

Introduction:

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

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?