



# Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into the Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting

## Unit 1 – Orientation and Culture

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## Welcome from World Learning

Hello and welcome to the MOOC *Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into The Exploration of Culture in an EFL Setting*, produced by World Learning and our School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute.

My name is Dr. Kara McBride, and I was the lead designer for this MOOC -- out of a team of many experts in TESOL and teacher training. This course was primarily intended for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). As the title of the course implies, we will be talking about the exploration of culture in an EFL setting while engaging and increasing your students' critical thinking skills.



"Dr. Kara McBride" by World Learning is [licensed under CC0](#) while engaging and increasing your students' critical thinking skills.

So, let's talk about the content of the MOOC. The MOOC has five units. In Unit 1, we will present some foundational ideas about culture and we will look at encounters between people of different cultures.

Unit 2 brings in critical thinking and also asks you to reflect on the cultures that you belong to.

In Unit 3, we will start to really get into how you teach culture and also how you assess your students' learning.

Next, in Unit 4, we get into critical thinking again, focusing on that and how that helps you explore culture.

Finally, in Unit 5, we'll get into the real details of putting together a quality lesson plan. By the end of this MOOC, you will be in a solid position to implement these ideas into your classroom.

Now, let's talk about the structure of this MOOC.

Each unit has an order of activities and you need to follow the order to advance in the course. First you do activity one, then activity two, etc., which means that you can't first do activity #9 and then go back; you need to do each one in order. But once you do an activity, you can always go back to that activity during the MOOC.

If you want more details about the course, you should look at the syllabus. You can find the syllabus in a link that's in the navigation menu at the left side of your screen. Please be sure to take the time to read this important document.

We estimate that participation in this MOOC can take up to five hours a week. If you have limited access to the internet, you may want to download the unit packets. The unit packets are PDF files that contain all of the material of each unit, except the quizzes. You have to be online to take the quizzes.

The quizzes were not created only to verify your comprehension of the material; the quizzes are also made to help you think through the material and how you can apply it to your classroom. And by the way, you can take the quizzes as many times as you want to.

We also really hope that you are able to fully engage in the online discussions with other EFL professionals, like yourself, from around the world. And we encourage you to discuss the ideas from this course with your colleagues and friends locally, offline. This MOOC is packed with lots of fascinating concepts about culture and critical thinking and how you can implement these in your classes. We hope that you take full advantage of the course, that you enjoy it, and that you get lots of practical ideas! See you online!

## Overview of Unit 1: Orientation and Culture

Welcome to Unit 1! In this unit, you get oriented to the course, introduce yourself and meet other MOOC participants, and then dive into an exploration of culture. Our first reading on culture will introduce foundational concepts about culture. The next reading, called “Intercultural Encounters,” presents tools for understanding differences between cultures, which we can use to improve our intercultural competence.

This MOOC is flexible in terms of when and how often you log in. Ideally, you will spread out each unit's activities over one week (one week per unit). The unit's activities are listed below, followed by approximate times for each activity. Timing will vary depending on your experience and interest in the topic.

1. **Take** the background survey or “diagnostic” (25 minutes)
2. **Post** an introduction of yourself in the discussion forum (10 minutes – optional)
3. **Respond** to your classmates' introductions in the discussion forum (25 minutes – optional)
4. **Read or watch** material defining “culture” and “intercultural competence” (30 minutes)
5. **Answer** a follow-on quiz on the previous text (15 minutes)
6. **Read or watch** material on “intercultural encounters” (30 minutes)
7. **Answer** a follow-on quiz on the previous text (15 minutes)
8. **Participate** in a discussion on how to apply ideas from the unit to your classroom (30 minutes – optional)
9. **Take** a self-assessment survey to check in on your participation in the MOOC (15 minutes)
10. **Read** the unit summary (10 minutes)



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## Unit 1: Initial Questionnaire

Help us get to know you! The team at World Learning that created this MOOC is eager to know more about the participants of this MOOC. We will use this questionnaire to compare with an end-of-course questionnaire, to see what you have learned and whether your ideas about culture and critical thinking have changed.

This questionnaire has 15 multiple-choice questions. There are no right or wrong answers, so feel confident in whatever answer is true for you. This questionnaire is not graded, and you can only take it once.



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<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

## Unit 1: Let's Introduce Ourselves (optional)

**Tell us a little about yourself! Please include the following:**

- Your name and what we can call you
- Where you are from and where you live
- What kind of school you work at, what levels you teach, who your students are
- Why you decided to join this MOOC
- Something personal too -- maybe about your family, your hobbies, whatever you would like to share
- You are encouraged to add a photo of yourself to your account profile.



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When commenting on your classmates' posts, you can identify similarities between you and your colleagues, expand on an idea, or ask a question. When you receive a response to your original post, or a reply to your comment, feel free to reply and continue the conversation!

<<This task can only be completed online.>>

## Unit 1: Introduction to Culture

This video (7:29) introduces key concepts about culture. These concepts form the foundation of our discussions about culture throughout the course. There is a quiz after this video, to confirm your comprehension of these key concepts.

[Video available online for viewing. Script and presentation slides below.]

What is culture? The word **culture** is used frequently, and not just by language teachers or cultural specialists. Pretty much everyone feels comfortable using the term. But how can we define it? I invite you to try right now to define the term *culture*. If you're listening to this as a sound or video file, press pause and try to put into words what culture means. If you're reading, set this text aside while you try to define *culture*.

Give yourself at least 5 minutes to write a definition for the word *culture*.

...How did it go? What does your definition include? When you start really thinking about culture, you realize that it includes or at least influences nearly everything in the human experience. Anthropologist John H. Bodley defined culture as, "what people think, make, and do" (1994, p. 22). This broad definition has been developed in further detail by what is called the 3P model of culture (Frank, 2014). The 3P's are *perspectives*, *practices*, and *products*. Let us look at each of these.

**Perspectives** describe "what members of a culture think, feel, and value" (Frank, 2014, p. 3). This includes ideas about what is important in life, and beliefs about how younger people should relate to older members of society. *Perspectives* define what members of a particular culture consider appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Perspectives shape **practices**. *Practices* include the traditions and typical behaviors in a culture. The way people communicate can differ greatly from one culture to another, not just in terms of language but also *what* people talk about; with whom; how direct they are when communicating; the gestures they use; their use of eye contact; etc. Practices include other behaviors as well, from the formal – for example wedding ceremony traditions – to the informal, such as how people dress and eat on a day-to-day basis.

Food is often the first cultural **product** that people think of when they think about another culture. The special foods associated with a particular culture are often the first thing someone unfamiliar with the culture learns about it. Other cultural products include clothing, music, and literature.

Culture is strengthened through its expression. The more people engage in the traditions and ways of living of their culture, the more that culture's perspectives, practices, and products are reinforced. A tradition that has been practiced for



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hundreds of years is a very strong tradition. Culture is not static, however. On the contrary, culture is dynamic. A culture's perspectives, practices, and products can change over time. As we will discuss in later modules, this is particularly likely when there is contact between cultures.

In today's globalized world, most people have encounters with members of other cultures, and for many people, this is on a regular basis. These encounters happen in social, political, and commercial contexts. It is therefore important for people, in all areas of their lives, to be able to interact successfully with people who are from cultures that are different from theirs. This ability is called **intercultural competence**. Intercultural competence is needed for people from different cultures – with their



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different values, practices, and ways of communicating – to avoid conflict and misunderstanding. Intercultural competence requires people to be flexible in their thinking and to recognize that people are complex. To see people in ways that are simple and not complex is to **stereotype** people.

Intercultural competence is not an all-or-nothing ability. People have different levels of intercultural competence, among themselves, and from context to context. People's intercultural competence will be more or less effective depending on their familiarity with the particular culture they are

encountering and the particular **stereotypes** that they may believe.

No one can be completely prepared for all the intercultural experiences they will have in the future, and so intercultural competence requires flexibility. It requires the ability to think critically about differences. Critical thinking is also necessary to negotiate differences and use strategies to minimize conflict and misunderstandings.

As English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, we are preparing our students for future intercultural encounters. In order to understand differences, the first step is to understand "Different from what?" A necessary step in developing intercultural competence is to have a very clear understanding of oneself as a **cultural being**. That is, we need to understand what our own culture is and how it affects us day to day.

The development of intercultural competence is an ongoing process; it never ends. In many activities in this course, we will explore our own cultural perspectives, as well as other cultural perspectives. This will put us in an excellent position to help our students go through a similar process.

## References I

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Frank, J. (2013). Raising cultural awareness in the English language classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 2-35.

## References II

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Bodley, H. H. 1994. *Cultural anthropology: Tribes, states, and the global system*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.

Kubota, R. (2016). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism: complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 474-494.

Sugiharto, S. (2013). Critical multiculturalism and the politics of identity in academic writing. *K@ta: A biannual publication on the study of language and literature*, 15(1), 19-24.

## Suggested Further Reading

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Shahed, F. H. (2013). 'Culture' as a skill in undergraduate EFL classrooms: The Bangladeshi realities, 24(1). *TEFLIN Journal*, 97-112. <http://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal/article/view/157/209>


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## Introduction to Culture Presentation Slides







# Introduction to Culture


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# What is CULTURE?

Press pause! Give yourself 5 minutes to define *culture*.

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## How did it go?







## What does your definition include?


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## Bodley's Definition of Culture

*"What people think, make, and do"*







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## The 3P Model of Culture

Perspectives

Practices

Products

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## Perspectives

“What members of a culture think, feel, and value”

What is important  
in life?

Appropriate and  
inappropriate  
behavior

How younger  
people should  
relate to older  
members of  
society

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## Practices



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## Products



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## Culture is Dynamic



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## Intercultural Competence



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Think critically



and be flexible.

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## Cultural Beings

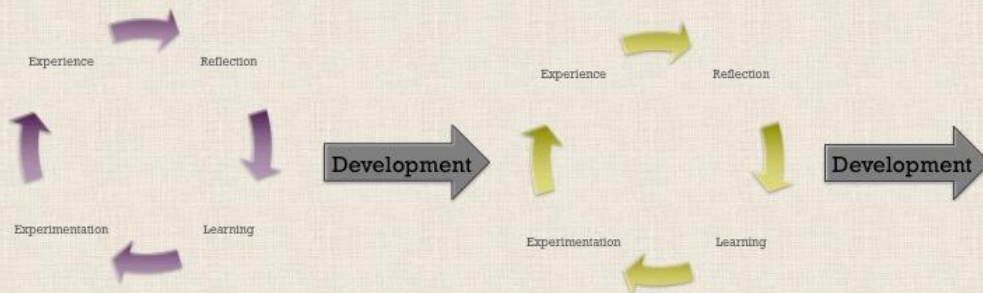
What does it mean to be...

And how is that different from...



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## Development is an Ongoing Process



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## References

- Bodley, H. H. 1994. *Cultural anthropology: Tribes, states, and the global system*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.
- Frank, J. (2013). Raising cultural awareness in the English language classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 2-35.
- Kubota, R. (2016). The multi/plural turn, postcolonial theory, and neoliberal multiculturalism: complicities and implications for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 474-494.
- Sugiharto, S. (2013). Critical multiculturalism and the politics of identity in academic writing. *K@ta: A biannual publication on the study of language and literature*, 15(1), 19-24.

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## Suggested Further Reading

- Shahed, F. H. (2013). 'Culture' as a skill in undergraduate EFL classrooms: The Bangladeshi realities, 24(1). *TEFLIN Journal*, 97-112.  
<http://journal.teflin.org/index.php/journal/article/view/157/209>

## Unit 1: Introduction to Culture - Follow-on Quiz



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This quiz checks your comprehension of "Introduction to Culture." You must score at least 70% on each quiz in this MOOC in order to continue in the module. For this quiz, that means that you must score at least 11 out of 15 points. You may take the quiz as many times as you like. Be sure to read the feedback that you receive after each attempt. Your grade will be your highest score.

<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

## Unit 1: Intercultural Encounters

Our first text/video presented ways of understanding culture. Every culture is different, and so when two people from different cultures encounter each other, they need ways to understand and negotiate those differences. That is what this text will discuss. You can watch this video (8:04) or read the video transcript below.

**[Video available online for viewing. Script below.]**

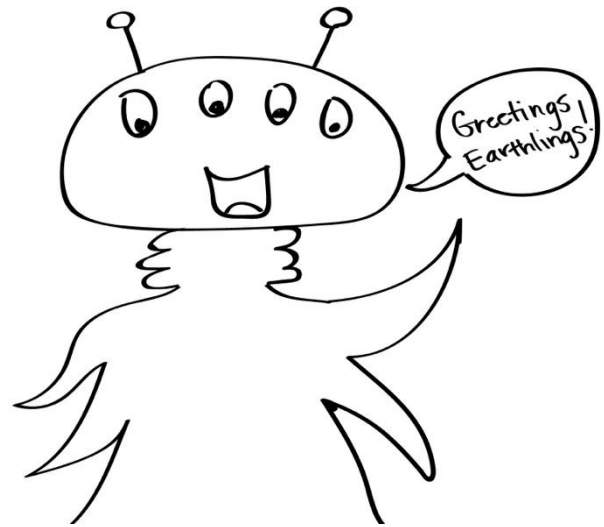
Why do people from different cultures sometimes have misunderstandings or conflicts? Because they can interpret the same thing differently. Some behaviors that are polite in one culture can seem rude in another culture. Clothing that is very nice in one cultural context can be entirely inappropriate in another.

This is why we spent some time in Module 3 looking at the difference between **observation** and **interpretation**. People from any two cultures should be able to make the same observations, but their interpretations can be very different. This is because they attach different cultural meanings to what they observe.



**Cultural meaning is symbolic.** We do not see events and objects just for what they are; we attach symbolic meaning to it. For example, instead of simply seeing clothing of a particular color and style, we can interpret it to indicate that a person is a policeman or baker. These professionals' uniforms have symbolic meaning to all who know how to interpret them.

Gestures and actions take on symbolic meaning when interpreted through a cultural lens. Greetings, for example, vary widely from culture to culture. How should you greet a particular person? Do you shake hands? Wave? Give a kiss on the cheek? Is a hug appropriate? Do you bow? The rules vary widely around the world. Interculturally competent people will adjust their behavior according to the context they find themselves in. **Greetings** are fairly formulaic. The right way to greet different kinds of people can usually be described in a few rules.



"Greetings Earthlings" by Gina Asalon is [licensed under CC BY 4.0](#)

Other cultural differences are more general and are the result of **differences in values**. We have already talked a lot about one such difference: the difference between **high-context and low context-cultures**. As you will remember, most cultures in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia are high-context cultures. When they communicate, they use the full context to understand a message. It's not just the words that matter, but also how the words are said and in what context. They assume a shared understanding. This means that many things may be left unsaid. In a low-context culture, like the United States, messages are made explicit through words. Speakers do not leave key parts of the message unsaid, and what is said is interpreted more literally.

That is one axis along which cultural differences are described. Today we will look at two more. The next one concerns cultural attitudes towards time. The two extremes are called polychronic and monochronic.

In **monochronic cultures**, such as in North America and Northern Europe, time is viewed as linear; people prefer to do only one thing at a time; schedules are not flexible; and time is considered a valuable commodity. In fact, a common saying is "time is money."<sup>1</sup> Let's look at what a meeting would look like in a monochronic culture. There will be an agenda. The first agenda item will be dealt with first. During that time, people will only talk about *that* item and should not bring up topics related to other agenda items. When an agenda item is finished, the topic will be left behind, and people should not return to that topic during the meeting. If any of these rules are broken, members of the meeting may feel like the rule breaker is wasting their time.<sup>1</sup>

People from **polychronic cultures** (in much of the Middle East, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa), will tend towards opposite behaviors. They focus on tasks or activities, not schedules. If a task takes a little bit longer, they prefer to stay with the task and give it the time it needs. They are more likely to multi-task: for them, mixing personal activities and work activities is not a problem.

The last major cultural difference that we will look at today is **collectivism versus individualism**. In a collectivist society, your strongest identity is with the group you belong to. Your individual identity is less important. This group may be your family, your work place, or your national identity. If the group's needs conflict with your individual needs, you will be expected to sacrifice (give up) your individual needs for the group. In collectivist societies, long-term relationships built on trust are very important.



"Collectivist Vikings" by Gina Asalon is [licensed under CC BY 4.0](#)

People in individualist societies are the opposite. They will be willing to sacrifice personal relationships if that is necessary for personal gain. Because of this, relationships outside of their nuclear family are less important. Written contracts in these societies are very important documents for defining relationships between many people.

Based on this description, what cultures do you think are collectivist? And which are individualist? You are encouraged to read more about this by doing some research on the internet.<sup>2</sup>

It can be very useful to understand these differences in motivations and values that are generally true between certain cultures. But an important word here is "generally." These generalities help us **understand people's motivations**, but we must be careful not to over-generalize about people. People are always complex, and there are always differences among the members of any group of people. These cultural tendencies can help us understand people's motivations, but **they should not lead us to stereotype** them or view them in a simplistic way.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to see how this metaphor appears in other expressions about time: *to spend time*, *to waste time*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the other major ways that intercultural differences are described are: 1) neutral versus expressive; 2) short-term versus long-term orientations; 3) universalism versus particularism; and 4) desire to avoid uncertainty.

## References

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Hall, E. T. (1998). The power of hidden differences. In M. J. Bennett (Ed.) *Basic concepts of intercultural communication selected readings* (53-67). Intercultural Press.

Jackson, J. (2014). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*. NYC: Routledge.

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Neuleip, J. W. (2015). *Intercultural Communication*, 6th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### **Suggested Further Reading**

Dalib, S. (2017). Probing intercultural competence in Malaysia: A Relational Framework. *International Conference on Communication and Media*, 33, 1-5. Retrieved from [http://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2017/01/shsconf\\_icome2017\\_00045.pdf](http://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2017/01/shsconf_icome2017_00045.pdf)

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## Intercultural Encounters Presentation Slides

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# Intercultural Encounters

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Clothing that is very nice in one cultural context...



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...can be entirely inappropriate in another.

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## Cultural Meaning Is Symbolic



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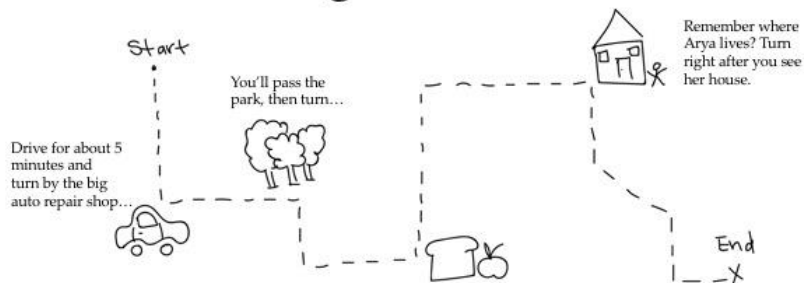
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## Greetings are Formulaic



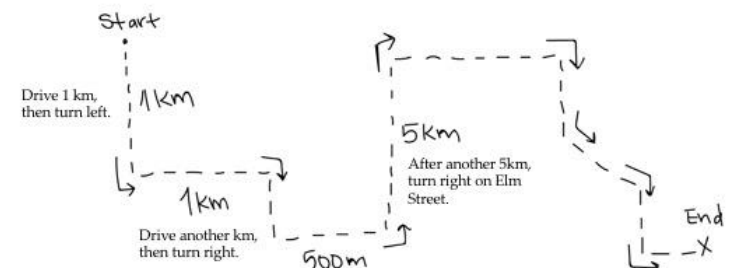
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## High-Context



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## versus Low-Context



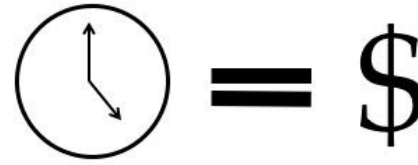
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# Monochronic versus Polychronic

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## Monochronic Cultures



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## Polychronic Cultures

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## Collectivism versus Individualism



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## Collectivism



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## Individualism



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Generalities help us understand people's motivations, but they should not lead us to stereotype.



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- Neuleip, J. W. (2015). *Intercultural Communication*, 6th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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## Suggested Further Reading

- Horvat, S. (2011). Assessment of intercultural competence in the FL classroom. *Journal for Foreign Languages*, 3(1-2), 111-120. Retrieved from <http://revije.ff.uni-lj.si/Vestnik/article/view/3438>
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## Unit 1: Intercultural Encounters – Follow-on Quiz



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Answer these 7 comprehension and application questions about "Intercultural Encounters." You must score at least 70% on each quiz in this MOOC in order to continue in the module. For this quiz, that means that you must score at least 7 out of 10 points. You may take the quiz as many times as you like. Be sure to read the feedback that you receive after each attempt. Your grade will be your highest score.

<<This diagnostic can only be completed online.>>

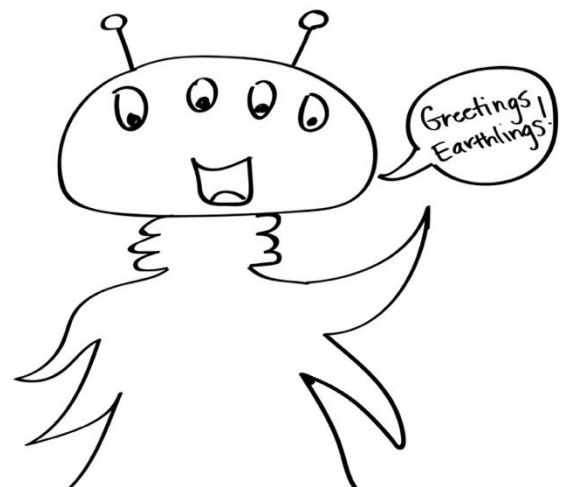
## Unit 1 Discussion: Intercultural Encounters (optional)

We read about some rich and complex concepts in "Intercultural Encounters," including

- Cultural meaning is symbolic
- High- and low-context cultures
- Monochronic and polychronic cultures
- Collectivism and individualism
- Understanding people's values in order to understand their motivations
- Stereotypes

*In your post, please address the following 2 questions:*

1. How might you use one or more of these concepts (listed above) in a lesson on culture your students?
2. How could you present these ideas to your students for it to fit a) their level of maturity, b) their level of English, c) their level of intercultural competence, and d) their interests?

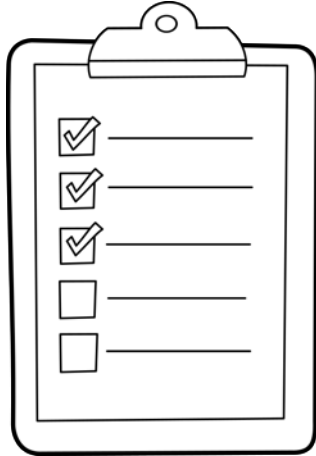


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**Later, please come back soon and respond to (at least) one other participant's post.**

<<This task can only be completed online.>>

## Unit 1 Self-assessment



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In a MOOC, you do not have the advantage of getting direct feedback from an instructor. Because of this, self-awareness and self-assessment are even more important than in a regular online course. This self-assessment questionnaire is meant to help you assess your participation in the MOOC.

Answer all questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers; you simply are asked to answer the questions thoughtfully, and you must complete this survey in order to move on to the next activities. Although you must complete this self-assessment, it is not graded. You can only submit the self-assessment once.

<<This task can only be completed online.>>

## Unit 1 Summary

### Congratulations on making it to the end of Unit 1!

We jumped right in and looked at a working definition of culture, using the 3Ps framework.

- Perspectives
- Practices
- Products

This discussion helps us see how culture touches every aspect of our lives. We then went on to explore some powerful ways that we can analyze different cultural perspectives, products, and practices by identifying where a culture falls on three continua<sup>1</sup> or ranges, namely,

low-context ----- high-context

monochronic ----- polychronic

collectivist ----- individualist

We describe these three dimensions as *continua* or *ranges* to emphasize that some cultures may not be at either extreme, but instead somewhere in between the two extremes. This is even more true when we use these dimensions to describe individual people. In



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fact, you might want to take a minute and think about where *you* fall on those three continua. For example, are you more of a monochronic person, or a polychronic person? Or somewhere in between?

These dimensions help us understand that cultures differ in terms of priorities. When we encounter differences in priorities, it is easy to jump to conclusions and be judgmental. This is exactly what we want to avoid. In order to avoid this mistake, we need to exercise *critical thinking*. For this reason, a working definition of critical thinking will be our first major task for Unit 2.



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The unit ended with a self-assessment. The self-assessment is there to help you think about how fully you are engaging with the concepts discussed in this course. The more you engage with these concepts and apply them to your life and your classroom, the more insights you will gain. For this reason, we encourage you to not only engage in the online activities, but discuss these concepts with your friends and colleagues locally.

Before you finish Unit 1, take a minute to review the terms introduced in this unit. Do you recognize them all? If you need to see their definitions, you can go to [the MOOC glossary](#).

- 3 Ps model of culture
- Collectivism
- Cultural being
- Formulaic greetings
- High-context culture
- Individualism
- Intercultural competence
- Low-context culture
- Monochronic culture
- Perspectives (one of the 3 Ps)
- Polychronic culture
- Practices (one of the 3 Ps)
- Products (one of the 3 Ps)
- Stereotype
- Symbolic meaning

‡ Plural of the word "continuum"

<<This is the end of Unit 1.>>