

## POINT ETIQUETTE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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*Abstract:*

In this article, we will explore the cultural variations in the etiquette surrounding pointing gestures across different societies. Pointing, a seemingly universal and instinctive action, carries diverse social meanings and connotations depending on the cultural context. While in some Western cultures, such as the United States or Europe, pointing is often used informally to indicate objects or directions, it can be considered impolite or aggressive in other regions like East Asia or the Middle East. In countries like Japan or Indonesia, pointing directly at people or objects is frowned upon and gestures like using the entire hand or a subtle nod are preferred. The analysis also examines how historical, religious, and social norms shape these etiquette rules, influencing interpersonal communication and behavior. Understanding these differences is crucial for avoiding misunderstandings and promoting respectful interaction in a globalized world. The study highlights the need for cross-cultural awareness, particularly in multicultural environments, international business, and diplomacy, where nonverbal communication plays a significant role in establishing trust and mutual respect.

*Key words:* cultural variations, instinctive action, connotations, cross-cultural awareness, multicultural environment, diplomacy, nonverbal communication, mutual respect.

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In certain nations, pointing with the middle finger is considered impolite. While pointing the finger is certainly considered impolite in many cultures, it is considered extremely offensive in some, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. There, making thumb gestures toward objects is regarded as far more courteous. Pointing is only appropriate for inanimate objects not people in many African nation.

People in certain nations make gestures with their mouths twisted. For instance, pointing with the lips rather than the thumb or index finger is typical in Nicaragua. Are you wondering how this is done precisely? All of it begins with a sort of duck face puckering up. The person can then express what they are trying to point out by moving their lips forward or sideways. In order to signal that something interesting is happening nearby, this gesture is typically coupled by a directed head movement.

Using your left hand for eating or performing other tasks is frowned upon in several nations. The left hand is regarded as filthy in these countries because people clean themselves with their left hands after using the restroom. Much of the Middle East, India, Sri Lanka, and portions of Africa follow this ritual. When greeting people,

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exchanging money, handling items, and, of course, eating, always use your right hand when you are in these parts of the world.

The Yoruba tribe, a Nigerian ethnic group, takes greeting customs seriously, especially when it comes to their elders. Traditionally, young people will bow their heads in greeting when an adult approach. More precisely, men prostrate themselves, and women kneel. These customary motions are expressions of reverence and esteem for the community's elders. In Nigeria, this tradition is not followed by other ethnic groups [1].

The majority of us today work across cultural and economic divides, even though many "old school dos and don'ts" no longer hold true in many professional and social contexts. In many cases, it is anticipated that procedural recommendations will be provided. But in as many other cases, as your profession progresses, you might not be made aware of delicate aspects of convention. When in doubt, always make an effort to ask. The majority of business partners and social hosts will value your inquiry if it enables you to show up and behave properly.

A smile and the necessary information are essential when entering any social or professional setting. It's also critical to allow your grin to perform its magic. I've been to too many meetings and social gatherings when people who wear too much perfume can mix and produce an unwanted odor. This can be both disruptive and distracting in business meetings. Some people's ability to focus or stay in the room can be overwhelmed by allergies and sensitive noses. If not, too much fragrance is present, it can at least lead to unfavorable reactions that need to be emotionally resolved before you can proceed with the purpose of your visit. As is usually the case with perfumes, it's a good idea to apply sparingly, at pulse points, before clothing. This satisfies the fragrance's purpose without overpowering the people you deal with.

When you must travel for work or social gatherings, control your expectations about what constitutes appropriate behavior. Moving at one tempo is normal in some cultures and at a completely other rate in others. While queuing or standing in lines can be expected in some cultures, it can also be a "free for all" in others. In most professional contexts, it is fine to express a desire to speak and to have the meeting moderator thank you for doing so; but I have seen seasoned professionals interrupt others in conversation and lose their respect or interest.

Similar to this, living arrangements vary from culture to culture and from region to region. There will be differences in foods and meal service as well as in general social graces. Examine what to anticipate in advance and find out from people who may already be acquainted with your specific future circumstance or event about their experiences and expertise. Acquire one or two social phrases that demonstrate your curiosity and show consideration for your situation. Learning the appropriate responses to common questions like "Excuse me," "Please," "Thank you," and "How much?" is usually not too difficult. You can download apps to your gadgets that provide quickly learns and language translations. Even though it is uncomfortable for you, most hosts and locals will appreciate your efforts.

Let the substance of your contribution speak for you when you have something interesting or important to add to a commercial or social discussion. No matter how heated the discussion becomes, people will still make room for you to be heard if you are saying something significant. When you're ready to contribute and make a move, give a pleasant tap on the arm or wave of your hand. However, never interrupt

someone who is really engaged in their own talk. Compare the benefits of your contribution to the costs of upsetting someone else [2].

Issues with communication might become even more complex in the varied workplace of today. When it comes to in-person encounters, each culture has its own set of implicit beliefs and customs, making it occasionally challenging to communicate successfully. In situations where there is no language barrier, communicating across cultures can still be difficult. The following are our top ten suggestions for successful intercultural communication:

1. Continue to be polite

There are specific communication manners in many cultures. Do some research on the target culture before the meeting, or, if time permits, engage in some cross-cultural training. For instance, formality is often expected when people first communicate with one another in many cultures. Every culture has a unique manner of expressing this formality, such as the use of “san” for both men and women in Japan, the reversal of family and given names in China, and the terms “Herr” and “Frau” in Germany. Respect these familiarity tokens and wait for the other person to cue you to introduce yourself before doing so.

2. Steer clear of slang

Even highly educated non-native English speakers will not possess a thorough comprehension of English slang, idioms, and proverbs. They might comprehend your words individually, but they won't get the meaning or context. You risk misunderstanding them or, worse, upsetting them as a result.

3. Talk gently

Speaking at your typical conversational pace is not a good idea in cross-cultural situations, even if English is the common language. It will be beneficial to talk more clearly and pronounce words correctly, as well as to adjust your speed. As you proceed, break up your sentences into manageable chunks and let your audience to interpret and process what you're saying. However, avoid going too slowly since this could come across as condescending. Do not hesitate to advise someone to slow down if you are having trouble understanding them because they are speaking too quickly or have an accent.

4. Maintain simplicity

There's no need to use large terms in a cross-cultural conversation to make it more difficult for either of you. Just make things easy. One syllable word is preferable to two syllable words, while two syllable words are significantly harder to understand than three syllable ones. Say “Please do this quickly” instead of “Please do this effectively.”

5. Engage in active listening

One highly useful tactic for enhancing cross-cultural communication is active listening. Ask lots of questions and make sure you understand the other person by restating or summarizing what they've stated. In addition to fostering rapport, this makes ensuring that crucial information is not overlooked or misinterpreted.

6. Take turns speaking

By alternating between speakers, you can encourage more natural flow in the discussion. After stating your case, hear what the other person has to say. Speak to individuals in brief exchanges rather than giving them a lengthy monologue that

could be hard for them to understand, especially if they are speaking English as a second language.

7. Make notes

To be sure you have been understood correctly, put your thoughts in writing if you are unsure. When talking with big numbers, this can be quite useful. In the UK, a billion is written as 1,000,000,000, however in the USA, it is written as 1,000,000,000,000.

8. Refrain from asking closed-ended questions

Questions that need a “yes” or “no” response should not be asked. You will always receive a “yes,” even if the truth is a “no,” because it is embarrassing or difficult in many cultures to respond negatively. Request information by posing open-ended inquiries that demand an answer.

9. Use humor sparingly

Numerous cultures have a strong emphasis on business, professionalism, and adhering to rules at all times. As such, they find it offensive when jokes and humor are used in a professional setting. If you do choose to utilize humor, make sure it is acceptable and understood in the other culture and won't offend anyone. Be advised that British sarcasm is typically misinterpreted overseas.

10. Show encouragement

For cross-cultural communication to be effective, comfort between the parties is essential. Treat non-native English speakers with respect during every conversation, try your best to speak intelligibly, and encourage them when they answer. Their confidence and trust in you will grow as a result of this.

In conclusion, point etiquette varies significantly across cultures, reflecting diverse social norms and communication styles. In many Western cultures, pointing with the index finger is common and often considered neutral. However, in several Asian and African countries, this gesture can be seen as rude or aggressive, and more polite alternatives such as using the whole hand or thumb are preferred. Understanding these differences is crucial in fostering respect and avoiding misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions. By being mindful of these cultural nuances, individuals can communicate more effectively and show consideration for others' customs and traditions.

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