



A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE

Learners discuss social customs in the UK and in their own countries

Level:	Intermediate - Advanced
Target Audience:	Secondary, Adults (of the same nationality)
Language / Skills Focus:	Culture, Speaking
Activity Time:	50 minutes
Materials:	One copy of the worksheet for each learner

MATERIALS PREPARATION

Make copies of the worksheet for everyone in the class.

IN CLASS

- 1 Write the word 'etiquette' on the board and check that everyone understands its meaning by doing a quick brainstorm of ideas and examples.
- 2 Give each learner a copy of the worksheet, and deal with any problems concerning the language and meaning in the statements.
- 3 Tell your learners that they should work individually to complete the worksheet. Explain that if they think a statement is generally true, they should put a tick in the column. If they think it is false, they should put a cross. If they do not know, they should write a question mark. They should respond to the statements both for their own country and for the UK. Set a reasonable time limit for this, and begin the activity.
- 4 When everyone has responded to the statements, put learners into groups of three or four.
- 5 Tell groups that they have twenty minutes to discuss the statements and their reactions to each. Groups should try to reach a consensus of opinion.
- 6 At the end of the time limit, stop the activity and ask each group to report back. Draw a table on the board and ask each group to fill it in with their ticks, crosses and question marks.
- 7 Finally, initiate a discussion with the whole class about social customs in the UK, and fill in any gaps in their knowledge of the norms.

EXTENSION

Ask learners to write a letter to a pen-pal from the UK who is going to visit their country, explaining some of the customs and ways of behaving, especially those that are likely to surprise or shock their English visitor.

COMMENT

I have tried to make this activity do-able in monolingual groups that have an interest in talking about UK culture and a well-informed teacher. I have frequently used a similar activity with classes of mixed nationalities learning English in the UK. In this case, I do not focus so much on British culture, but encourage them to talk about their own countries and make comparisons. The lesson leads to a lively discussion on the differences between countries and their cultures, and enhances learners' awareness and appreciation of these differences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The activity was originally suggested by a questionnaire in *Blueprint Intermediate* by Brian Abbs and Ingrid Freebairn (Longman). I have adapted it.

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Worksheet

A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE

	In my country	In the UK
Men should wear jackets and ties in restaurants.		
If a man invites a woman to go out for a meal, she expects him to pay the bill.		
Taxi drivers expect their passengers to give them a tip.		
Children and teenagers should give up their seats on buses and trains to older people.		
It is OK for young people to hold hands and kiss in the street.		
If you give someone a present, they should not open it until after you have left.		
It is OK to visit people at home without letting them know that you are coming.		
If someone visits your house unexpectedly, you should offer them something to eat and drink.		
If you are having a meal at a friend's house and there is extra food on the table, it is OK to help yourself without asking.		
It is normal to take off or change your shoes when you go into your own or someone else's house.		



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Worksheet

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

In the UK	
Men should wear jackets and ties in restaurants.	Yes. This is expected in the more expensive and chic restaurants. But you are unlikely to be turned away from most restaurants if you are more casually dressed.
If a man invites a woman to go out for a meal, she expects him to pay the bill.	No. A woman should at least offer to pay her share of the bill, but of course some men will refuse to accept! Most women nowadays like to be treated as equals and pay their own share.
Taxi drivers expect their passengers to give them a tip.	Yes. It is customary to give taxi drivers a tip of around 10% of the fare.
Children and teenagers should give up their seats on buses and trains to older people.	Older people still expect this but it happens less frequently nowadays.
It is OK for young people to hold hands and kiss in the street.	Yes, although not everyone likes to see a couple getting very intimate. It can be embarrassing for onlookers.
If you give someone a present, they should not open it until after you have left.	No. You should open a present as soon as it is given to you, and thank the person who brought it for you.
It is OK to visit people at home without letting them know that you are coming.	Most people prefer to know in advance that you are coming, so a phone call is a good idea. There is no problem with dropping in on good friends, but don't expect a meal if you arrive unexpectedly.
If someone visits your house unexpectedly, you should offer them something to eat and drink.	Most people would offer a drink, but it is not normal to provide food as well if the person arrives unexpectedly.
If you are having a meal at a friend's house and there is extra food on the table, it is OK to help yourself without asking.	No. It would surprise (and perhaps offend) your hostess if you helped yourself to extra food without asking. However, once you have asked, the answer will usually be, "Help yourself, I'm glad you like it."
It is normal to take off or change your shoes when you go into your own or someone else's house.	It is not normal to walk around without shoes in UK homes. However, if your shoes are wet or dirty, it's a good idea to ask if your host(ess) would prefer you to take them off.