

Adjusting to Life in America

America is made up of a variety of diverse cultures and peoples. It is these very differences that are celebrated at Otis College of Art and Design. However, it is not uncommon for International Students to experience culture shock during their first few months at college. Much of the culture shock has to do with new geography and making new friends, but culture shock is also brought upon from having to learn new cultural behaviors/manners. Ideas concerning proper manners, etiquette, vary widely from culture to culture. If you have just moved to America, your adjustment time will be shorter if you understand a few American manners.

Everyday Manners

1. Most Americans will smile and shake hand. Handshaking is acceptable for men or women. Women can offer their hand to a man and a man can offer his to a lady. The general accepted area of personal space while conversing is about two feet. Eye contact shows sincerity, but intense eye contact is a negative sign. Pointing at someone is slightly rude.
2. Many Americans speak only one language: English. It's perfectly acceptable to ask an American to speak slower or repeat what he has said.
3. Americans work generally from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an hour for lunch, around noon. Many international students are surprised by the various American holidays, which include a two-week vacation for most workers, Christmas, New Year, Easter, Labor Day, Memorial Day and a few others.
4. Be on time for appointments since punctuality is important in the professional world. It's acceptable to be a few minutes late for a social affair.
5. If you burp, belch or sneeze in public, cover your mouth and say, "excuse me."
6. It is considered good personal hygiene to use deodorant and brush your teeth. Americans are sensitive about body odor and very conscious of personal appearance.

Meal Manners

1. Table etiquette is not as strict as in some countries. Use the knife or fork in either hand, or switch them at will. Some foods are eaten with the hands, such as appetizers, breads, cupcakes, fruits and some vegetables.
2. When invited to an American's home don't be surprised if the women, and even the children, are a part of the group affair.
3. Smoking is not allowed in many restaurants and personal homes, so if you smoke, ask if it's acceptable to do so.
4. It is polite to wait for others at the table to be served before you begin eating.
5. It is courteous to help with preparation and cleaning up after meals. Ask if you can help, if not, you can stand and talk to the host while they are busy.
6. Do not talk with your mouth full! And chew with your mouth closed.
7. Do NOT touch your nose, hair, or teeth at the table.
8. If you cannot swallow something, put it in your napkin, i.e. bones, seeds, etc.

Overnight Manners

1. When spending the night at a friend's house, take a toothbrush, toothpaste and pajamas (towels and soap are usually provided).
2. Ask when an appropriate time to arrive is and an appropriate time to leave for home. Also, ask about the family schedule. You never want to overstay your welcome.
3. Bathroom use - Use the bathroom for no longer than 30 minutes. When you come out of the bathroom, leave it clean, dry and make sure you have taken out all of your personal items. Also, take your hair out of the bathroom tub drain and face bowl.
4. Phone – When in someone else's home, ask before you use the telephone, and talk no longer than 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Television – It is appropriate for your host to choose the program. Save your questions or comments until the commercials, because most people do not like to be disturbed in the middle of a program.

6. Your guest room – Upon leaving your guest room, leave it neat and clean by making the bed and putting your things away.

7. With each meal, snack or helpful favor, always say an immediate “thank you.”

8. A closed door usually means that someone is inside. KNOCK and wait to be invited in before entering.