**Cultures and Communication**

Buongiorno. Salam. Nín hao. Hujambo. Howdy. There are so many ways just to say hello!

No matter where you are in the world, communication is important. But communicating across cultures can be pretty hard. And I don't just mean that there's a language barrier, although that can be an issue. No, I mean that cultures actually have some very different ways of communicating. Some cultures are informal, some cultures use a whole series of ritual greetings before having a conversation, and some cultures consider it rude to show up to a meeting on time.

But what do all these cultures have in common? Well, for one, you can offend each of them if you don't understand their communication practices. And we want to avoid that. So what do we do? Well, to put it simply, we learn to communicate!

**Intercultural Communication**

So, we need to learn how to communicate all over again, just like when we were children. And just like when we were children, this requires learning language as well as learning behavioral norms for good communication. However, this will be a bit different since we're adults learning how to communicate in someone else's culture, not our own.

**Intercultural communication** is the verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. Basically, 'inter-' is a prefix that means 'between' and cultural means… well, from a culture, so intercultural communication is the communication between cultures. Sometimes, this is used to describe a single person trying to interact in a foreign environment but more often, it is a two-way street, where people from both cultures are trying to improve their communication.

Now, if you want to learn about intercultural communication, it's important to understand what this is. But it's also important to understand what it isn't. Intercultural communication is targeted at allowing for positive and productive interaction. You are not joining this culture, you are not becoming a member of another society, you are not abandoning your own culture. That would be assimilation and that's not what we're after.

Intercultural communication is also not simply a language proficiency. Yes, communication requires the ability to understand language, but just think about how much of your communication with even your own friends is nonverbal: our body language, our attitudes, the rituals from hand-shaking to the stink eye. Some researchers estimate that up to 93% of all human communication is nonverbal, although according to recent studies, it's actually closer to 60%.

Still, that means that more than half of communication is never spoken. So, intercultural communication is going to take a lot more than just learning a language.

**Intercultural communication** is a discipline that studies [communication](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication%22%20%5Co%20%22Communication) across different [cultures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture%22%20%5Co%20%22Culture) and [social groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_group%22%20%5Co%20%22Social%20group), or how culture affects communication. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In this sense, it seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and [perceive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception%22%20%5Co%20%22Perception) the world around them.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-%3A2-1)

Many people in intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-%3A2-1) With regard to intercultural communication proper, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds *interact*. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries.

Intercultural communication plays a role in [social sciences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_science%22%20%5Co%20%22Social%20science) such as [anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropology%22%20%5Co%20%22Anthropology), [cultural studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_studies%22%20%5Co%20%22Cultural%20studies), [linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics%22%20%5Co%20%22Linguistics), [psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychology%22%20%5Co%20%22Psychology) and [communication studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication_studies%22%20%5Co%20%22Communication%20studies). Intercultural communication is also referred to as the base for international businesses. Several cross-cultural service providers assist with the development of intercultural communication skills. Research is a major part of the development of intercultural communication skills.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication#cite_note-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication#cite_note-3) *Intercultural communication* is in a way the 'interaction with speakers of other languages on equal terms and respecting their identities'.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication#cite_note-4)

Identity and culture are also studied within the discipline of communication to analyze how globalization influences ways of thinking, beliefs, values, and identity, within and between cultural environments. Intercultural communication scholars approach theory with a dynamic outlook and do not believe culture can be measured nor that cultures share universal attributes. Scholars acknowledge that culture and communication shift along with societal changes and theories should consider the constant shifting and nuances of society.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication#cite_note-:3-5)

The study of intercultural communication requires intercultural understanding, which is an ability to understand and value cultural differences. Language is an example of an important cultural component that is linked to intercultural understanding.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercultural_communication#cite_note-:0-6)