



Communicating Across Cultures: Mastering International Job Interviews in English.

A workshop

Servei de Llengües UAB

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INTERVIEW

Prefix “inter,” meaning between or among + “view,” meaning a seeing, looking, or inspection.

“An interview is the intermingling of distinct ways of seeing; this is especially clear in a cross-cultural context. We must ask ourselves how our knowledge or lack of knowledge of people from a given culture affects the interview process.”

(Aronson Fontes, L. *Interviewing Clients across Cultures: A Practitioner's Guide* 2008.)

Objectives

By the end of this workshop, students will:

1. Understand **cultural** differences that affect international job interviews: formality, gesture, tone, authority.
- 2 Identify and adapt to **communication styles** in different cultural contexts.
3. Understand some common **language** challenges and **identify tools** to deal with possible communication difficulties.
4. **Handle misunderstandings** with tact and respect.
5. **Gain confidence** in presenting themselves professionally in English.



AGENDA

1. Ice-breaker – introductions
2. Intercultural knowledge quiz
3. Cultural dimensions maps – discussion
4. Videos - intercultural communication
5. Group matching activity
6. Roleplay cards – cultural sensitivity
7. Linguistic challenges in interview
8. Activity – solving communication issues
9. Your elevator pitch – roleplays
10. Interview questions - roleplays



INDIVIDUAL



CULTURAL GROUP IDENTITY

Intercultural knowledge ...

- This class offers a glimpse into cultural tendencies based on the work of experts like Geert Hofstede and Erin Meyer, but it's crucial to remember that people are **individuals** first and foremost.
- Not everyone from a given country will act as described, and personal traits often far outweigh cultural generalizations.
- I present scenarios to highlight specific **patterns**, but real-life interactions are far more **nuanced**.
- Understanding these cultural **tendencies** can give you valuable insights, yet true understanding always comes from seeing people as individuals.

Brainstorm – list intercultural differences in communication

British and American friendliness



Danish attitudes to time





Ice-breaker activity (3 mins)

Introduce yourself briefly to the group (name, studies, hobby) and mention one country you'd like to work in.

What do you know about communication in that culture? (formal/informal, direct/indirect).

Test your intercultural savvy!

In pairs choose ...

[Quiz 1](#) or

[Quiz 2](#)



Test your intercultural competence

**Intercultural Communication Quiz:
Test Your Business Etiquette IQ**

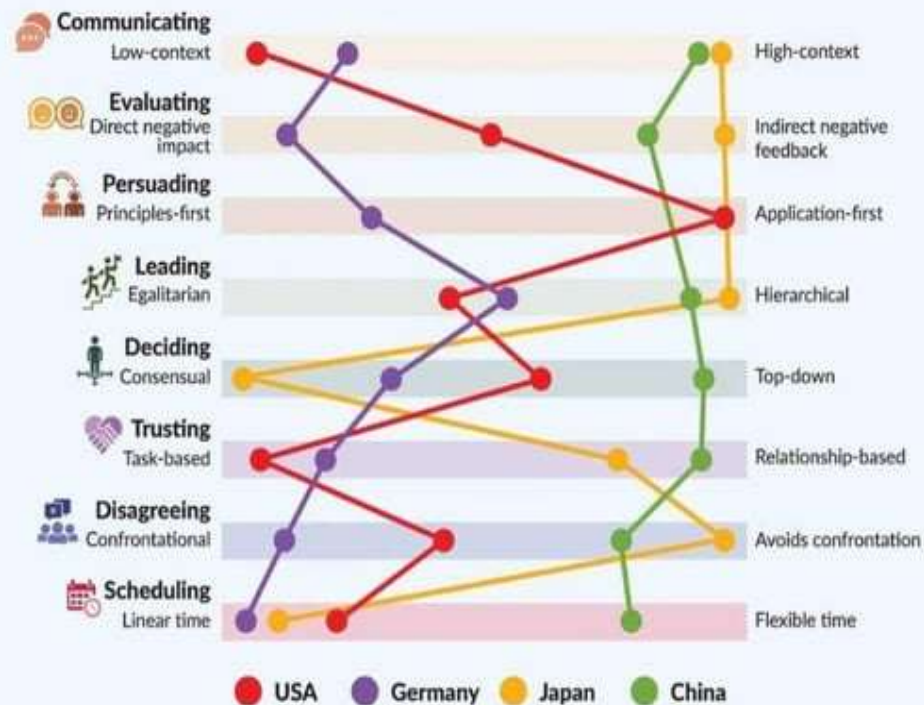


Erin Meyer's 'The Culture Map'

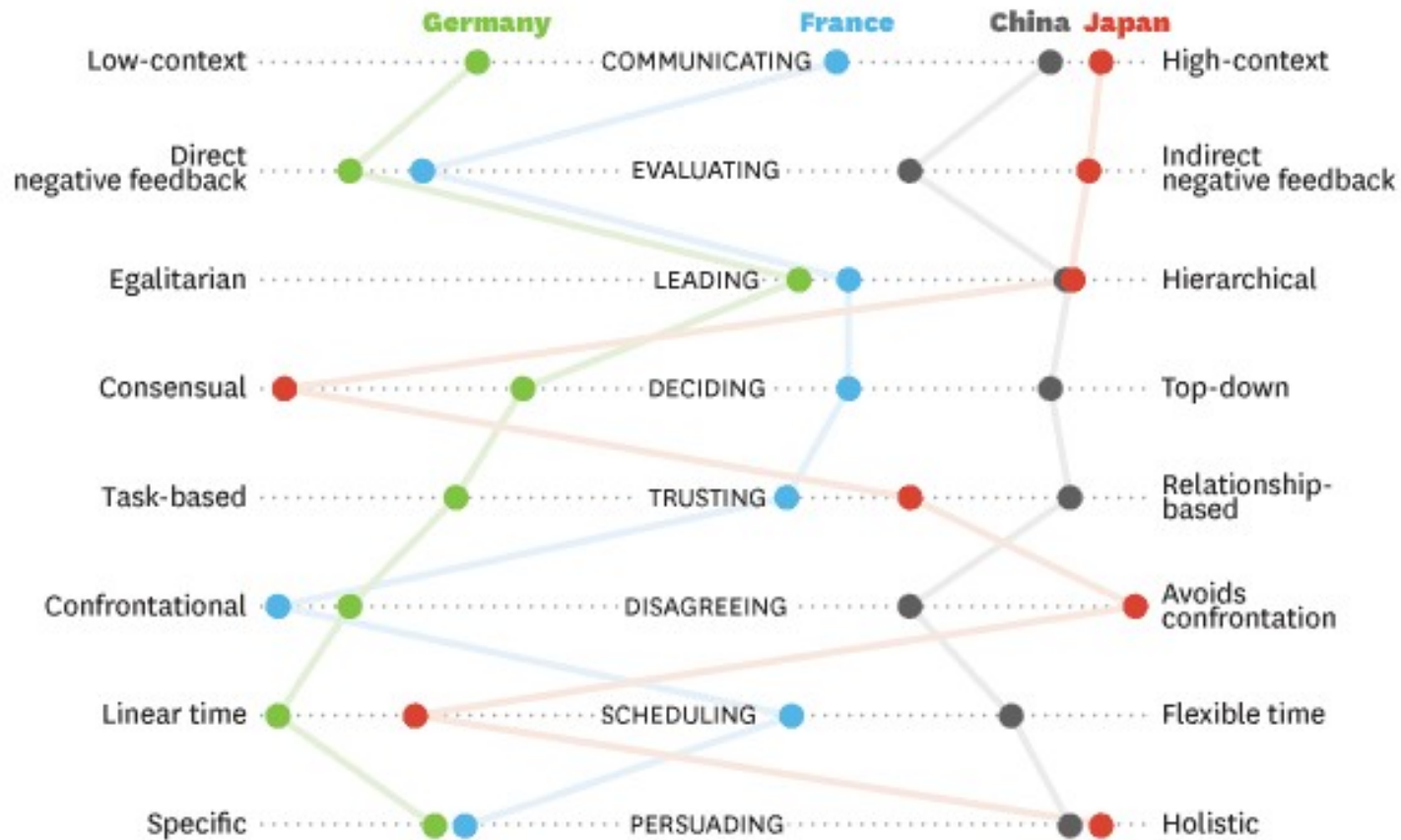


Not sure how to navigate cultural differences?

Look at cultural relativity so we understand how people from one culture might see another culture differently. Check out this example:



MANAGEMENT STYLES ACROSS FOUR DIFFERENT CULTURES



SOURCE ERIN MEYER

HBR.ORG

Cultural Dimensions in Job Interviews

- **Power Distance:** How hierarchical or egalitarian different cultures are.
- **Formality & Politeness:** Different greetings, handshakes, titles (e.g., Mr./Ms. vs. first names).
- **Communication Styles:** Direct vs. indirect, use of eye contact, gestures.



Cultural differences in interactions

[Understanding Cultural Differences in Job Interviews](#)

Pakistanis living in Canada.

Min 01-2.15



[The Culture Map: The Future of Management](#)

Japan: Eye contact and directness

Erin Meyer min 0.10-03.16



What are Some Examples of Cultural Differences in Interviews?

21/5/25 20:20

How do Cultural Differences Impact Job Interviews?

How do Cultural Differences Impact Job Interviews?

Apr 19 Posted by [Culture Vulture](#) in [HR News](#)



Eye contact is a sign of confidence and trust in the UK and other European countries. However, if a Chinese individual is being interviewed and maintains no eye contact does this equal them hiding something or being unconfident? No, because in China it is considered rude to maintain eye contact.

Similarly, to **speak loudly** and clearly may be construed to be a positive trait in the UK, but in many other countries such as Malaysia they believe speaking softly is a good quality.

In the UK and other 'western' nations, we **communicate explicitly**, meaning we divulge information beyond the topic at hand based on the premise the listener is unaware of background or correlating issues. **Implicit communicators**, such as the Japanese, divulge little as they believe the listener will be aware of such issues. A Japanese interviewee therefore is not being purposefully vague, but on the contrary assumes you understand what he/she means to imply.

To **'name drop' in interviews** may be considered inappropriate for many recruiters in Europe, however in countries where family and community ties play a greater role such as in Mediterranean countries, to mention your relationship with someone of influence is natural.

Although Latin Americans are **very expressive and emotional**, this does not equal them being excitable and unstable and therefore unsuitable for professional jobs.

The Subtle Way Cultural Bias Affects Job Interviews

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_subtle_way_cultural_bias_affects_job_interviews

Job applicants who want to appear calm and collected might be at a disadvantage. According to a new Stanford study, **American employers are more likely to favor excited over relaxed candidates.**

But as Tsai has found in prior research studies, the emotions people value and, in turn, display vary across culture. How might these cultural differences influence candidates and their hiring managers on job interviews?

In one experiment, participants were asked to imagine they wanted a competitive internship. They were then asked to fill out an application, including a video introducing themselves. At the end of their application, they were asked which emotions they wanted to convey.

The researchers found that what is interpreted as the “best impression” varies from person to person and from culture to culture.

European Americans were more likely to convey excitement and enthusiasm than Hong Kong Chinese, who desired calm and even-tempered states.

These values were also reflected in their applications. For example, European Americans were more likely than Hong Kong Chinese to show their excitement with phrases like “I’m really enthusiastic about this position” and “I am passionate about the work.”

How do Cultural Assumptions Impact the Interview Process?

The basis of incorporating a cross cultural framework of understanding in interviews is in overcoming 'assumptions'.

Assumptions refer to several inter-related elements. Interviewers *assume* what should or should not happen, what is normal and abnormal, and what is correct or wrong.

Assumptions also refer to what someone's physical appearance says about them, what their body language says about their confidence, how people communicate and how they present themselves.

For example, imagine a cross cultural interview is taking place between an English interviewer and a German interviewee.

Fairly early on in the interview the interviewer starts to make assumptions regarding the person's character, personality and suitability for the post based on misperceptions of the German candidates appearance, behaviour and communication style.

Although the interviewee is rather high-brow, blunt in conversation, formal and academic in demeanour this does not mean he/she is rigid, inflexible or reserved as the interviewer assumes. Rather, this is how the play is acted out in Germany. If the interviewer had been a bit more aware of German theatre (i.e. culturally aware), then possibly such assumptions would not have been made.

As we can see from the above example, **assumptions can lead to interviewers making the wrong decision based on their cultural assumptions.** In this case, they could have potentially lost a genuinely positive addition to their company.

In addition to the areas mentioned in the example above, **interviewers must also be aware of culturally ingrained assumptions** made about areas such as eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, posture, showing emotions, the giving out of information and the use of language to name but a few.

All have a cross cultural element that needs to be understood properly.

Body Language –cultural norms

If we habitually shake hands with interviewees before we speak with them, not realizing that this is offensive to certain religious groups, we would sabotage our effort to establish rapport with people from those groups.

(From *Interviewing Clients across Cultures: A Practitioner's Guide* by Lisa Aronson Fontes. 2008)

Group activity - scenarios

How might interactions vary? Discuss with examples.

Interviewers are from the USA / Japan / the Netherlands / Qatar / Argentina / Britain / Italy / Nigeria

Interview quotes or situations and matching activity.

How can the individual balance their natural communication style with cultural sensitivity?

Scenarios (handouts)



Roleplay

Q's on Cultural Sensitivity

Roleplay cards

Practice answering interview questions on cultural sensitivity

Pair-work

General Interview etiquette.

Formality, politeness, non-verbal communication



- An interview is formal. It requires politeness, social and emotional intelligence.
 - What does this imply? (Behaviour and speech)
 - Watch and identify the top tip for you.
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- [Video 1](#) Experts on body language and job etiquette
 - [Video 2](#) on body-language, non-verbal communication

Linguistic challenges in an interview

How does Language affect confidence and clarity?

Have you ever had difficulties understanding someone due to accent, vocabulary? (Give examples)

Have you ever been misunderstood due to accent or vocabulary?

What if the interviewer speaks really fast?

What strategies can you use to overcome language difficulties?

If you don't understand every word, what should you do?

ASK FOR CLARIFICATION / PARAPHRASE / CONFIRM
MEANING / CONTROL YOUR NERVES.

Clarifying and checking understanding

Pair activity: match the beginning, end & function

	Beginning		End of sentence/question	Functions
a	Sorry, could you say ...	1	... you say 'end user'.	Using your own words to check.
b	I'm sorry, I didn't ...	2	... that again please?	
c	I don't understand what you mean when ...	3	... catch that.	Asking for more information.
d	Could you be a little ...	4	... more specific?	
e	So, in other words, you felt isolated is ...	5	... that right?	Asking for repetition.
f	Are you ...	6	... put it another way.	
g	Perhaps I didn't explain very well. Let me ...	7	... what I meant.	Replying, apologizing then clarifying.
h	No, sorry, that's not really ...	8	... saying ...?	

Your personal elevator pitch

Tell your story.

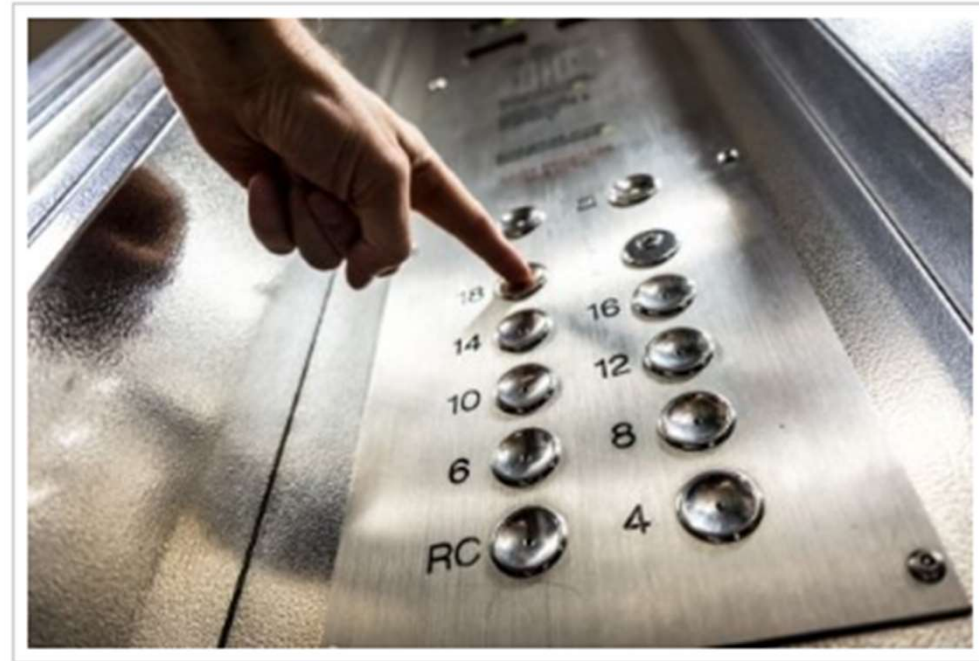
Make a really strong first impression.

Respond to the question “Tell me about yourself.”

An overview of your experience, skills, strengths, accomplishments, and goals

All in 30 seconds!

[Example](#)



Your personal elevator pitch

A **compelling introduction** of yourself, what you do, and what sets you apart from others in your field.

It's intended to quickly captivate your audience and help open up a dialogue.

A professional 30-second pitch for graduates should be **concise** and **highlight key skills** and **career goals**.

It should include a **brief introduction**, a **summary of relevant experience or skills**, and a clear **statement of your desired** role or next step.

What is a personal elevator pitch?

THE CHALLENGE – TO STAND OUT, TO BE COMPELLING.

DON'T BECOME A SALESPERSON!

CREATE A CONVERSATION, PERSON TO PERSON.

THE OLD PITCH, THE NEW.

LIKE WHEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA, YOU NEED TO GRAB PEOPLE'S ATTENTION.

THE FOCUS IS ON YOUR LISTENER.

YOUR AIM IS TO GET THEM TO SAY "TELL ME MORE!"



Structure

1. Introduce yourself, as appropriate.
2. Discuss your experience. As a student, this would include your major field of study. If you have practical experience in the field you could include that as well.
3. State a strength or skill the employer would be interested in.
4. Follow that with an accomplishment (or two) that proves you have that skill. It can be related to school, work, a volunteer experience, an activity (Scouts), etc.
5. Describe your employment goal—what are you looking for now and/or in the future?
6. Most importantly, tell how you can immediately benefit the company.

DO ...

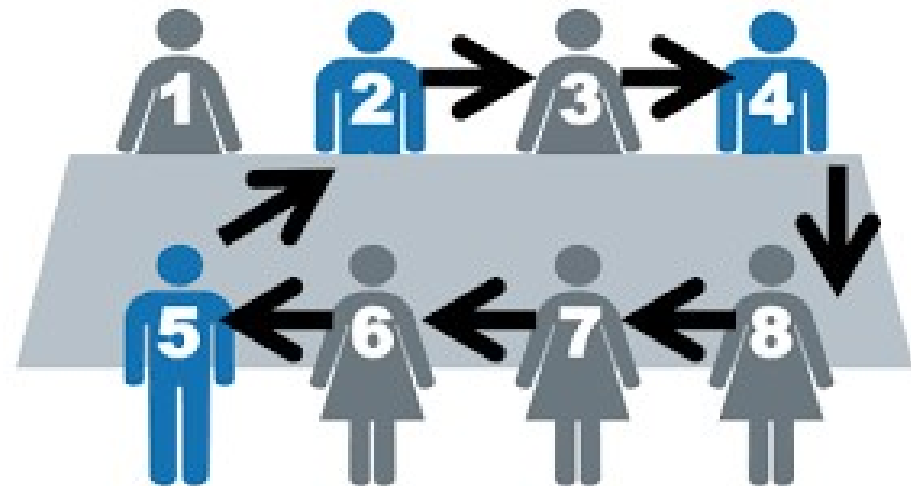
- **Make it meaningful** to the person you're speaking with. Consider not just what you do, but how what you do could help the person you're pitching to.
- **Tell a story.** Paint a picture of what you do in order to help your pitch get noticed. This might involve highlighting an interesting accomplishment or simply sharing your unique perspective on your profession.
- **Be specific.** Future employers want to understand what your particular area of expertise is.
- **Be authentic.** Give potential employers a sense of who you really are. After all, you're looking for a career opportunity that is a good fit for you, so giving some insight into who you are and what motivates you is important.
- **Use a conversational tone.** Avoid using language that's too rigid or formal, and be wary of your statement coming off like a sales pitch. Even though your elevator pitch is, at its core, a way to sell yourself and your worth, it's important to strike a balance between confident and casual.

DON'T ...

- **Go into too much detail.** Your pitch should have only enough information to pique someone's interest; it is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all you have to offer.
- **Use jargon or industry language.** Articulate what your skills are and what your value is using simple terms so that professionals from any field can see and understand your value.
- **Take too long.** Aim to get your point across in less than 30 seconds.
- **Put too much focus on your years** of experience. It's not your longevity in a job that will make you noticeable but what you did with that time.
- **Use cliché terms.** Phrases like “state of the art” and “thinking outside the box” are overused and can make a pitch seem dull.

OVER TO YOU!

- Write your elevator pitch
- Speed-dating with your classmates
- Present 30 secs, move on, present 30 secs, move on



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ROLEPLAY ACTIVITY IN PAIRS

Common interview questions & How to answer them!

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths / weaknesses?
3. Describe a challenge you dealt with at work, and how you handled it.
4. Why do you want to leave your current job?
5. Where do you see yourself in five years?
6. What are your salary requirements?
7. Why should we hire you?
8. Why do you want to work at this company?
9. Walk me through your resumé.
10. Tell me about a challenge or conflict and how you handled it.

<https://graduate.northeastern.edu/knowledge-hub/common-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer/>

or

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/interview-questions-and-answers>

(now check the link for suggestions)

Homework Activity: Micro-roleplays using Sesame.com

Practice 3 tricky situations:

- You didn't understand a question due to accent.
(students brainstorm some experiences; common language issues in foreign speakers: l/r Japanese, Chinese; r sound French; no article Russian; non-pronunciation of schwa;
- You were asked a question you find too personal.
- You realize you misinterpreted a gesture or tone; eye contact; personal space

References and sources

1. <https://myinterviewpractice.com/blog/cultural-sensitivity/>
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Thanks for your participation!
Good luck in your next interview!

Dr. Anya Doherty



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Tens un minut?
Ens interessa la teva opinió!



ESCANEA'M!

CODI O119

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