

Purpose

Use this checklist to help leaders and frontline managers communicate more effectively with international clients, guests, colleagues and brand partners.

This tool is not designed to label people by nationality or culture. Use it to observe, clarify and adapt respectfully.

Part 1: Before the Interaction

Ask yourself:

- Who will be involved in the conversation?
- Is this a client, guest, colleague, senior leader or brand partner?
- Is the purpose to sell, advise, resolve, negotiate, host or build trust?
- Do I need to prepare product details, service options or follow-up actions?
- Should I use a concise summary or a more relationship-focused opening?
- Are there any language or cultural factors that may affect understanding?

Useful preparation phrase:

“Let me prepare both a concise recommendation and supporting details, so I can adapt to the conversation.”

Part 2: During the Interaction - What to Notice

Observe:

- Does the person prefer direct answers or more context?
- Are they speaking quickly or carefully?
- Are they asking many detailed questions?
- Are they using humour, idioms or indirect comments?
- Are they quiet because they agree or might they need more time?
- Do they respond more positively to facts, stories, reassurance or relationship-building?

Reminder:

Do not assume. Observe first.

Part 3: What to Avoid

Avoid:

- Making assumptions based only on nationality.
- Saying “People from your country usually...”
- Correcting grammar or pronunciation unnecessarily.
- Laughing at language mistakes.
- Speaking too quickly.
- Using too much slang or idiomatic English.
- Interrupting before the person has finished.
- Treating silence as automatic agreement.
- Treating directness as rudeness.
- Treating expressive communication as anger.
- Giving unclear or vague answers when precision is needed.

Part 4: What to Say Instead

Use respectful clarification:

- “May I clarify one point?”
- “Just to make sure I understand correctly...”
- “Would you prefer a brief summary or more detail?”
- “Let me explain that another way.”
- “Would it be helpful if I gave an example?”
- “Please take your time — I’m happy to go through the options.”
- “Let me summarise the key points.”
- “That is a helpful question. Here is the most important point.”

Part 5: After the Interaction

Reflect:

- Was the message understood clearly?
- Did I adapt my communication appropriately?
- Did I make any assumptions?
- Was the person given enough time and respect?
- Is follow-up needed in writing?
- What can I do better next time?

Follow-up phrase:

“Thank you for the discussion. To confirm, the key points we agreed are...”

Part 6: When Managing Multicultural Teams

Leaders should ask:

- Do all team members feel safe asking for clarification?
- Are quieter colleagues invited to contribute?
- Do we discourage teasing about English mistakes?
- Do we focus on meaning before grammar?
- Do we allow time for people to prepare for important discussions?
- Do we model respectful communication across languages and cultures?

Leadership phrase:

"In our team, clarity matters more than perfect English. If something is unclear, we clarify respectfully."

Final Reminder

Cultural intelligence is not about memorising rules.
It is about communicating with curiosity, clarity and respect.