

### **Introduction:**

This lesson will challenge participants to consider how culture affects their professional correspondence. In this activity, they will mine their "Sent" folder in their email and identify language patterns within their responses. They will then reflect on how the context and their cultural norms or values might have affected how they responded in particular instances.

### **Objectives:**

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Identify language patterns across their professional correspondence.
2. Analyze how context and culture might affect their email responses to others.

### **Time:**

1 hour and 30 minutes

### **Group Size:**

Entire Group

### **Materials:**

Access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone

### **Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:**

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

### **AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:**

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

### Activity Instructions:

1. Navigate to the program that you use for your professional email.
2. Browse through your "Sent" folder and find contrasting pairs of emails where you do the following. Choose three to four of these contrasting patterns:
  - Make more or less polite requests
  - Use more or less formal or informal greetings
  - Use more or less formal or informal language and/or punctuation (such as exclamation points, emojis, etc.)
  - Use more or less elaborate or detailed explanations
  - Use or don't use humor
  - Come to the point abruptly or make small talk first
  - Use a more or less powerful tone
  - Express your feelings more or less intensely
  - Any other contrasting patterns that you see within your email responses
3. Once you have identified all contrasting pairs, answer the following reflection prompts:
  - What is the context surrounding these examples you have chosen?
    - Who was the recipient? How do you relate to them in terms of your professional position? How well do you know them?
    - Why were you contacting them?
    - When were you contacting them? Was it an initial contact or a response to another message?
  - How do you think these contextual factors affect the style and tone in which you communicated with the recipients?
  - What cultural norms or values might have been at play in your communication style?
    - For example, power dynamics, the need to save face, directness vs. indirectness, separation between personal and professional, importance of harmony, definitions of politeness, etc.
  - If you know that you and the recipient may have had some differing cultural values, how did you navigate that scenario?
  - How might your communication style have changed if the context was different?
  - What have you learned about yourself, your communication style, and your cultural values as a result of this analysis?
  - How much variation did you notice across your emails? Why is variation important?
  - What might you do differently and what might you be thinking through strategically as you write your next email?

### Related Tools:

- [Direct-Indirect Communication](#)
- [Pacing](#)