



# CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

LEVEL 2 PROJECT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Introduction
3	Your Assignment
4	Assess Your Skills
5	Competencies
5	Defining Culture
7	Understanding Cultural Diversity
10	Review and Apply
10	Complete Your Assignment
11	Resources

**TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL**

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# INTRODUCTION



Toastmasters International is a worldwide organization with clubs in more than 135 countries. One of the greatest benefits of belonging to an organization such as Toastmasters is the opportunity to connect with members from a variety of countries and cultures.

Each club meeting, Annual Toastmasters International Convention, and social media or other online connection offers the possibility of cultivating a better understanding of yourself and others. Making the most of each interaction helps you gain understanding of and respect for other cultures while enhancing your communication skills.

In this project, you will learn what defines culture as well as the importance of cross-cultural awareness in communication. You will have the opportunity to explore the stereotypes associated with your personal cultures and build an understanding of the value of interpersonal connections as a communicator and leader.

# YOUR ASSIGNMENT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to identify your own cultural identities and the stereotypes that impact others' perceptions of you.

**Overview:** Develop a 5- to 7-minute speech about the cultures with which you most closely identify and the personal impact of the stereotypes commonly associated with those cultures. You may need to spend some time researching the stereotypes believed about your cultures, especially if you are a member of the most dominant cultures in your geographic area. Be aware that all cultural identities have some sort of affiliated stereotype, even if it is obscure or uncommon.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 11.**

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Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

# ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

**5**  
EXEMPLARY

**4**  
EXCEL

**3**  
ACCOMPLISHED

**2**  
EMERGING

**1**  
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the definition of culture.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize the need to cultivate an understanding of other cultures.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am able to recognize the stereotypes that others identify with my cultures.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am sensitive to cultural differences.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand the difference between cultural norms and cultural stereotypes.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident in my ability to connect with people from various cultures.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

# COMPETENCIES

**The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.**

- Understand the definition of culture.
- Understand the need for cultural awareness.
- Acknowledge the impact of stereotypes on your own life and in the way you view others.
- Recognize the importance of respecting the customs and etiquette of other cultures.
- Demonstrate cultural awareness in interactions with others.

## DEFINING CULTURE

Culture is more than location, ethnicity, race, or religion. It is a collection of beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and lifestyles learned both unconsciously and consciously that are shared by a group of people. Cultural values are often ingrained in such a way that many of us are unaware of the far reaching impact they have on our relationships and experiences.

We all associate with many cultures. You may be female, a member of a certain profession, an animal lover, and a sports fan. Each of these represents a different culture.

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness is the acknowledgement of the many cultural connections that combine to form a personality and belief system that is unique to you. Each person has her own unique combination of cultural identities.

### Diversity

The mindset of a culturally aware communicator includes remaining open and mindful of the commonalities and diversity that exist between you and the people around you.

### Values and Beliefs

Cross-cultural communication requires that you recognize your own cultural values and beliefs and how these beliefs influence your views and interactions with others.

## **DEVELOP AWARENESS**

Though it is common to focus on one identifying culture when you meet someone new, such as home country or religion, this is often too simplistic a view. By developing an awareness of yourself and the cultures you identify with—both the profound identities specific to you, like family, home country, or religion, and the cursory identities like your workplace culture, Toastmasters club culture, or the culture around being a fan of a particular sports team—you can begin to expand your ideas of cultural understanding.

The human brain is programmed to make quick judgments. This can be a challenge when meeting someone new. A broadened view of how you understand culture can help you avoid defining someone you meet with generalizations and facilitate effective communication. Though you may be very different in some ways from a new person or group you encounter, there are most likely important ways you are alike. A welcoming attitude toward others puts you in contact with new opinions, perspectives, and solutions with the potential to broaden your world view.

## **UNDERSTAND STEREOTYPES**

To begin to understand the impact of expanding your personal view of culture, it is important to recognize the most common and damaging challenge to valuing cultural diversity. Cultural stereotypes are common beliefs that can derail even the most well-intentioned communication.

A cultural stereotype is an overgeneralized belief about how people of another culture behave. Stereotypes are often negative misrepresentations. Even positive stereotypes can be offensive because they disregard the differences that exist among individuals. Take a moment to consider the stereotypes that apply to the cultures with which you identify. It is likely that some stereotypes that apply, but many that do not fit with who you are or what you believe.

The same is true for everyone you meet. No person will fit perfectly into a stereotype. It is beneficial to take the time to learn about people or groups before allowing a stereotype to define them for you.

## **RECOGNIZE ATTRIBUTES**

Cultural attributes are truths about the beliefs, values, behaviors, and overall ways of life specific to a culture.

Stereotypes are often false, but perceived as true by the person who holds them. It can be difficult to separate a stereotype from reality when all you know of a culture is the stereotype. Before making any assumption, consider from where your information originates. If your understanding of a culture or person is generated from firsthand knowledge, such as identifying with the same culture, then you can be fairly confident your assumptions are not based on a stereotype.

# UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY



When understanding comes from media representations, conversations with peers from your own culture, or other indirect sources, you may want to draw conclusions only after a conversation with someone from that culture. If you allow your interaction to inform your understanding of a new person or group, there is less danger of making an unfair or overly narrow assumption.

Consider how you would like to be treated. When you meet someone new who has very little knowledge of your background or experiences, you would most likely prefer that they give you the opportunity to share your personal experiences and beliefs rather than making decisions about you based solely on a stereotype of your culture.

The same is true when you meet others. It is sometimes challenging to avoid stereotypes or assumptions and allow an individual to share his experiences before you make any decision about who he is as a person. By concentrating on the actual interaction rather than basing your understanding on stereotypes, you allow for real communication and the development of understanding.

Welcoming similarities and differences in a person or group does much toward eliminating the biases and stereotypes that may otherwise restrict communication. To optimize communication within a diverse group, it is important to seek similarities and common experiences.

### **Explore Cultural Identity**

Take time to evaluate and understand your cultural identity. Include the bigger cultural groups you belong to like your country of origin as well as the smaller, more nuanced cultures that impact who you are, like your career or volunteer groups that matter to you. Once you understand yourself, it is easier to recognize others' cultural variances and similarities.

### **Ask a Friend**

When you seek to learn about a culture that is unfamiliar to you, the best person to teach you is a person from that culture. Invite friends or fellow Toastmasters members from other cultures to share their experiences including customs, etiquette, and unique attributes such as family structure.

### **Listen and Share**

Listen carefully and without judgment when your questions are answered. Share your own experiences and look for similarities or beliefs and attributes you have in common.

### **Experience Different Cultures**

Once you have learned about the people closest to you, seek other situations in which you will be among people of varying cultures. Listen to their stories and take note of the similarities in values, communication styles, and beliefs. Work to understand the attributes that make the cultures around you unique.

### **Do Your Research**

To expand your understanding, do your own research. Look up information on other cultures at the library or on the internet. Be sure to focus on content that speaks to cultural truths and avoids relying on stereotypes. Look for unique characteristics that define a culture and seek to recognize similarities rather than focusing only on perceived differences.

## **UNDERSTAND YOUR CULTURE**



Use the Defining Your Cultural Identity resource on page 15 to build an understanding of your own cultural identity and how it shapes your life. List all the cultures you associate with including broad cultural definitions, like country and religion, as well as the smaller cultural groups you associate with, like your Toastmasters club. Once you have identified your cultural affiliations, list stereotypes associated with each one.

## LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

A person's first language is an important part of her culture. As you expand your circle to include a wider variety of people, you may experience language differences. When you or another person in the conversation has a limited mastery of the language being used, there are steps you can take to ease communication challenges.

- **Expect ambiguity.** There may be challenges in understanding for all people involved in the conversation. Be patient with yourself and others as you navigate each exchange.
- **Ask clarifying questions.** If necessary, rephrase information during the conversation to ensure understanding.
- **Avoid slang,** as it is typically specific to only one language or region.
- **Use literal language.** Avoid idioms and words that are not meant to be taken literally, including sarcasm or phrases such as, "It's raining cats and dogs."
- **Be cautious with humor.** Recognize that humor does not always translate across cultures.
- **Be patient.** When communicating with people who have a different first language than yours, be patient with them and yourself. If you don't seem able to communicate with each other, you may want to consider finding a translator to help.

## APPLY CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness includes being mindful, adaptable, self-aware, and accepting. Differences in communication can impact relationships and understanding in unexpected ways.

Take time to be sure you understand and are being understood. Ask questions and listen carefully to answers. Avoid judgment or reaching conclusions before you have all the information.

When organizing or participating in an event in which a variety of cultures will be represented, take time to consider the needs of individuals as well as cultural groups. Review the following list to launch a conversation with other organizers or to prepare for varying needs.

- Review etiquette specific to different cultures.
- Consider how any specific needs or expectations may impact your event.
- Determine if any cultural celebrations will take place on the day you plan to schedule your event. If a celebration will occur, consider changing the date to accommodate attendees.
- Be mindful of different cultural ideas, such as how much physical space is comfortable between two people when speaking to one another.
- Review beliefs about eye contact, greetings, and appropriate gestures.

These are just a few of the possible cultural ideas you may want to consider as you plan and prepare for a multicultural event, both as an organizer and an attendee.

## REVIEW AND APPLY

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- How do you define culture?
- What is the value of cultural awareness?
- In what ways can you show respect for the customs and etiquette of other cultures?
- How does awareness of cultural differences help you to be a better communicator and leader?

## COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT



Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

**Review:** Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

**Organize:** Use the Project Checklist on page 11 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

**Schedule:** Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.

**Prepare:** Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 12–14 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Cross-Cultural Understanding

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to identify your own cultural identities and the stereotypes that impact others' perceptions of you.

**Overview:** Develop a 5- to 7-minute speech about the cultures with which you most closely identify and the personal impact of the stereotypes commonly associated with those cultures. You may need to spend some time researching the stereotypes believed about your cultures, especially if you are a member of the most dominant cultures in your geographic area. Be aware that all cultural identities have some sort of affiliated stereotype, even if it is obscure or uncommon.

**This project includes:**

- The Defining Your Cultural Identity resource
- A 5- to 7-minute speech

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Complete the Defining Your Cultural Identity resource.

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Schedule your speech with the vice president education.

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Write your speech.

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Rehearse your speech.

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After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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# EVALUATION FORM

## Cross-Cultural Understanding

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

**Speech Title** \_\_\_\_\_

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to identify his or her own cultural identities and the stereotypes that impact others' perceptions of him or her.

### Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project has spent time identifying his or her own cultural identities and associated stereotypes. A culture is defined as a group with which a person associates. Some examples include country of origin, gender, being a member of a certain profession, religious affiliation, an animal lover, or a sports fan.

About this speech:

- The member will deliver a well-organized speech.
- The member will share some aspect of his or her cultural identity and the stereotypes that impact others' perceptions of him or her.
- The speech may be humorous, informative, or any style the member chooses.
- The speech should not be a report on the content of the "Cross-Cultural Understanding" project.

### General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING
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<p><b>Clarity:</b> Spoken language is clear and is easily understood</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Vocal Variety:</b> Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Eye Contact:</b> Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Gestures:</b> Uses physical gestures effectively</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Audience Awareness:</b> Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Comfort Level:</b> Appears comfortable with the audience</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Interest:</b> Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:
<p><b>Topic:</b> Addresses some aspect of one or more of his or her cultures and the associated stereotypes</p> <p>5            4            3            2            1</p>	Comment:

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Cross-Cultural Understanding

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

### Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

### Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

### Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

### Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively

- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

### Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

### Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

### Topic

- 5 – Gives an exemplary speech about one or more of his or her cultures and the associated stereotypes
- 4 – Presents a well-thought-out speech about one or more of his or her cultures and the associated stereotypes
- 3 – Addresses some aspect of one or more of his or her cultures and the associated stereotypes
- 2 – Mentions some aspect of one or more of his or her cultures and the associated stereotypes, but does not fully address
- 1 – Does not address any aspect of his or her cultures or the associated stereotypes

# DEFINING YOUR CULTURAL IDENTITY

List your cultures and any cultural identities you have.

The list below contains suggestions to get you started. Add as many as you can think of in each section.

What is your	Are you	Do you	What are the stereotypes
<input type="checkbox"/> Religion <input type="checkbox"/> Nationality <input type="checkbox"/> Race <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnicity <input type="checkbox"/> Occupation <input type="checkbox"/> Marital status <input type="checkbox"/> Age <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic region <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> A female <input type="checkbox"/> A male <input type="checkbox"/> From an urban area <input type="checkbox"/> From a rural area <input type="checkbox"/> A parent <input type="checkbox"/> A student <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Have a hobby or interest that you share with others <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in a sport or support a sports team <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	List any stereotypes associated with your cultural identities. _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____



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