

***DukeWrites* Enrichment Suite**

Intercultural norms, part one

With Rene Caputo, Duke ESL Specialist

Hi, I'm Rene Caputo, with the Thompson Writing Program and Duke's Writing Studio. Today, we're gonna talk about some of the norms of education that you might experience as a Duke student that could be different from those in your culture. We'll look at the educational norms of participation, questions, office hours, and assignments.

So as a Duke student, participation is often a part of your grade for each of your courses. You might be wondering what exactly counts as participation. And you can always ask a particular professor that question.

But in general, participation includes asking questions, answering questions, giving your opinions, such as agreeing or disagreeing with what someone else said. Those are some examples for you.

I have found that some professors include what you post on a Sakai discussion board as part of a participation grade, but that really depends on your professors. So again, I encourage you to ask.

How can you more effectively participate in your classroom?

One thing is to really try to prepare before each of your classes meets. Read the readings very carefully and try to take notes on them. Consider what might be a question that your professor might ask in class. And think about that, write down the question's answer if you have time.

Another thing that you might find is a little bit different as a Duke student is how much time people pause after someone else finishes talking. In U.S. culture, this time is often very short. And you might even find that students interrupt each other.

They might even interrupt the professor when they think the professor is at the end of the sentence. So this might be a little bit different from your culture. See if you can adjust.

If you find it difficult to adjust to that time, one thing you might try is just to raise your hand, so someone can see that you are ready to answer a question or say something even if you have not opened your mouth and started to speak.

Now, some of your professors might say you really need to raise your hand and in other

classrooms you'll notice that people are talking and they never raised their hand.

If you put your hand down low like this and no one called on you, then try raising it a little higher. And if that doesn't work, try to raise it all the way up.

You might need to be persistent in trying to participate amongst other students from different cultures including the United States in your classroom. Keep trying. Even if participation is not an important part of your grade in a particular course, it's really important for you to share your thoughts, your opinions, in the classroom. And to have a voice in that classroom.

So now we're on the topic of questions. As I already said, asking questions is a form of participation during your courses as a Duke student.

You can ask before class, you can ask during class, you can ask after class. Your professor or teaching assistant might ask if you understand something. And perhaps in your culture it's not ok to say no. If you're unable to say, "No, I don't understand" then find another way to convey that to the professor.

You might say, "Could you give us another example of this, please?" Make sure the professor knows that you still need some help, that you would like some more assistance.

A professor or teaching assistant might also ask, "Do you have any questions?" This is your opportunity to get help. And I really encourage you to take advantage of it.

Outside of the classroom, your professors will have office hours. Those will be listed in your syllabus for the course. Feel free to go to those office hours to get additional help with your assignments or with any questions or course content. If the office hours do not fit with your class schedule, make an appointment.

Assignments. In U.S. academic culture, we have a lot of assignments normally for each course. And this might not be normal for your culture. So here are a few tips for you. First of all, it is essential, it is incredibly important that you follow the directions carefully.

Be sure to notice what the deadline is for the assignment. Or, for a writing class, perhaps you have multiple deadlines for the assignment. Look at those carefully and turn in each assignment on time. If you do not do so, you will probably have a serious penalty to your grade.

If what's slowing you down with your assignment is that you do not understand what you are supposed to be doing, ask questions. Ask your professor and your teaching assistant. And ask them as fast as you have your questions. Do not wait until the last

moment.

If you've been asked to write something that you really have never written before and you don't know what to do, ask the professor or teaching assistant for an example of that kind of writing.

Maybe a lab report, maybe a policy memo. Do not sit in your dorm room or somewhere else trying to figure it out by yourself. Ask for help.

Be sure, for each assignment, to do the work by yourself. Unless your professor or teaching assistant has said: on this particular assignment, I want you to work with these other classmates. Every assignment should be treated as an individual assignment unless you have those specific instructions to work as a group or as a team.

And I encourage you to take full advantage of appointments with the Writing Studio.

[U.S. Speech Norms]

You might find when listening to English as a Duke student that some people are speaking really quickly and their words seem to be all squashed together. Don't ya think ya oughtta do it? Don't ya think ya oughtta do it?

That means: Don't you think you ought to do it?

This is a very common way of speaking. And you might want to have some strategies to better understand what people are saying.

If you don't understand, first of all, it's really important that you are willing to ask for help. You can ask the person to repeat what they said. If you still don't understand it, ask them to rephrase it. Could you say that in another way?

Ask them to slow down. And if you need to, ask them to write it down. Feel free to ask for help.

Another strategy is to learn these squashed together forms that we call reduced speech. You don't have to use them, but if you learn more of them, they will be easier for you to understand.

You might also want to make an effort to learn some U.S. idiomatic phrases. And above all, speak English and listen to English as much as possible.

So here are a few examples of U.S. reduced speech. Couda, cuz. Hafta, doncha.

Dunno, otta. In fruna. And whend'ya wanna go?

I imagine that you might have heard some of these before or seen some of these before,

but let's just look at those quickly.

Coulda ~ Could have

Cuz ~ Because

Hafta ~ Have to

Doncha ~ Don't you

Dunno ~ Don't know

Otta ~ Ought to

In fruna ~ In front of

Whend'y wanna go? ~ When do you want to go?

Please take the quiz on U.S. reduced speech and idiomatic phrases.