

## Characteristics of Americans/American Culture

To help you compare and contrast what you observe of American culture and your own, mark the similarities and differences between your culture.

- Americans are extremely independent, individualistic, and like to be different from each other.
- Americans believe in freedom of choice.
- Americans need a lot of “elbow room”; they like personal space around them.
- The streets of major cities are often dirty.
- Many people, especially teenagers, wear strange clothes, and many have tattoos and body piercings.
- Americans are extremely informal and call most people by their first name or nickname.
- Americans smile a lot and talk easily to strangers, sharing personal stories.
- Asking “how are you?” is simply a greeting and is not a question about your health.
- When Americans put their hands on their hips, they are usually relaxed; when they fold their arms tightly across their chests, they are angry or very serious (or cold).
- Americans don’t push or stand too close to anyone in line. They always wait their turn.
- In a restaurant, the server is usually very friendly and helpful and often will tell you his or her name.
- When the service is good, tipping is expected to be 15–20% of the bill.
- Polite Americans eat with one hand while the other one is under the table on their laps.
- Usually, when friends meet at a restaurant they each pay their share of the bill or split the bill in half.
- If you have guests over to your house, turn off the television, make sure your music isn’t too loud.
- Americans have parties for many reasons. Sometimes they are held for friends to get together and to meet new people. There is rarely music or dancing at a typical American party.
- When you meet Americans, be sure to look them in the eye, smile, and shake hands.
- Americans open presents and cards in front of people.
- Americans include a card with gifts. The person given the gift will send a thank you card.
- At an American funeral, it is not normal to make loud sad sounds. Americans try to keep strong emotions inside.
- Americans don’t like direct question about their religion, age, money, salary, weight, or dress/suit size.
- Americans go to someone’s house without calling first to see if it is convenient.
- If you are invited to an American party, do not bring your children, friends, or family members without first asking the permission of the host.
- Time is money. Never be late to classes, employment interviews, appointments, parties.
- Some Americans hug a lot. It is okay for women and men to hug even if they are not close friends.
- It is normal for American women to have male friends who are just friends (and vice versa).
- Most American women do not feel comfortable having the man pay for everything all of the time.
- American parents encourage their children to question and always ask “Why?”
- It is normal for American children to have very messy rooms.
- Americans do not hit their children but discipline them by taking things away.
- American men try to share equally with their wives in parenting and housework.
- Americans hire “babysitters” to take care of their children when they go out or are at work.
- Americans love their pets, sometimes more than they love people.
- The majority of older Americans prefer to live in *retirement homes* for independent living rather than to live with their grown children.
- There are special seats in the front of buses reserved for disabled people or senior citizens.
- Most buses require the exact amount of money and cannot make change.
- Pedestrians always have the right of way.
- Rent must be paid on time or there is usually a late fee.
- Americans love to hunt for bargains and often buy used things.
- When you drive, be sure to always have your license, registration, and proof of insurance with you.
- Never, for any reason, argue with or give money to a police officer.
- Students are expected to ask questions.
- It is normal for an American teacher to sit on the desk.
- Always call your teacher by his or her name.
- It is permitted to visit most college and university campuses to see what they are like.
- Cheating is serious, and the punishment is strong.
- Most Americans put on a good underarm deodorant after bathing.