

culture

Saying the right things

1 Reading

- Look at these words:

knife and fork plate shaking hands queues prices

- What do you think the article will say about these things?
- Read the article and check your ideas. Were you right?

Am I Doing It Right?

1 What we say in different situations is important, but sometimes what we do or how we behave is just as important. One of the biggest problems is that our behaviour is not the same everywhere in the world. The etiquette (the way we behave in certain social situations) will depend on the culture of the country.

One area where there are lots of 'rules' about the way we should behave is food. It is very easy to find ourselves in an embarrassing situation because we didn't know what was expected. In most countries it is
 5 impolite to start eating until everyone has been served and often the host or head of the family will say something such as 'Enjoy your meal'. However, once we've started eating there are many differences. In Britain it is rude to make too much noise when you are eating, but in some countries if you are too quiet people may think you are not enjoying your food. It is quite normal to smack your lips and make fairly loud noises to indicate your appreciation. How we eat the food can differ a lot as well. Do you pick up
 10 food with your hands, eat with chopsticks or use a knife and fork? And, do you leave any food on your plate? In Britain it is polite to finish all the food you are given, but in China if you empty your plate then your host will give you more food because you must still be hungry. You need to be careful otherwise you'll never stop eating!

Meeting and greeting people is also an area that can be quite confusing. Should you shake hands with
 15 both men and women, kiss people on the cheek (and if so, how many times?), or is it not polite to touch people (especially if you've never met before)? Getting it right can be difficult and, of course, if you get it wrong it can be very embarrassing for everyone.

This brings us to personal space. In Britain people stand in queues when waiting for a bus, waiting to pay in a shop, entering a cinema or theatre and in many other situations. But, you must not stand too
 20 close to the person in front of you. If you do, they are likely to become nervous and will start to glance at you. This idea of an acceptable distance also works when you are speaking to someone. Standing too close is regarded as rude, but how do you know how far away you should stand?

Finally, shopping can be quite an experience in some countries. If you go to markets in many places around the world, you will be expected to haggle when buying something. Often you end up paying half
 25 the amount that the person originally asked for the item. However, this kind of behaviour is very unusual in Britain and often people will be offended if you start saying you don't want to pay the original price. So, knowing how to behave and where each kind of behaviour is normal can be quite a challenge. One way of finding out what you should do is watch people around you and follow the way they do things. It doesn't always work, but at least you are less likely to do something that will upset the locals.

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2 Comprehension

Read the article again. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F) or not given (NG)?

- 1 Etiquette is the same wherever you are.
- 2 In most countries people start eating as soon as they get their food.
- 3 In Britain people are fairly quiet when they are eating.
- 4 In China you should leave some food on your plate at the end of the meal.
- 5 You should shake hands with both men and women in Britain.
- 6 It is OK to stand near someone when you are queuing in Britain.
- 7 In Britain people stand about half a metre apart when they are talking.
- 8 Bargaining about the price of something is quite usual in many countries.
- 9 In Britain people might be upset if you argued about the price.
- 10 You should always apologise if you upset someone because of your behaviour.

3 Vocabulary

Find a word in the article that means:

- 1 rude, not the way you should behave _____
- 2 a person who invites people for a meal or party in their home _____
- 3 make a loud sound whilst eating _____
- 4 to show something _____
- 5 a feeling when you like something a person does and it makes you happy _____
- 6 things used by Chinese people for eating their food _____
- 7 give someone a quick look _____
- 8 something that most people think is OK or can be allowed _____
- 9 to bargain about the price of something _____
- 10 upset by something someone does or says _____

4 Speaking

- 1 How would you behave in each situation described in the text in your country?
- 2 What types of behaviour would upset people in your country?
- 3 How can people learn about the etiquette of your country?