

Introduction:

This activity will demonstrate to participants how different cultures express values through titles of address. Participants will describe the honorifics used in their own and different cultures and discuss the traits those honorifics highlight.

Different cultures use different honorifics, which can provide some insight into what values and elements are important in that culture. Participants will begin by listing honorifics and the corresponding culture in which the honorific is used. Next, the participants will describe the aspects each honorific highlights, such as skill, age, relationship, etc.

Objectives:

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

1. Recognize that different cultures emphasize different values regarding skill, age, relationship, etc. through honorific titles.

Time:

20 minutes.

Group Size:

Entire group.

Materials:

Participant Instructions (in [Downloads](#)).

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).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

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.

Activity Instructions:

The facilitator should begin by asking the following:

- The terms “Sir” and “Ma'am” are used more frequently in some parts of the U.S than in others. What parts of the country use these terms most often? Why are these honorifics used?
- Do people in your culture refer to each other by their first names, or are the honorifics “Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name)” or equivalent more frequently used? Why do you think there are these differences?
- The terms “Auntie” and “Uncle” are frequently used in India, for example, when referring to older women and men who are not necessarily related to an individual. Why do you think this is done?
- List some honorifics used to show respect for people who have a particular skill.
- Some cultures have more terms indicating family relationship status. Provide some examples. Why do you think these differences in culture exist?
- What do these honorifics tell us about that particular culture’s values?

Debrief and Reflection

Help students reflect on honorifics by asking them to answer some reflection questions. Encourage students to discuss their thoughts and responses with one another in class – you can start by having them speak with a partner or in small groups and then extend the discussion to the entire class if you wish.

- What are the main takeaways?
- How might you use this understanding when encountering new honorifics?

Related Tools:

- [Culturally Intelligent Professional, The](#)
- [Hofstede Value Dimensions Online Country Comparison Tool](#)
- [Hofstede Website Activity](#)
- [Knowing Your Cultural Style](#)
- [Language Coding](#)
- [Power Distance Case Study](#)
- [Power Distance Quiz](#)
- [Respect Activity](#)