?

- Indiana University serves more than 96,000 students on eight campuses and is one of the largest universities in the United States. The Bloomington campus has more than 38,000 students and is the largest in the IU system.
- Guarantees and warranties that come with new appliances should not be thrown away. Keep the register receipt with the purchase date. Fill out and mail to the company the registration certificate that comes with a new appliance. Appliances broken within the warranty time limit should be returned to the store where purchased or sent to the manufacturer for repair.
- If you have a complaint against a merchant or need prepurchase facts about a product, you can write a letter about it to "Hotline," *Herald-Times*, 1900 S. Walnut St., 47403.
- Animals found in the woods and fields of Indiana include the beaver, fox, deer, skunk, otter, raccoon, coyote, rabbit, squirrel, muskrat, opossum, woodchuck, and chipmunk.
- In Bloomington, Kirkwood Ave. (Fifth St.) forms the dividing line between addresses labeled North and South, while Walnut St. divides those addresses labeled East from those labeled West. It also divides the zip code boundaries. Houses with even numbers are on the west or north side of a street, those with odd numbers on the east or south.
- The state bird is the cardinal; the state tree, the tulip tree; and the state motto, "The Crossroads of America." The state flower is the peony; the state stone is limestone; the state river, the Wabash; and the state song is "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away," by Paul Dresser.
- You do not need to boil water from the faucet. It has been purified.
- You can rent vacuum cleaners, tools, electronic equipment, camping equipment, furniture, and hundreds of other items from rental stores. Look in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory under "Rental Service Stores."

- Hoagy Carmichael, who wrote the song "Stardust," went to IU and spent a great deal of time in Bloomington. Carmichael Center is a shopping area at the corner of Kirkwood Ave. and Indiana Ave.
- The origin of the nickname "Hoosier" has never been determined. Some think it came from "Who's yer friend?" Some think it came from, "Who's here?" Some think it came from "husher"—a slang word for a fighting man who could "hush" others with his fist.

United States Idioms

An idiom is a word or combination of words with meanings not always easy to understand. Too often, we *take it for granted* that everyone knows these phrases that place an interesting vocabulary *at one's fingertips*.

Though we are no *stuffed shirts*, we'll tell you *straight out* that, *on the whole*, current slang expressions include such unprintable vocabulary that it would be out of the question to include them here. Listed below, however, are some idioms that you will hear *every now and then*. Study these *once in a while*. Don't *brush them aside*, for it will be a *feather in your cap* if you understand them.

Here are the idioms we just used:

- Take for granted**—to assume
- At one's fingertips**—easily recalled
- Stuffed shirt**—pompous, inflexible person
- Straight out**—in a direct manner; openly
- On the whole**—generally; after consideration
- Out of the question**—unthinkable; impossible
- Every now and then/Once in a while**—at intervals; occasionally
- Brush them aside**—ignore them
- Feather in your cap**—praiseworthy accomplishment

Here are some other idioms you might hear:

- A lemon**—a bad buy or purchase
- Above board**—honest; straightforward, without tricks
- Beat around the bush**—avoid speaking directly
- Beat it**—leave quickly

Blow it—lose an opportunity through foolish errors

Break the ice—make a beginning

Buried—overloaded with work or tasks

Bury the hatchet—make peace; reunite; become reconciled

By the skin of one's teeth—just barely

Call off—cancel

Call up or give a call—contact by telephone

Cool—calm, controlled; agreeable; acceptable, OK; excellent

Cool it—be calm

Cop out—quit; avoid a responsibility

Don't sweat the small stuff—do not worry excessively about unimportant details

Down in the dumps—gloomy; morose; depressed

Down to earth—practical; straightforward, simple (person)

Drive up the wall—to irritate; make someone upset or frustrated

Drop in—visit without a specific invitation

Drop off—deliver to a designated location

Drop out—quit before completion of a goal

Dude—an unnamed male; an interjection, like "Hey!"

Face the music—prepare to accept the results of one's actions

Feel it in my bones—feel or sense what is going to happen

For a song—for a very low price; for a bargain

Freeze!—Do not move at all! (often said by police officers)

Get a life—do not waste time being concerned about trivial problems

Get cold feet—become afraid to carry out a plan

Get in one's hair (or on one's back)—bother; pester; annoy

Get on the bandwagon—support an apparently successful cause

Get with the program—come back to deal with the issue at hand

Gets under one's skin—irritates; affects deeply

Getting down to brass tacks—concentrating on the facts