We tend to make assumptions about what other people think or know, based on the context of the conversation as much as on the words they use and their body language. Very often, it’s these assumptions that cause a misunderstanding, so here are some tips for communicating successfully:

- Be complete and explicit, and pay attention to the other person’s response before continuing.
- Avoid metaphors, colloquialisms, and jargon. If you must use jargon, explain it.
- Be alert for different meanings of the words you use and the other person use.
- If a word or concept is not understood, reword your thoughts. Do not simply repeat it or increase your volume (as if the listener has a hearing problem).
- Seek verification of understanding. Ask the listener to confirm information or directions in their own words.
- Consider the most appropriate mode of communication – would it help to write things down?
- Withhold judgment and consciously set your assumptions aside.
- Acknowledge cultural differences without bias and be persistent. When you have difficulty, talk about it together.
- Study and evaluate cultural generalisations. Understand that even valid generalisations must be carefully considered when applied to individuals.
- Be sensitive to cultural stands on social issues like gender roles and drug use.
- Do not ask questions that you would not or could not answer yourself.

Successful communication occurs when one person understands the meaning and intention of what another person has said. Communicating across cultures can be challenging, because we don’t all have the same ways of making our meaning and intention clear.

If you are having difficulty communicating with, or have concerns about an individual or group of students where cultural differences are relevant, please contact International Student Advisers to discuss the situation and the support available.

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