

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Overview of business etiquette* & body language

*(*E-ti-ket*) customs and manners

(*SPEECH ACTIVITY: The following statements are often true, but not always. Skim the page. Which statements do you agree or disagree with?*)



ON TIME

Your work shift starts at 8:00, and you punch in on a time clock at 8:00. You are **on time** in the U.S., but in other countries you are late.

For a business meeting, Asians will arrive 10 minutes **before**, Americans at **the exact time**, and Latinos 10 minutes **after**. If you will be more than 5 to 10 minutes late, a phone call is expected ("**I'm sorry, but I'm running a little late**").

For a party, people are often 15 to 30 minutes late.

HANDSHAKE AND GREETING

Americans prefer a **firm** handshake and **direct** eye contact ("**Pleased to meet you**"). Not making eye contact means you are dishonest and are hiding something, or you are not paying attention, or you are a shy or fearful person.

Asians may bow slightly, and Latinos may embrace or hug you.

BUSINESS CARDS: Business cards are casually exchanged with **one hand**. It's okay to write notes on a person's card.



SPEAKING DISTANCE: Americans will stand at **arm's length**, Asians a little farther out, and Latinos a little closer.

PERIODS OF SILENCE

Americans are not comfortable with the "Less Is More" conversational style. A quiet person is viewed as not interested or as having nothing to contribute.

POINTING: The index finger is used to point, not the middle finger which is insulting ("**He gave him The Finger**").



TOUCHING

Americans who live in large cities on the coast don't touch as much as Americans from Middle America ("**They're so touchy-feely**").

Touching between men is viewed as homosexual behavior, the exception being friendly pats or slaps on the back.

Can you say "sexual harassment"?

TWO PEOPLE TALKING: When two people are talking, walk around them. If you must walk between them, please say, "**Excuse me**" or "**Pardon me**."

WHICH SIDE OF THE SIDEWALK? Americans favor the **right** side, the same side you drive a car.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: Americans value **self-expression** more than maintaining group harmony.

ACHOO!

"**God bless you!**" or "**Bless you!**" is what you say when someone sneezes. Also, blowing your nose in public is okay in the U.S., as is laughing aloud without covering your mouth.

COME HERE! The hand is **palm up** with the fingers waving toward the face or body. In other countries, the palm is down.

HOW TALL ARE YOU?

A person's height is shown with the arm stretched out, **palm down**. In Mexico and other parts of Latin America, this gesture is used only for animals, not people.

Clasp your hands. Is your left thumb or right thumb on top? (*Not necessarily scientific, but it's fun!*)

1. **Left thumb on top** indicates **right-brain** preference (visual, spatial, musical, intuitive, spontaneous – heart over mind). (Most people have left thumb on top.)

2. **Right thumb on top** indicates **left-brain** preference (verbal, mathematical, analytical, organized – mind over heart).

RECOMMENDED READING

Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World by Roger E. Axtell (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991).