



# U.S. Business Culture

*Depending on your home country, you may find differences in the way business is conducted in the United States. Many of these differences are directly related to the attitudes and social conventions (attitude toward formality, diversity, etc.) mentioned earlier in the course. The following are generalized examples of common standards only; your experience may vary depending on your U.S. host company.*



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## Names

- » In some countries, it is usual for employees to be called by their job title or by their family/last names. In the U.S., first names are commonly used.
- » Coworkers will generally tell you how to refer to him/her.
- » If you are very uncomfortable calling someone by his/her first name, try using Mr. or Ms. when addressing someone by his/her last name.
- » Do not use Mr. or Ms. when addressing someone by his/her first name.

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## Dress

- » Formality of dress varies by company; some are informal.
- » You will receive information regarding dress code from your company.
- » See the packing section in the US Living PDF for packing suggestions.

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## Work roles

- » In some countries, junior employees are encouraged to observe and learn from senior employees, rather than participate.
- » In the U.S., employees are valued for taking initiative and offering ideas.
- » Interns considered “lower-level” employees may be treated more like regular employee.
- » Junior employees are expected to work independently, using skills and experience.

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## Benefits

- » Many positions include benefits in addition to pay, and may include:
  - o Health insurance
  - o Public transportation allowance
  - o Sick days
  - o Vacation days
  - o Company discounts
- » You will receive information about specific benefits soon after you begin employment.
- » Make sure you ask enough questions to have a sufficient understanding of your benefits.



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## Understanding and asking for clarification

- » Ask for clarification if you do not fully understand.
- » Ask rather than make a mistake.
- » Phrases:
  - o “I’m not sure I understood that.”
  - o “Could you please explain one more time?”
  - o “I wanted to check with you.”
  - o “When you said [what the employer said], did you mean [your interpretation of what the employer said]?”

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## Asking for more information

- » If you do not have enough information to complete a task, ask for more information.
- » If information is accessible in a document or on the internet, research before you ask for more information.
- » When you complete all tasks, ask for more work.

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## Making suggestions, sharing opinions

- » U.S. employers value opinions of employees, including interns.
- » Make sure you understand a topic before offering input.

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## “Open Door” Policy

- » Most managers will extend the invitation to notify them of any difficulties or problems that may occur.
- » While it may not be appropriate to approach a supervisor with complaints in some countries, in the U.S. it is expected that you do so respectfully and in private.

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## Workplace diversity, discrimination, and harassment

- » Employers take discrimination and sexual harassment very seriously.
- » Discrimination and/or harassment based on the following “Protected Classes” is generally prohibited by federal, state, or local law:
  - o Age
  - o National origin
  - o Disability
  - o Race and ethnicity
  - o Marital status
  - o Veteran status
  - o Religion
  - o Sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity
- » All employers strongly forbid sexual harassment.
- » Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- » Any harassment or discrimination should be reported to a work supervisor immediately.



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## Work hours

- » Employees in the US generally leave the workplace when their work hours are complete.
- » Employees in the US are not expected to wait for their coworkers to finish before leaving for the day.

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## Eating and socializing

- » Lunch: While employees may choose to eat lunch together, it is not customary in most companies for all employees to eat together or at the same time
- » Dinner/After Hours: Some companies may occasionally organize special after-hours outings, but generally employees are not expected to dine or socialize together once work hours are over.

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## Email etiquette

- » The subject line clearly states the topic of the email.
- » Begin emails with Dear Mr./Ms. [Last name] or Dear [First name].
- » Do not use all capital letters.
- » Do not use unusual fonts or colors other than black or blue.
- » Do not use emoticons (^\_^). Use only one question mark (?) at a time.
- » Avoid using exclamation marks (!).

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## Showing politeness

- » U.S. communication may be more informal, but politeness is still required.
- » Use “please” when making requests.
- » Use “thank you” when someone does something for you or gives you something.
- » Talking about someone’s age, weight, or race is rude.

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## General guidelines for work behavior

- » Do not make personal phone calls or use the internet for personal reasons.
- » Be on time; call in advance if you will be late.
- » It is not necessary to ask permission to leave at the end of the work day.