



# Cultural know-how

Lesson code: K2TT-7RPB-9NM5-1

UPPER INTERMEDIATE +

## 1 Idioms

Study the following sentences and match each underlined idiom to its correct definition below.

1. At the end of the meal, we decided to go Dutch.
  2. If you want to win the argument, you should stick to your guns.
  3. Thank you for all your help. I hope someday we can return the compliment.
  4. The politician managed to save face by escaping blame for the mistake.
  5. Everyone at the party was wearing special costumes, and we had to follow suit.
  6. During the negotiation, they decided to give ground in order to reach an agreement.
  7. We were wined and dined all over the city.
  8. I was trying to be polite, but he got the wrong idea.
- a. change your position in order to make it easier to reach an agreement
  - b. do something for someone because they have done something for you
  - c. do what other people are doing
  - d. keep your position even if people try to criticize you
  - e. misunderstood
  - f. pay 50% of the bill each
  - g. protect your reputation
  - h. taken out for expensive meals

## 2 Cultural etiquette

Decide whether the statements are true or false and then check your answers by reading the article.

1. In Singapore, the word 'no' is considered impolite.
2. In Greece, you should nod your head upwards to say 'yes'.
3. In Italy, it is a bad idea to turn up late for a meeting.
4. In the Netherlands, it is a bad idea to turn up late for a meeting.
5. In Japan, the business card is very important and should be treated with respect.
6. In Russia, you should not argue during business deals.
7. In Turkey, you should not insist on sharing the restaurant bill with your host.
8. In Mexico, you should be careful about proposing dinner arrangements with your client.




 THE  
 INDEPENDENT

## Cultural know-how

**Learning about a country's culture can help you secure good working relations on your travels.**

- 1 Do you arrive 10 minutes early for an important business meeting in Rio or 10 minutes late in Amsterdam? In Moscow, is it a good idea to give ground at an early stage of the negotiations? And in Istanbul, should you offer to go Dutch with the host on the restaurant bill?
- 2 Mastering the local etiquette can be more valuable than learning the language, because so much of the world does business in English. Or a form of English. "Beware that an English word or phrase doesn't always mean the same thing abroad," warns Michael Bennett, who sells security systems in South East Asia. "In Japan and Singapore, people feel that 'no' is an impolite word, and will sometimes say 'yes' to avoid causing offence. What they really mean is 'I understand what you're saying', not 'I agree'. I'm told that in Indonesia there are 12 words for 'yes' that mean precisely the opposite."
- 3 Even the movement of your head can be open to misinterpretation. Publisher Robin Touquet has had difficulties in Athens: "The Greeks traditionally use an upward nod of the head to say 'no', and a tilt of the head from side to side to mean 'yes'. I was ready for that, but didn't realise the younger generation have learnt to do it our way. Confusion all round. If in doubt, keep still."
- 4 The issue of punctuality is almost as complicated. Oil company executive Malcolm Thorburn deliberately turns up a few minutes late for meetings in Brazil "because Brazilians believe latecomers are more likely to be commercially successful than people who arrive early. They're impressed by people who are relaxed enough not to worry about the clock. The Italians take a similar attitude. They believe that arriving late shows who is the boss." However, don't risk that in the Netherlands. "The Dutch frown upon lateness," warns film finance agent James Hindle: "They believe that people who can't use their time wisely cannot be trusted."
- 5 Hindle has also experienced the ceremony of exchanging business cards in Japan. "The business card is seen as representing the individual, so the whole affair has to be treated with respect. You must accept your client's card with both hands, perhaps admiring it, and then place it carefully in your cardholder."
- 6 The social side of Japanese commerce can also unnerve the western visitor, who might have to go a karaoke bar and sing. "Many Japanese businessmen like to conclude business by performing their favourite song in a karaoke bar," says management trainer Nicole Wehden. "You're expected to follow suit."
- 7 In Russia, the ritual of the business meeting is more theatrical skill. "I've seen temper tantrums, sudden walkouts, table-thumping and so on, but it's all part of the fun," says Michael Bennett. "And they admire you more if you stick to your guns. Seeking a compromise early is seen as a sign of weakness."
- 8 In almost every business community around the world, the host pays for the meal. Malcolm Thorburn was wined and dined in Istanbul, and all went well until he insisted on paying his share: "It caused real embarrassment," he recalls. "In Turkey, the idea of sharing a bill is quite alien. The best policy is to thank your host and return the compliment at the first opportunity."
- 9 Insurance underwriter Toni Morrison caused supper-time embarrassment in Mexico five years ago. "I was working late with a client, and midway through the evening I felt so hungry I suggested we carry on working at a nearby restaurant. The client thought this was a sign I had a romantic interest in him. When I realised he'd got the wrong idea I started to laugh, which made things even worse. The only way of getting out of it was to enable him to save face, so I accepted all the blame for the misunderstanding."

*Adapted from The Independent, 18 June 2007*



### 3 Find the words

Find a word or phrase in the article which means...

1. offending people (*phrase, P2*) \_\_\_\_\_
2. understood incorrectly (*phrase, P3*) \_\_\_\_\_
3. an upward or downward movement of the head (*noun, P3*) \_\_\_\_\_
4. do not move (*phrase, P3*) \_\_\_\_\_
5. people who arrive late (*noun, P4*) \_\_\_\_\_
6. disapprove of (*phrasal verb, P4*) \_\_\_\_\_
7. make someone feel nervous or uncomfortable (*verb, P6*) \_\_\_\_\_
8. sudden periods of uncontrolled childish anger (*plural noun, P7*) \_\_\_\_\_

### 4 Grammar - Modal verbs for advice, possibility and necessity

Look at the following sentences from the text and answer the questions below.

**Should** you offer to go Dutch with the host on the restaurant bill?

The social side of Japanese commerce **can** also unnerve the western visitor, who **might** have to go a karaoke bar and sing.

...the whole affair **has to** be treated with respect.

You **must** accept your client's card with both hands.

1. Which modal verb means that something is generally possible?
2. Which modal verb means that something is possible, although not very likely?
3. Which modal verb means 'it is a good idea'?
4. Which two modal verbs express an obligation?
5. What is the negative form of each modal verb?
6. What are the positive and negative past forms of **might** and **should**?
7. What are the positive and negative past forms of **have to** and **must** (used for obligation)?
8. What other modal verb expresses obligation? what are the negative and past forms?
9. What is the difference between these two sentences?  
I **must** get some sleep.  
I **have to** get some sleep.
10. What is the difference between these two sentences?  
I **don't have to** get up early tomorrow.  
I **mustn't** get up late tomorrow.
11. What other modal verbs express possibility and speculation? What are the past forms?



## 5 Grammar practice - Modals (present forms)

**Rewrite the sentences below using a suitable modal verb:**

Example: It is a good idea to arrive on time for meetings in the Netherlands.

You should arrive on time for meetings in the Netherlands.

1. Calling your new boss by his first name is not a good idea in this country.
2. Parking your car in the manager's parking space is not allowed.
3. The company dress code is very relaxed, so it is not necessary to wear a suit and tie for the meeting.
4. If you don't learn about the country's culture, there is a slight chance that you will cause someone offence on your business trip.
5. There is a general possibility of offending someone if you ignore cultural etiquette.
6. I'm feeling rather tired. It is necessary for me to go to bed now.
7. It is necessary for me to get up early tomorrow because I start work at 8 o'clock.
8. If you want to do successful business in Russia, it is a good idea to stick to your guns during negotiations.
9. If Sam keeps arriving late for work, there is a possibility that he will get the sack.
10. Karina has been very stressed lately. It is necessary for her to take a holiday.

## 6 Grammar practice - Modals (Past forms, speculating)

**Complete the following sentences with a suitable past form of should, may, might, could, couldn't, can't, must + the verb in brackets**

Example: Duncan looked rather upset. He must have misunderstood (misunderstand) me.

1. Michael's meeting in the Netherlands didn't go so well. He \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive) so late for the meeting.
2. Margaret failed her exam again. She \_\_\_\_\_ (study) harder.
3. We didn't receive your last invoice. You \_\_\_\_\_ (send) it to the wrong address.
4. Emilio \_\_\_\_\_ (move) abroad. I saw him just yesterday!
5. The new deal we signed wasn't particularly cost-effective. With more careful preparation, we \_\_\_\_\_ (negotiate) a much better price.
6. ABC's advertising campaign looks very similar to ours. They \_\_\_\_\_ (copy) our campaign.
7. Angelo is having problems with his English. He \_\_\_\_\_ (join) the company English course last year.
8. I didn't hear the phone ring. I \_\_\_\_\_ (be) asleep.
9. 'I can't find my car keys.' 'You \_\_\_\_\_ (leave) them in the office.'
10. You \_\_\_\_\_ (attend) the business development conference last month. It was probably the most interesting and useful conference I've been to all year.



## 7 Grammar practice - Modals past and present

**Work in pairs. For each of the situations below, use past and present modal verbs to speculate on what went wrong, how the situation should have been dealt with correctly, and on the possible consequence of the mistake.**

Example: During negotiations with a potential customer from Singapore, Carl said 'no' to several important propositions. It has been a week now and he hasn't heard anything. He is worried that the potential customer has decided to make a deal with one of his competitors.

*Answer: Carl might lose the deal. The potential customer may have been offended. In Singapore, 'no' is considered an impolite word. Carl should have learnt something about the culture in order to be better prepared for the meeting.*

1. Simon, the representative of an American manufacturing company, had arranged an important meeting in Rio with a group of Brazilian businessmen to discuss their possible investment in his company's new business plan. When the Brazilians arrived at the conference room, Simon was already there waiting for them. He had turned up 20 minutes early.
2. James, an architect from Britain, turned up 10 minutes late for an important meeting with a potential client in Amsterdam. James' firm is well-established in the market and offered a better price than his competitors. However, now the Dutch client isn't replying to his follow-up emails.
3. Paolo, an electronics distributor in Italy, is in the middle of an important meeting with the representative of a potential Japanese supplier in Tokyo. During the exchange of business cards at the beginning of the meeting, Paolo took the representative's card, folded it in two and slipped it into his back pocket. The Japanese negotiator seemed less friendly after that.
4. During a business dinner in Turkey, Peter tried to insist on paying his share of the bill. His host went quiet and appeared a little red in the face.

## 8 Talking point

**What etiquette advice would you give to a foreign visitor seeking to do business in your country? Try to use some vocabulary from this lesson.**

**Have you or a visitor ever had any difficulties during a meeting or trip abroad? How could you or your visitor have been better prepared?**



If the students work in a cross-cultural environment, encourage a short warm-up discussion on the cultural differences in the habits and behaviour of the people they work or do business with.

### 1 Idioms

This can also be done as a pair work exercise.

1. f      2. d      3. b      4. g      5. c      6. a      7. h      8. e

Ask students questions using some of the idioms, e.g. 'Do you usually go Dutch with your friends/colleagues?', 'Have you ever been wined and dined', 'If you went to a karaoke bar with your colleagues and they started singing, would you follow suit?' etc.

### 2 Cultural etiquette

1. True                      2. False                      3. False                      4. True  
 5. True                      6. False                      7. True                      8. True

NOTE: The statement about Mexico should be treated as a joke. Obviously, Toni Morrison's personal experience does not reflect the cultural etiquette of Mexico in particular.

### 3 Find the words

1. causing offence
2. open to misinterpretation
3. nod
4. keep still
5. latecomers
6. frown upon
7. unnerve
8. temper tantrums

### 4 Grammar - Modal verbs for advice, possibility and necessity

1. can
2. might
3. should
4. must, has to
5. might not, shouldn't, can't, don't/doesn't have to, mustn't
6. might/might not have + PAST PARTICIPLE, should/shouldn't have + PAST PARTICIPLE
7. had to/didn't have to, had to/wasn't allowed to
8. need to, don't need to/needn't, needed to, didn't need to
9. Must generally refers to a personal, 'internal' obligation, whereas have to generally refers to an external obligation (an external reason why something is necessary such as a timetable constraint, a law, the weather, etc.
10. Don't have to refers to a lack of obligation (i.e. something is not necessary), whereas mustn't refers to an obligation not to do something (i.e. something is forbidden)
11. could (couldn't/could have/couldn't have), may (may not/may have/may not have), can't (can't have)



**5 Grammar practice - Modals (present forms)**

*Suitable answers:*

1. You shouldn't call your new boss by his first name in this country.
2. You mustn't park your car in the manager's parking space.
3. The company dress code is very relaxed, so you don't have to wear a suit and tie for the meeting.
4. If you don't learn about the country's culture, you might cause someone offence on your business trip.
5. You can offend someone if you ignore cultural etiquette.
6. I'm feeling rather tired. I must go to bed now.
7. I have to get up early tomorrow because I start work at 8 o'clock.
8. If you want to do successful business in Russia, you should stick to your guns during negotiations.
9. If Sam keeps arriving late for work, he could get the sack.
10. Karina has been very stressed lately. She needs to take a holiday

**6 Grammar practice - Modals (Past forms, speculating)**

*When students get stuck, prompt an appropriate modal verb, e.g. TEACHER: 'Was it a good idea that Michael arrived late for the meeting?' STUDENT: 'No. So, he shouldn't have arrived late.' Suitable answers:*

1. shouldn't have arrived
2. should have studied
3. must have sent
4. can't have moved
5. could have negotiated
6. might have copied
7. should have joined
8. must have been
9. could have left
10. should have attended

**7 Grammar practice - Modals past and present**

*Possible answers:*

1. Simon shouldn't have arrived so early. The Brazilians might be cautious about doing business with him now. In Brazil, latecomers are considered more likely to be successful in business.
2. The Dutch firm may have frowned upon James' lateness. They may decide to hire one of his competitors instead. James should have been punctual for the meeting.
3. Paolo may have offended the Japanese supplier. In Japan, the exchange of business cards should be treated with respect. He should have been better prepared for the meeting. It might be harder for him now to secure a good deal now.
4. Peter must have embarrassed his host. He shouldn't have tried to insist on paying. In Turkey, you should let your host pay the bill.

