

PART ONE

Western Europe

No Elbows or American Cheese, Please!

An Introduction to the Region

There is an old joke that Europeans are fond of, which goes something like this: Heaven is where the cops are English, the cooks are French, the mechanics are German, the lovers are Italian, and it's all run by the Swiss. Hell, of course, is where the cops are German, the cooks are English, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and it's all run by the Italians. Nowhere is there a more complex mix of cultures and lifestyles than in Europe, especially the Europe of today. Depending upon your geographical criteria, for example, there are around fifty sovereign states on what amounts to a western peninsula of Asia. Then, if you look at the cultural distinctions within those sovereign states, you can about double that number to reflect the number of cultures on the European continent. At one time, European nations ruled much of the rest of the world, and the effect of European culture, including language, economics, politics, philosophy, and art, on the rest of the world, for good and bad, is profound. Today, curiously, the Continent claims its place as the crucible (perhaps along with China) for determining what the twenty-first century might look like. Currently, the western half of the Continent is attempting to do what has never been done before: create a twenty-first-century geopolitical form that goes beyond the nation-state (specifically, the Economic Union, or EU), while cultures in the eastern half of the Continent are still struggling to resolve seventeenth-century questions of how to constitute themselves into nation-states. The original, and hence most entrenched, cultures of the post-Columbian Americas, both north and south of the Rio Grande, had their origins in Europe, and Europe is still where most Americans look to find their roots, backgrounds, cousins, religions, and language. We begin our exploration of the world's great cultures in this Global Etiquette Guides series, therefore, with the cultures of Europe, this first part being devoted to what is commonly referred to as western Europe.

Getting Oriented

Get more than two people together to discuss the question of defining macro-cultural groups, and there will be all sorts of differing opinions, based on each individual's unique perspective. With apologies to all who might disagree for whatever reason, western Europe, for our purposes, consists of the following macrocultural groups:

The Anglo-Celtic cultures: England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland

The Frankish cultures: France, Monaco, and the French areas of Switzerland and Belgium

The Germanic cultures: Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland

The Benelux cultures: Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands

The Nordic cultures: Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, and Denmark), Finland, and Iceland

The Baltic cultures: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

One way of approaching the cultures of Europe is to superimpose a cross onto the entire Continent. The horizontal line cuts across the Continent roughly from west to east through the Alps, and the vertical line divides the Continent north to south from the eastern portion of Germany down into the Balkans. The coincidence of macro-European cultures generally falling within the quadrants resulting from the superimposed cross is more than symbolic. South of the horizontal line we have the Latin cultures of Iberia and Italy, parts of Switzerland, and other areas. North of the horizontal line we have the Protestant reformist cultures of Germany, the Nordic states, the United Kingdom, and others. East of the vertical line we have the Eastern Orthodox cultures of the Slavic world, while those cultures west of the vertical line are generally Roman Catholic and/or Protestant in origin. Of course, there are exceptions and complexities within this model: Roman Catholic Ireland and Poland; the Muslim Balkans; the global influence of Jews, North Africans, Romanians, and other cultural groups. But, in general, it's a neat way of getting our hands around the single major root cause of European cultural differences today: over a thousand years of religious conflict, which has divided the continent into mainly Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox camps (generally reflected respectively in the cultures of Latin, northern, and Slavic Europe). The following chapters will treat each major western European country separately, presented according to the macrocultural groups within which each country falls. Let's begin with the Anglo-Celtic cultures of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

CHAPTER ONE

The Anglo-Celtic Cultures: England

Some Introductory Background on England and the English

Living in Britain, for many non-British English speakers (and this does include Americans!), can be a surprisingly difficult and challenging experience. This unanticipated surprise results from the assumption of similarity, due to history and language, which unfortunately masks some real cultural differences. While there are not as many cultural differences between the United States and Britain as there are, say, between the United States and China, Americans expect the differences they encounter in China, but are usually surprised and confused at the fewer, but very real, differences they encounter in Britain. Cultures in which the language is similar and whose histories may have intertwined can be uniquely challenging because both sides need to overcome the expectation that there are no significant differences when, in fact, there often are. Indeed, on some key measures, there are no two cultures more different than the United States and the United Kingdom. The United States is, for example, a horizontal culture, while Britain is a vertical culture; that is, the United States was created by a revolution against precisely those things, like kings and queens and royalty and inherited privilege, that are still hallmarks of British culture. Therefore, while no doubt sharing many things in common, there is much that is different between us. George Bernard Shaw said that “Americans and Britons are cousins separated by a common language,” and that about sums up the subtle yet profound difficulties encountered when American and British culture bump into each other. Whether it’s driving on different sides of the road (Americans drive on the right precisely because the British drove on the left), eating differently with utensils (Americans switch their knives and forks precisely because the British did not), or spelling words differently (Americans omit the letter *u*, for example, in words like *colour* and *behaviour* precisely because the British spell them that way!), Britons and Americans, and other English speakers, have taken cultural pains to differentiate themselves from each other. Over and over again, we will see that our hidden differences have as profound an impact on our mutual behavior(s) and reactions to each other, as do the more obvious similarities. (By the way, the term *Brit*, used in place of *Briton*, is generally acceptable, but only if used affectionately.)

The similarities that blind us to our differences, however, are overwhelming. After all, the first Europeans to settle permanently in what was to become the United States were British: the Pilgrims, to be exact. It is important to remember that the Pilgrims were the traveling arm of the Puritans: those radical religious fundamentalists of their day for whom the Anglican Church of England (as created by Henry VIII) was still too papist and Catholic for their taste. The Anglican establishment wasn't too fond of Puritans, either, and while eventually having quite a say in the future development of Britain—due to, among other things, a civil war and a religious bloodletting known as the War of the Roses—Protestants also sought safer ground abroad: some in the Netherlands and some in the northern part of the New World, in what was to become the United States. Today, Britain is a complex culture constantly struggling to hold these two fundamentally different traditions in balance: the aristocratic, hierarchical, monarchic Anglican traditions and the reformist, democratic, egalitarian Puritan traditions, out of which formative American values emerged. Both have deep historical roots in Britain and are very much at work today: the ancient monarchy is now one of the few active monarchies still left in the world, and democratic traditions go as far back as 1215 when, with the signing of the Magna Carta, the people forced the king to devolve some of his powers by creating a Parliament. When modern Americans and Britons get along, it is because they are sharing in those behaviors, beliefs, and activities that are fundamentally rooted in the common ideas of the democratic Protestant Reformation (individualism, equality, progress, change, etc.); and when modern Americans and Britons have difficulties, it is because those reformist Puritan ideas, which are at the heart of American culture, are running up against the traditional Anglican, aristocratic, monarchical traditions that Americans rebelled against (hierarchy, privilege, status quo, etc.).

Some Historical Context

Look at the map of Britain, and you begin to understand a critical feature of British culture. Most important, it is an island. The island fortress of Britain has served to help Britons distinguish themselves from their European neighbors (a headline in the London *Times* of the early twentieth century read, “Heavy Fog Over Channel, Continent Cut Off”)—indeed, to help themselves against their occasional Continental enemies. Even today, there is a strong trend among the British to identify themselves as a people separate from the Continent, and it is evident in many areas: from the reticence of many Britons to join up with the policies of the Economic Union (EU) to the skepticism surrounding the benefits of the “Chunnel” (the tunnel that now connects Britain to France and the rest of the Continent). A second important feature is the weather and climate. It is always perfectly all right to talk about the weather in Britain: everyone does it, and although it is usually just a way of maintaining small talk (and Britons are marvelously skilled at this, as a means of avoiding confrontation), it is a key aspect of British life. Basically, the country has a rough and challenging climate; it allows for a “man versus nature” approach to life, promoting everything from a preference for “sensible” clothes, to a reverence for the never-quite-finished sheltering and cozy home and hearth, to the Industrial Revolution

(which began, appropriately enough, in England). A small island nation, short on natural resources, densely populated by a people created from waves of invasions over eons, resulting in a people of strong, insular identity and conviction.

The modern Briton is an amalgam of many other cultures. The first organized post-Neolithic indigenous culture of Britain was created by the Celtic peoples who migrated to Britain and Ireland in approximately 300 B.C. The Romans followed, then the Vikings, then the Normans (from the north of France), and finally the Anglo-Saxons—those peoples from the Saxony area of Germany, and those from the nearby geographic area formed by the “right angle” created where the peninsula of Denmark meets Germany (hence the term *Anglo-*). The result was, among other things, the creation of the modern English language and culture and the subjugation of the indigenous Celtic cultures. Today, the modern variants of the Celtic culture are mainly found in the Scots (never Scotch, that’s a whiskey), the Irish, and the Welsh. All inhabitants of the island of Britain are British (or Britons); therefore, the Scots, the Welsh, and the English are all, technically, British. However, the English are not Scots, nor Welsh, nor Irish. It is very important, therefore, to identify Britons carefully; offense is easily taken in mistaking one for the other. Complicating the issue, of course, is the fact that the English also subjugated the Irish on their own island, resulting in the political division into Northern Ireland in the north and the Republic of Ireland in the south. Due to those major European religious divisions referred to earlier, these cultural groups also distinguished themselves along religious and political lines, so that Northern Ireland is predominantly Protestant with a Catholic minority, while the Republic of Ireland is mainly Catholic. *Great Britain* is a political term, referring to the union of the Kingdoms of Scotland and England, the principality of Wales, assorted minor entities (such as the Isle of Man and the Jersey Islands), and Northern Ireland (sometimes referred to incorrectly as Ulster by Protestants in the north; Ulster actually is larger than the six counties that make up Northern Ireland). North-ern Irish Protestants sometimes prefer to call themselves Britons rather than Irish. Be especially careful in the terms you use to refer to your colleagues from these Anglo-Celtic isles. Since we have a separate section on Celtic Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, for our purposes here we will be referring exclusively to the English.

An Area Briefing

Politics and Government

Britain is a constitutional monarchy; there is no written constitution, in that the laws of the land (made by Parliament), in combination with the stability of the monarchy and the traditions that have built up over the years, all constitute the political and legal way of life in Britain. The Parliament, or representative government in Britain, is made up of two houses: the House of Commons (popularly elected) and the House of Lords (currently changing, but in the past assigned according to peerage). The Parliament is technically subordinate to the king or queen, but in fact determines the political life of the country, and the monarchy is severely limited to its role as the stabilizing, figurehead embodiment of the state. The elected government is based on the parliamentary system,

wherein the prime minister represents the ruling party in the House of Commons; should the majority in the Commons change, the prime minister would also need to reflect this, and new elections would be called. Currently, there are two major parties: Labour (predecessors: the Whigs), generally representing a more socially active approach to government; and Conservative (predecessors: the Tories), generally representing a more restricted approach to government.

Schools and Education

“Public” schools are really privately run schools that are open to the public (a reference to the time when schooling was available only through tutors and the church); today, such schools usually provide an elite education (through the “Oxbridge” university system representing schools such as Oxford and Cambridge or secondary schools such as Eton); it can be costly, and usually requires excellent academics, but is not legally restricted only to one particular class. Typically, though, education for the masses is available through the state-run school system, which prepares students, at the postsecondary level, either for an academic or professional career through state-run universities and colleges, or for a trade and vocational career through trade/vocational and community colleges. There used to be an “Eleven Plus” exam that determined the course of secondary study lower-school students would take, but that has been replaced with a more sophisticated process for assigning future course study to students. Once secondary school has been completed, students take their “GCSE” exam (formerly known as “O” levels exam), which determines either university/college or trade/vocational study after secondary school; additionally, if the university course is taken, a second exam (“A” levels) is usually required to further determine the school and course of study.

Religion and Demographics

Officially, the Church of England (or the Anglican Church) is the state church. Nevertheless, many other religions are represented in England today, including Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and so on. In addition, while the Anglican Church is perhaps the closest of all non-Catholic denominations to Rome, most Anglicans in Britain today are secular Christians. Nevertheless, the traditions of the church, particularly as they affect other institutions (and the observance of holidays, such as Christmas), are well maintained.

Fundamental Cultural Orientations

1. What’s the Best Way for People to Relate to One Another?

OTHER-INDEPENDENT OR OTHER-DEPENDENT? The English value the individualist; that is, someone who develops his or her unique identity within the group, within the borders. Americans value individualism; that is, the idea that one should separate him- or herself from the group and strike out on one’s own. This allows for acceptance in Britain of the “eccentric,” while in the United States, the true hero is someone who achieves on his or her own and in his or

her own way, without the benefit of, and sometimes in defiance of, others and their rules. The U.S. tradition is, in part, the result of a successful revolution against the British “rule makers,” while the British tradition is the result of a long history of Anglicanism, monarchism, and of many culturally diverse peoples having to live together on a very small island. What this means today is that there is a keen sense of how one’s actions in Britain play out with others, and a distrust in standing apart. Britons can find American individualism too strong, “over the top,” naive, and unrealistic. Americans, in turn, can find British reticence frustrating, unproductive, and too self-effacing for no apparent good.

HIERARCHY-ORIENTED OR EQUALITY-ORIENTED? Here, too, we see an existence, side by side, of the two contradictory traditions in Britain. There is what has become known as the “great and the good”: that combination in Britain of civil servants (from the “right” families and schools), aristocrats, church leaders, and wealthy scions of industry who, in effect, determine how society runs. The direct result is a class system that is still rigid and distinct by most standards, membership in any one class being identified by such factors as occupation, speech, dress, and taste. The belief that this system has value is so strong that it is often considered wrong or “bad form” to act as if one wanted out of one’s class and into another, no matter what class one starts out in. This runs smack against the American glorification of the poor little lad who grew up in a log cabin to become president, or of Horatio Alger’s rags-to-riches stories. Remember, in feudal England, the landlord had everything and never had to work for it; the serf worked all his life and never had anything to show for it. Effort, or striving, has, in this tradition a distinctly negative connotation, for it is associated with the serf; the remarkable formula of “Effort Equals Reward” is a revolutionary Puritan notion (coming out of the Protestant idea that individuals can demonstrate their worthiness directly to God) adopted by Americans and revolutionary Englishmen. This situation has resulted in, among other things, a management class that was, at least until very recently, very distant from the workers; a disbelief in the rewards of hard work; managers who were distinguished by their ability to withhold information; and the need to have personal relationships with particular individuals in order to get certain things done. It also results in a subtle disrespect for anything that is “achieved,” as the greater glory is in being able to humbly demonstrate innate (i.e., ascribed) ability. In Britain, about the only places where all classes were equal on a day-to-day basis were, and are, the queue and the pub. The pub has been known as the great equalizer, for it is where all citizens have equal access to all others (that’s assuming, of course, that all classes will patronize the same pub, which they don’t).

RULE-ORIENTED OR RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTED? A curious blend of the two opposing traditions here: the aristocratic, Anglican, monarchist tradition emphasizes the importance of individual relationships, which is tied to class and who one is and who one knows. However, the democratic reformist tradition is very powerful in Britain today, and the British are sometimes seen as real sticklers for doing things by the book—no matter who, no matter what. Here again, which tradition has the upper hand depends upon whom one is with and the circumstances. If the “particular” tradition holds the cards, you can be sure the American will ultimately be rubbed the wrong way, feeling snubbed and

disregarded. Americans in Britain will consistently be confounded by requirements that are applied to all, while seeing, at a distance, clear evidence that many are exempt from the same strictures.

2. What's the Best Way to View Time?

MONOCHRONIC OR POLYCHRONIC? The English are primarily monochronic, believing in the value of organizing one's time carefully. Business and life are conducted best when done so in an orderly, progressive way. This leads to all sorts of uniquely British phenomena—from what some might term obsessive queuing at most any given opportunity, to the reliance on business agendas, memoranda, follow-ups, and the observance of schedules and timetables.

RISK-TAKING OR RISK-AVERSE? Here again we have the curious mix of two opposing ideas: England is a conservative culture that approaches new ideas cautiously and skeptically, yet the British can equally feel very confident and comfortable in the most remarkably threatening and “risky” situations. Perhaps it is the universalism of the British and their reliance on their rules and ways of doing things that gives them their remarkable confidence in dealing with uncertain or chaotic conditions. After all, these are the same people who, to paraphrase Noel Coward, were mad enough to go out in the noonday sun and sip their tea at four o'clock, no matter where on earth they may actually have been. Risk-taking, yes; but as we see below, change-oriented, no.

PAST-ORIENTED OR FUTURE-ORIENTED? The British culture is a “controlling-oriented” one: the belief that the individual can, with enough will, resources, luck, and stamina, push their way through is widespread. “Muddling through,” “carrying on,” “keeping a stiff upper lip,” “mustn't grumble”: these are all hallmarks of the unstoppable and unflappable English. This means that you will have to work uphill as well as “prove your stuff” in order to get things done, especially if what you are attempting to do with the English requires that they do things differently from the way they always have. And here is where the past plays a great role in England. There is no guarantee, for example, that tomorrow will be any better than today: in fact, English history is mainly the story of their great struggle in order simply to keep what they already have. Therefore, *precedence*, or the way that things have already been done successfully, is the main reason why they do what they do, even into the future. Optimistic, risk-taking Americans may have a hard time convincing the British to try a new way. Unless there is a very good reason to throw out that tattered, cracked-leather chair in the corner, they'll keep it, thank you very much.

3. What's the Best Way for Society to Work with the World at Large?

LOW-CONTEXT DIRECT OR HIGH-CONTEXT INDIRECT COMMUNICATORS? English understatement, American overstatement: this is one of the key communication differences between the two cultures. English communication patterns emphasize the unstated, the implied, and the qualified as opposed to the American orientation toward clear, frank, and direct speech. There is a preference for the use of qualifiers: “perhaps,” “could/should,” and the brilliantly evasive

“quite,” “nice,” and “indeed.” English humor is extremely dry, reserved, self-effacing, clever, and based on a playful use of double and opposite meanings. Traditionally, the English have been portrayed as being extremely polite with strangers while being cuttingly direct and forthright within their peer group or with those with whom relationships have been long-standing. There is perhaps no greater example of this preoccupation with public politeness than the excessive apology to the stranger on the street when accidentally bumped into, the self-conscious avoidance of eye contact on a crowded “tube,” or the constant use of sayings, aphorisms, and proverbs to say what cannot be said directly.

PROCESS-ORIENTED OR RESULT-ORIENTED? Perhaps precisely because the British have managed to devise a culture in which two so opposite traditions can still live and thrive side by side, it should not be surprising that the dominant thought orientation is one of inductive experience based on precedent, not a search for Platonic ideals or philosophical correctness. What appeals to the English is what has worked in the past: precedence. There is neither the (French) orientation to logical form, nor the (German) orientation to provable method; rather, practical past empirical success, however achieved, is the reason for doing things a certain way. The English are practical, empirical, and results oriented; therefore, no newer logic or better result sways them on its own if they are already satisfied with the results they have painstakingly achieved and currently enjoy.

Greetings and Introductions

Language and Basic Vocabulary

British and American English (or Australian, Canadian, Indian, Caribbean, African, and other versions, for that matter) can be very different. The language alone, much less the communication style preferences discussed above, provides numerous opportunities for misunderstanding. Here’s a short dictionary of some important British/American English minefields:

British	American	British	American
<i>lift</i>	elevator	<i>flat</i>	apartment
<i>block of flats</i>	apartment house	<i>spanner</i>	wrench
<i>typist</i>	clerk	<i>roundabout</i>	traffic circle
<i>kiping</i>	taking a nap	<i>pram</i>	baby carriage
<i>tram</i>	trolley car	<i>char</i>	cleaning lady
<i>biro</i>	ballpoint pen	<i>dinner jacket</i>	tuxedo
<i>jumper</i>	sweater	<i>lounge</i>	living room
<i>serviette</i>	napkin	<i>napkin</i>	diaper
<i>toilet/WC/loo</i>	restroom	<i>pardon?</i>	come again?
<i>full stop</i>	period (at sentence end)	<i>bonus issue</i>	dividend
<i>chips</i>	french fries	<i>crisps</i>	potato chips
<i>biscuit</i>	cookie	<i>vest</i>	(men’s) jacket
<i>waistcoat</i>	vest	<i>knickers</i>	(women’s) underwear
		<i>trousers</i>	pants

<i>pants</i>	(men's) underwear	<i>fanny</i>	female genitalia
<i>braces</i>	suspenders	<i>scone</i>	biscuit
<i>lorry</i>	truck	<i>fag</i>	cigarette
<i>rubbers</i>	pencil erasers	<i>dustman</i>	garbageman
<i>kiosk</i>	telephone booth	<i>hoarding</i>	billboard
<i>tube</i>	the metro	<i>subway</i>	underground walkway
<i>goods train</i>	freight train	<i>way out</i>	exit

- In England, double or triple numbers (e.g., “77” or “000”) on the telephone are usually referred to as “double seven” or “triple zero,” and you “ring” someone up, instead of “call” someone up.
- British English refers to groups of individuals in the plural (“Cambridge play Oxford”).
- There are many spelling differences between British and U.S. English, but here are some important ones:

colour	cheque
honour	gaol
centre	kerb
theatre	pyjama
criticise	storey (floor of a building)
agonise	tyre
travelled	aluminium
travelling	grey
defence	whisky (but Irish whiskey)
pretence	manoeuvre
licence	waggon
practise	carburetor

Here are some common, seriously misunderstood phrases:

To knock up: to ring up, to wake up, to be exhausted

To shag: to encounter sexually

To table something: to bring something forward for discussion

To strike out: to go after an opportunity

A fortnight: a two-week period

A bomb: a dazzling success

A davenport: a small writing desk

Surgery: a doctor's office or practice

Honorifics for Men, Women, and Children

Mr/Mrs/Miss is preferred for the overwhelmingly (95 percent by some estimates) middle-class Briton today; the term *Ms* is ever so slowly gathering common usage (please note that in written form, “Mr,” “Mrs,” and “Ms” do not have periods—“full stops” in British English—after them: they are words in and of themselves and not abbreviations). If someone holds a degree or title (e.g., Ph.D., Doctor, Lord, or Lady), it should be used while addressing him or her, even though the holder of such a title never uses it when referring to him-

or herself (however, such titles and degrees may be written on stationery and business cards). Please note: surgeons are referred to as “Mr.,” not “Doctor.” Occasionally, titled aristocracy might present a card with a line hand-drawn across their title: it is an indication that you may refer to them without their title in casual conversation. Nobility use their title *plus* first name, not family name, when being addressed (the correct form for addressing peerage is complex, and can be researched in books specifically addressing this issue). Children in Britain are another matter: they have been traditionally viewed as incomplete adults; as such, the British childhood is often suffered, and children are endured. If introduced to a child, use whatever name or honorific is used by the adult. Children in Britain, in turn, are expected to be respectful and not overly conversational when speaking with adults, and must always use honorifics when referring to adults. Pets, however (especially dogs), are still another matter: they are adored, perhaps because there is no risk of their talking back, and referred to endearingly with the most amazing names (by the way, in England, black cats are considered lucky).

The What, When, and How of Introducing People

Always wait to be introduced to strangers before taking that responsibility upon yourself. Depending upon your familiarity with the situation or others, it may not be appropriate to introduce yourself. Britons are most comfortable with a third-party introduction whenever possible. Try to ensure that for yourself ahead of time. Do not presume to seat yourself at a gathering: if possible, wait to be told where to sit. With whom, when, and how you are introduced is a key to understanding how you are perceived and how the British are going to “fit you in” within their world. Pay close attention. This is especially important if you believe you will be interacting with individuals from a different strata or class. Shake hands with everyone individually in a group before departing: the American group wave is *not* appreciated. Avoid ending the conversation with the American expression “Have a nice day”: it sounds controlling and insincere to the English.

Physical Greeting Styles

The handshake is common, but perhaps not as “gripping and pumping” as the American version (the spoken introduction is the cue to let go). Introductions such as “Pleased to meet you” and “How do you do” are most common; any introductory phrase that is posed in question format (e.g., “How do you do?”) does *not* require an answer: merely repeat the phrase back. Smiling and other nonverbal forms of communication need not accompany the handshake. A man should wait until the woman extends her hand before reaching for it, and a woman may take the lead in extending her hand or not. A man must remove his gloves when shaking hands with a woman, but a woman need not remove her gloves when shaking hands with a man. Bows and curtsies are quite old-fashioned and not common, except in formal occasions, usually with royalty. It is a nontouching culture, which means that men do not slap each other on the back or hug when greeting; women who know each other may kiss each other on the cheek once, but rarely will men and women do so, unless they know each other particularly well. When being introduced, make immediate eye

contact, then quickly look away: eye contact is minimal during conversation in Britain, unless a very specific point with a specific speaker is being made—in that case, eye contact is usually very direct.

Communication Styles

Okay Topics / Not Okay Topics

Okay: the weather, animals and pets, anything that is a universal pain in the neck (griping is an apparent pastime), the economy. *Not okay:* politics (especially “the royals,” the “Irish,” and the associated “Troubles”), religion (although the Anglican Church is the official Church of England, few Britons today find their spiritual renewal there: it is a very secular culture), sex (Britons are very private about this, which is probably why the tabloids rely on it daily to sell their papers: sex is always a scandal), and British food (it is really quite good, especially nowadays). In addition, avoid references to the British “setting sun” (the end of the empire). Do not inquire about a person’s occupation in casual conversation. Americans often begin a conversation with “So, what do you do?”; this is too personal in England, and assumes that one “does” something in the first place (not the occupation of a lord, remember). Do not volunteer your own personal family history, or ask about others’.

Tone, Volume, and Speed

In most formal situations (excluding the home and family-style restaurants), understatement is the driver: therefore, the volume is almost always turned down, almost to mumbling; the tone is respectful and humbling; but the speed can vary, depending upon the situation (class).

Use of Silence

The need to avoid confrontation is so strong at times that silence or withdrawal may occasionally be employed to avoid a direct battle. Do not confuse avoidance of confrontation with lack of directness: if no confrontation is anticipated, Britons are usually remarkably direct (especially in business).

Physical Gestures and Facial Expressions

The basic rule is to minimize physicality: it is seen as childlike and representative of ill-breeding. Touching one’s nose indicates “keep this a secret” or “this is between us”; in addition, the “V for Victory” sign must be done with palm facing outward. In most English-speaking countries (with the exception of the United States, where we must, because of our revolutionary experience with Britain, apparently do everything differently from them), making this sign with the palm inward is a vulgar gesture of defiance (it comes from the British demonstrating at the battle of Agincourt to the French that they still had two fingers left with which to pull the archer’s bow). Upon first meeting, facial expressions are kept to a minimum; therefore, feelings may be hard to read from the face.

Waving and Counting

The index finger is one; the thumb is five. Pointing is usually done with the head or chin, and not with the fingers: it is considered unseemly. The wave is generally the same as in the United States.

Physicality and Physical Space

When possible, a small distance between speakers is preferred, although given the density of the highly urbanized England of today, this is not often possible. Never speak with your hands in your pockets: keep them always firmly to your side, stand straight, and sit with feet planted flat on the floor. If men and women must cross their legs, it must never be ankle over knee, and for women, it is most preferable to cross ankle over ankle.

Eye Contact

Contradictory behaviors here: in casual conversation, especially between people who are not (or do not want to become) that familiar with each other, eye contact is minimal, beginning with a meeting of the eyes, and then a looking away. This is true for social as well as business conversation. However, when important points are being made, interest is being shown, or a relationship desired, maintaining direct eye contact is very important. Do not stare at people in public. Once eye contact is made with an individual, no other individual can intrude on the conversation until the conversation is completed. Avoiding eye contact is a very common way of saying, "I want my privacy," and the English can be a very private people, even in public.

Emotive Orientation

Avoid backslapping, shouting, or calling attention to oneself (especially in public), and broad behavior. Polite, self-possessed behavior is the norm. Keep your hands to your sides, and avoid emphasizing the spoken word with gestures. The essence of British humor is the not-stating of what is obvious, or implying the opposite of what is said. It is therefore what is not done that may be more important than what is: this leads to a reticence of emotive expression, especially in more formal situations.

Protocol in Public

Walking Styles and Waiting in Lines

Queuing is a national pastime: never break a queue, and if there is a queue, go to the back of it and wait, no matter how long it takes. Queues develop at all public facilities, and then some. People walk on the left in public, drive on the left, and pass on the right: this is true on escalators and moving walkways, as well as roads and streets. Remember also that you usually have the right of way as a pedestrian only in a "zebra" walkway (the stripes painted at a crosswalk): cars must stop as soon as you step into the zebra (pronounced with the "e" as in "egg"); nevertheless, be careful!

Behavior in Public Places: Airports, Terminals, and the Market

Americans find British customer service an oxymoron. Someone once stated that they thought the British television series *Fawlty Towers* was a comedy until they went to Britain and realized it was really a documentary. As in many European countries, mass marketing and customer orientation is a new idea in a culture with roots in artisanal quality and bourgeois production. Store hours are typically not built around customer convenience (many stores are closed on weekends and most evenings—except Thursdays, usually), and getting served in a store or restaurant can be an exercise in patience: it's one person at a time, thank you, and you are often not acknowledged as waiting until the sales agent is ready for you. Typically, the customers are invisible to the salesclerk until eye contact is made, and it can be maddeningly difficult for customers to get the clerk's attention at times. In food markets, if you touch the produce, you buy it; in goods stores, it may be difficult for you to return a product unless there is a flaw in it. Smoking in public places is on the decline.

Coins are still accepted at some public telephones, but there are many that only take telecards: get them at local newsstands, kiosks, and so on.

Bus / Metro / Taxi / Car

Never break a queue for a bus, train, or taxi; on public transportation, it is polite to surrender your seat to the elderly, parents with babies, or the handicapped, but men need not do so for women of the approximate same age. Enter a taxi in the back on the opposite side of the driver; when leaving the taxi, go round to the driver's window first before paying the fare.

Tipping

Usually 10 to 15 percent; more is considered *nouveau* and *gauche*. This is true for restaurants and taxis. Porters and hotel help get a pound per service rendered, theater and bathroom attendants usually 20 to 50 pence (p.).

Dress

There is a distinctly British version of casualness that is creeping into dress in England these days, although "casual Fridays" have certainly not arrived (except, perhaps, in certain specific industries). Going to the theater, for example, need not be dress-up (in fact, the ease with which theater tickets can be purchased in London, for example, promotes "off-the-street" attendance)—except for theater openings (very formal)—and business attire on the street is usually generational. That traditional bowler hat, for example, is definitely out, even in The City (the London financial district). Office attire, however, is still the business suit or jacket and tie for men, and dress or skirt and blouse for women. British men's shirts typically do not have pockets; if they do, they should remain empty. British businesspeople do not wear loafer-type shoes: lace-ups are preferred. However, because English aristocratic life revolves around the country estate (this is different on the Continent, where the aristocracy took a decidedly urban and refined identity), there has always been an acceptance of

the “squired” look for men, even for those in business: the tweedy jacket, the slightly too short pants, the argyle socks, and the solid—slightly scuffed—walking shoes have always had their place (usually in informal social gatherings); in business, the business suit can be worn either of two ways: very well-styled (bespoke and influenced by Savoy Row) and, with equal acceptance, slightly rumpled, even a bit worn (after all, well-made is well-served).

Seasonal Variations

There are four distinct seasons, and one dresses accordingly; summers can be surprisingly warm in the south (although showers can still pop up at any time), and winters can be bone-chillingly damp and cold (there is little snow, however); spring and autumn are both soft and swift, transitioning quickly between winter and summer.

Colors

The country estate look always had muted, natural colors: the fabric is the key, while dark, sophisticated colors rule with the high-tailored look. The high-tailored look can also include some surprisingly (for Americans) “loud” statements: very broad stripes, for example, and a bright color-coordinated tie for men or an equally bright scarf for women. In England, men who attended public schools, or were members of specific military units, would traditionally wear their “school ties” or “military ties”: these were usually of a special diagonal striped design. American men should refrain from wearing striped ties in England, as they suggest this English tradition (although the stripes are usually going in the opposite direction!).

Styles

Traditionally, formal in England has meant “white tie and tails.” American “formal” in England is usually “black tie” (tuxedo in America); and informal or casual in England has always meant tie and jacket (not necessarily suit). About the only time men wear casual, American-type clothes (sports shirts, jeans, sneakers, etc.) is at home, on the street on weekends, or at nonexclusive sporting events.

Accessories / Jewelry / Makeup

Women typically do not accessorize much for business, and the very high-powered look for women at work is not common.

Dining and Drinking

Mealtimes and Typical Foods

Breakfast is typically a large, important meal, and can be held anytime, usually from 7 to 9 A.M. An authentic English breakfast consists of white toast (in addition to croissants, or any other breads and pastries), juice, cereal, bacon, sausages (“bangers”), fried potatoes, sauteed mushrooms and tomatoes, and so on.

A real specialty that may be included is kippers (smoked herring), although this has its roots in Scottish cuisine. Drinks can be tea or coffee (tea is taken usually with milk or cream, although the aristocratic tradition in England emphasizes tea with lemon and no cream).

Lunch is served from noon to 1 or 2 P.M., and usually consists of sandwiches, salads, pub specials, and the like. Drinks are beer, sodas, or “squash” (different fruit concentrates plus water or soda water; you might see colored bottles of syrups set out: these are fruit concentrates to be poured into glasses of water or seltzer as a flavoring). On Sunday, the main meal of the day is supper, which is usually served beginning at lunchtime, but includes real dinner dishes, and mainly always a roast.

Formal dinner is served from 7:30 to 8:30 P.M., with 8 P.M. the customary time. It usually begins with an alcoholic drink (sherry, gin, or a whiskey), plus nuts and such. The appetizer is usually soup or prawns, followed by fish or meat and vegetables. Dessert includes sweet puddings (as opposed to savory, non-dessert puddings) and trifles, and can also include cheese and crackers. Wine is usually served with dinner, and the English have a real love for dessert wines: especially ports and liqueurs. Dinner parties usually end at around 11:30 P.M. to midnight.

Tea is a special tradition in England. There are two different forms: “tea” and “high tea.” High tea is really a substitute for dinner, and is taken around 5 P.M.: it consists of a hot dish (a savory pie, for example) plus all the other ingredients of regular tea. Regular tea usually consists of savory finger sandwiches, then cakes and sweets, all washed down with many cups of tea. Making a proper pot of tea is an important skill. After “putting the kettle on” (heating the hot water on the stove up to and just over the boiling point), one pours the scalding water into the teapot (a ceramic vessel containing the tea leaves), and lets the tea steep for about five minutes. Be sure that the teapot is very near the teakettle when you are ready to pour in the hot water: walking too far from the stove with a hot kettle is not good for the tea (and probably dangerous, as well!). Additional hot water may be added to the teapot as needed until the tea has given all it can.

Regional Differences

Well-known regional foods include crumpets (similar to English muffins—which, by the way, don’t exist in Britain, except for those imported from the United States), a Midlands dish; pasties (meat and savory pies), a typical Cornish dish; steak and kidney pie (East Anglia); pudding (usually a savory pudding made from congealed meat drippings and other ingredients), from Yorkshire; and fool and trifle (sweet custardlike puddings served at the end of the meal with jams, fruit conserves, cream, etc.). Be sure to try clotted cream from the lake country: it’s a rich, buttery cream that goes well with crumpets and scones. There are many other dishes with remarkable names: bangers and mash (sausage and mashed potatoes), toad-in-the-hole (similar to cocktail franks wrapped in pastry), spotted dick (custard with raisins—sultanas, in Britain), and others. Beans on toast is a common English lunchtime favorite, as is the ploughman’s lunch (usually some fine English cheese, bread, and pickles); and no English child made it through childhood without porridge (actually a Scottish invention) and Marmite (a salty, yeasty bread spread; definitely an acquired

taste). The British are very fond of their sweets and chocolates: you can find them everywhere.

Typical Drinks and Toasting

Mixed drinks before dinner are not as common as in the States, although martinis and such are growing in popularity (ask for the American martini if a gin or vodka martini is what you want; if you ask for a “martini,” you will get a Martini and Rossi vermouth, which is very common). Preprandials include a short whisky (Scottish whisky mainly, and spelled without the “e”; Irish whiskey is spelled with the “e”; in either case, it is usually drunk neat or with water, never over ice), some dry sherry, a gin and tonic, or vermouth. Red and white wines (often French; the British refer to red Burgundies as clarets) during the meal are common, and port or a sweet sherry at the end of the meal is perfect. Less formal meals, especially at lunch, are washed down with English beer, of which there are dozens of fine examples. English beer is not warm; it is merely served at room temperature. If you want a chilled beer, ask for a lager. Common English beers come usually in the following varieties, from the strongest on down: ale, stout, bitter, and lager. Beer usually comes in pints (almost two full glasses) or half-pints (women usually do not order pints, and a “ladylike” beer is often lager and lime—with a lime or lime juice added to the beer). The alcohol content of most English beers can be higher than American beers, so measure yourself accordingly.

The most common toast is *cheers*, or *to your health*. Sometimes there is a toast at the end of a very formal meal to the queen, the king, or the royal family; otherwise, with all other toasts, one typically does not toast anyone older or more senior than oneself.

There is a tradition in many Commonwealth countries to order rounds (or “shouts”) of drinks for friends: it is a taking of turns in the buying of drinks for all in the group.

Tea is usually served separately at tea and for breakfast; after lunch and dinner, coffee is the usual drink.

Table Manners and the Use of Utensils

The most important difference is that the English do not switch knives and forks, as Americans do. When both are to be used, the knife remains in the right hand, and the fork remains in the left. When the meal is finished, the knife and fork are laid parallel to each other across the right side of the plate. If you put both utensils down on the plate for any real amount of time, it is a sign to the waitstaff that you are finished, and your plate may be taken away from you. In addition, the fork is often held tines down, so that food is scooped up onto the backside of the fork; do this after much practice, or with foods that can stick to the back of the fork (like mashed potatoes and peas). There are often many additional pieces of cutlery, and the cutlery is often substantial. The knife above the plate is used for butter; otherwise, if you’re unsure of which utensil to use, always start from the outside and work your way in, course by course. Hands are expected, when not holding utensils, to be in one’s lap at the dinner table (this is the reverse of the practice on the Continent, which is to keep the hands above the table). At the table, pass all dishes to your left.

Seating Plans

The most honored position is at the head of the table, with individuals of greatest importance seated first to the left and then the right of the head of the table; if there is a hosting couple, one will be at one end of the table, the other at the opposite end. As on the Continent, men and women are seated next to each other, and couples are often broken up and seated next to people they may not have previously known. This is done in the interest of conversation. Men typically rise when women enter the room, and continue to hold doors for women and allow them to enter a room first.

Refills and Seconds

If you do not want more food, leave a bit on your plate; unlike in some other cultures, however, you may not be offered additional food if you finish your plate, as the course offered was the course offered. You may always have additional beverages; drink enough to cause your cup or glass to be less than half full, and it will automatically be refilled. As on the Continent, portions are generally smaller than in the United States, but there are generally more courses than in the States.

At Home, in a Restaurant, or at Work

Restaurants usually stop serving around 11 P.M., and dinner is usually served at 8 P.M., so there aren't too many seatings in the course of an evening. Be sure to make reservations (and confirm them) in the most exclusive restaurants; this is not necessary, however, in traditional British family restaurants, or those of the more informal "fish-and-chips" style. Indian and Chinese take-away restaurants are very common these days. Pub hours were traditionally set by law at 11:30 A.M. to 3 P.M., and 5 to 11 P.M., Monday through Saturday, and from noon to 3 P.M. and 7 to 10:30 P.M. on Sunday; however, these times are changing, and many pubs, as "private clubs," stay open much longer hours (you may be required to pay a small membership fee to join the club, which is sometimes not even stated, but merely included in your bill). In informal restaurants, you may be required to share a table; if so, do not force conversation—act as if you are seated at a private table. Waitstaff may be summoned by making eye contact; waving or calling their name is very impolite. Business breakfasts are really quite uncommon in Britain, although the business lunch or dinner is acceptable: it is perfectly fine to discuss business at these times. The business lunch can often be at the pub. More upscale business dining would involve lunch or dinner at a French or Italian restaurant. During the workday, tea breaks are common, and the tea trolley (loaded with tea, coffee, and pastries) that makes its rounds in the office is usually eagerly awaited. Smoking is becoming less and less common everywhere: ask permission before lighting up, except at formal occasions where women still do withdraw into another room (the traditional drawing room), leaving the men to light up their cigars and sip their port.

Being a Good Guest or Host

Paying the Bill

Usually the one who issues the invitation pays the bill, although the guest is expected to make an effort to pay. Sometimes other circumstances determine the payer (such as rank). Making payment arrangements ahead of time so that no exchange occurs at the table is a very classy way to host.

When to Arrive / Chores to Do

If invited to a private home, offer to help with the chores if there is no waitstaff present; however, your offer will probably be rejected, and you should not expect to visit the kitchen. If you are at a dinner party in a private home, do not move from room to room unless and until the host offers to show you around. Spouses are often included in business dinners (most commonly if there are spouses on both sides), and you are more likely to be invited to a dinner party at home in England than you would be in any other European country.

Gift Giving

In general, gift giving is simply not done in Britain for business purposes; it is best not to send a gift at any time, including the holidays, unless you receive one first from your business associate. However, holiday cards are very appropriate, particularly as a thank-you for your business in the previous year, and should be mailed in time to be received the week before Christmas. Gifts are expected for social events, especially as thank-yous for private dinner parties. The best gift in this case is flowers—and it is best to have them sent ahead of time on the day of the dinner. Never send chrysanthemums (as on the Continent, they are used primarily as funeral flowers) or red roses (these may signify romantic intent), and always be sure the bouquet is in odd numbers (an old European tradition). If you must bring flowers with you to the dinner party, be sure to unwrap them before presenting them. Other good gifts would be chocolates or a bottle of champagne (avoid wine, as it may present the hosts with the dilemma of whether it should be brought to the table, especially when they have already selected the wine for the meal; champagne, however, is always appropriate, as it can serve as an aperitif or an after dinner drink, or can be enjoyed by the hosts at a later date). In addition to the gift (and certainly necessary if you did not send or bring one), be sure to send a handwritten thank-you note on a card the very next day after the dinner party; it is best if it is messengered and not mailed. If you are staying with a family, an appropriate thank-you gift would be something from your country that is of high quality and difficult to get in England: gourmet foodstuffs (maple syrup, pralines, lobsters, etc.), coffee-table books about America, or anything that reflects your host's

personal tastes and is representative of America (a cap bearing the logo of a famous American team for the football-playing son of the family, for example) is appropriate. Gifts are often opened in the presence of the giver. Holiday (Christmas and New Year's) cards are customarily sent to good clients, customers, and friends.

Special Holidays and Celebrations

Major Holidays

New Year's Day (Hogmanay in Scotland) is increasingly a major celebration throughout the United Kingdom. Many English celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in Scotland. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are official holidays, as is May Day (the first Monday in May); there is also an official Spring Bank Holiday—the last Monday in May—which makes May, as is the case on the Continent, a holiday-filled month. The last Monday in August is the Summer Bank Holiday, and there is Christmas Day and Boxing Day (the day after Christmas). Virtually no business is conducted during the weeks before Christmas and between Christmas and New Year's. Boxing Day derives its tradition as the day that household servants would have off to compensate them for their service on Christmas Day, and employers would often give them Christmas boxes (hence the name) as gifts. Christmas Day is celebrated with a fine Christmas dinner, usually a goose and lots of pudding, with all the associated trimmings before, during, and after the meal, and Christmas crackers as well (each guest receives a "cracker"—a gift-wrapped vessel containing little presents—which makes a popping noise when pulled open from either end). Guy Fawkes Day is an unofficial holiday (November 5), commemorating the foiled attempt by Mr. Fawkes to blow up Parliament in 1605: he was captured, and today the anniversary is celebrated with fireworks and burned effigies of Guy throughout the land—a real excuse for mischief (related, no doubt, to the Celtic harvest festivals and Halloween). If you can, avoid initiating new business during the high summer, from late June through the end of August, as this is traditionally vacation ("holiday") time.

Business Culture

Daily Office Protocols

In general, the business day is usually more carefully defined in Britain: it begins at 9 A.M. and ends at 5 P.M., with senior managers perhaps staying in their offices until 6 P.M. or so. It is not uncommon to socialize in the local pub after the workday for an hour or so with one's office colleagues. The pub is a place to wind down, where ceremony and differentials in rank disappear. When first arriving in the office, greet each person you know with a "Good morning," but there is no need to shake hands. Shake hands with someone new in the office when you meet, but there is no need to greet or shake hands again with anyone you've previously greeted in the course of a business day (the American habit of greeting the same people again and again in the course of the day is a

source of mystery to most Europeans, Britons included). Women and men of equal rank generally are treated equally.

Management Styles

Among individuals of the same rank, regardless of gender, there is much direct and informal communication; among individuals of different rank, there can be restrained and indirect communication, postponed decision making, and a tendency to wait for direction from above while not offering suggestions to superiors. Individuals have considerable freedom to achieve goals on their own, as long as directions have been carefully provided from above, and there is periodic review of progress. English workers expect to be rewarded for jobs well done, but not necessarily publicly, and do not expect unsolicited praise. Traditionally, the most powerful jobs in the large British business organization have been those responsible for financial control, and people with such responsibility typically used their position to police or monitor the financial situation of the company.

Boss-Subordinate Relations

Until recently, there was a very rigid separation between the ranks in British business: the management class, usually from the “great and the good,” often was brought into an organization laterally (managers did not come up through the ranks, but rather were moved about in the stratosphere from one organization to another). Moreover, rank had its privileges: separate dining rooms, separate floors, separate corporate events. Business life today is singularly more fluid, although the degree to which this change has occurred is industry-specific; in most cases, those larger industries that have emerged out of previously state-run essentials, such as telecommunications, transportation, energy, and heavy manufacturing, are still, in many ways, the most conservative. In more traditional businesses, the boss, therefore, is regarded more formally, and distinguishes him- or herself as the decision maker, separate and apart from subordinates. Subordinates, in turn, do not volunteer opinions, recommendations, or thoughts openly, and their relationships with their superiors can be formal, with indirect and circumscribed patterns of communication.

Conducting a Meeting or Presentation

At meetings of peers, there can be open communication and sharing of ideas: meetings can, in fact, be information-sharing and decision-making forums where all individuals are expected to contribute. In more formal, conservative organizations, meetings are often gatherings of nonpeers, where decision makers have clearly called the forum together in order to gather information from below, clarify goals, and formulate action plans. In these cases, individuals often do not share ideas and are not expected to contribute to mutual problem solving.

Negotiation Styles

Once relationships have been established, and there is clearly a mutual benefit to working together, Britons can be blunt, direct, and very clear about what’s on their minds. However, until such time, during the relationship-building phase of

the negotiation, it is important to allow Britons the necessary time to size up your company, your proposal, and you. Direct questions may not result in direct responses. In general, Britons are motivated by precedent; therefore, your proposal stands a better chance the closer it conforms to the way Britons have done things in the past. Remember that precedent need not have a logical base, but it often does have an empirical, experiential history that they will eagerly recall to you as reasons why they can or cannot agree with your proposal.

Planning a Project

Don't push for the decision: if the British are keenly interested (or not) they will tell you; otherwise, try not to appear too pushy and develop some patience. Remember also that Britons can be very restrained in their attitudes, so do not expect emotional demonstrations of support: cool, detached, and businesslike approaches are the most appreciated. It is very important to avoid the hard sell, or denigrating another company's product or service: this will only reduce their interest in you and your product (remember, there is more concern for self-apology than for self-aggrandizement: this is often the reverse for the American).

Written Correspondence

Time is usually written in military time. Use the word "Dear" plus title or family name to open a correspondence, and end the correspondence with the following appropriate closings:

- Yours faithfully* (when you do not have a name: a "Dear Sir" letter)
- Yours sincerely* (when you do have a name: "Dear Mr Smith")
- Best regards,*
or Kind regards (when you know the recipient personally)
- Cheers* (very informal; use *only* when you know the recipient very well or in personal notes)