








STRATEGIES FOR BECOMING A BETTER INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATOR

Communication is key to building your intercultural competency skills. Here are 10 strategies to help you improve your interactions with international and culturally diverse students and peers while supporting your own intercultural learning.

Strategies	What you need to do	How you can do it
Be curious and vulnerable 	1. Take an interest ✓ Show students you're interested in learning about them. ✗ Avoid assuming everyone from their cultural group is the same.	Take time to get to know them, be curious , learn about their cultural background and share about yours; learn to pronounce their name correctly, the effort goes a long way. Ask students how they understand your role, find ways to explain what they can expect from you and the kind of support you can offer (e.g., talk about it or offer a printout); help others understand what they can do to help you support them. If something seems uncomfortable or odd, it may be due to value differences; if possible, try to find out how the student or your peer feel, talk about your own values to help you understand each other and work together. You can start by saying: "I think I've noticed... perhaps I've been too rushed/direct, would it help if I try...?"
	2. Establish a common ground ✓ Clarify the goals of your role, what is it that you can do for them, how you can best support each other. ✗ Avoid assuming your role and what people expect from you is understood in the same way across cultures.	
	3. Appreciate value differences ✓ Be aware of your own values, how they may affect your relationship. ✗ Avoid being critical if things (e.g., reactions, behaviours, and attitudes) are different from what you expected.	
Reflect on your reactions 	4. Identify your own biases ✓ Be aware of your own stereotypes and biases, learn to identify them and avoid making assumptions of others. ✗ Avoid making assumptions based on a person's origin or looks; avoid seeing things only from your own perspective.	Reflect on what you are assuming: Instead of thinking "This student/colleague is from x culture, so that means they are loud and indirect" it's better to think: "This student/colleague is from x culture, I am aware of the biases I hold. I recognize I don't know their story. I should focus on the student, not on the labels popping up in my head."
	5. Be mindful of how you are perceived ✓ Be aware of your own actions and attitudes; show respect, reliability, focus on the student's needs and how your knowledge/abilities can help them. ✗ Avoid thinking you're doing everything right (and they are not) or imposing your way of doing things.	

Strategies	What you need to do		How you can do it
6. Pay attention to communication styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep in mind that culturally diverse students may have a tendency for either a more direct or indirect communication style, e.g., people who grew up in Germany <i>tend to be</i> more direct while people raised in Japan <i>may favour</i> a more indirect style. Avoid assuming that everyone from a given culture communicates in the same way, there are variations even within the same group. 	Pay attention to how students/your peers communicate ; as an example, when giving feedback, you may ask them if they prefer a more direct approach, getting straight to the point (e.g., “This is considered right and this is something generally not acceptable, so it may be best if we/you...”) or they prefer using a more indirect approach where you make suggestions and help them come up with ways to move forward (e.g., “You might want to include/consider... How do you think you could reach that goal?”)
7. Be aware of nonverbal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of gestures, posture, tone of voice, eye contact, how close you sit to one another, the intensity of your hand movements. Avoid assuming you can “read” and correctly interpret all nonverbal cues. 	Observe how your peers communicate nonverbally and notice how similar/different this is from your own style, e.g., across cultures, respect can be conveyed by avoiding and also by making intense eye contact; try to adapt to what you see, while avoiding “imposing” your own nonverbal rules; take time to learn about differences in nonverbal communication so you and others feel more comfortable when interacting.
8. Be flexible and adaptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a rapport, be consistent, supportive, and patient; remember communication goes both ways; continuously reflect on your own behaviour! Avoid judging and assuming you understand everything in interactions, there are two sides of the same story. 	Listen for understanding and try not to interrupt others when they are talking to encourage them to go on, but be aware that in some cultures interrupting during conversations (overlapping) may be used to show you’re both paying attention; try to adapt yourself to the situation: pay attention and explain, and ask questions. Remember you can learn from others as much as they can learn from you.
9. Support and refer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of different ways to support students, from the language you use to communicate with them to further UW resources or services you may recommend. Avoid using slang, idioms, sayings, or telling jokes that only make sense in Canadian culture. 	Never assume anything , summarize your understanding of what students say; ask questions focused on what, how, why, and avoid yes/no questions: if you only ask “Do you understand?” they may feel embarrassed to admit they did not and will simply say “Yes”; write things down to support understanding; depending on your role or the situation, take time to explain relevant support services, they may not have the same type of support or they may mean something different back home.
10. Create a space for inclusion and belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure you and the students feel comfortable; promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging. Avoid making assumptions based on what “you see” and labeling people. 	Focus on the abilities of your peers regardless of background, identity, sexual orientation, religion, and mental ability; get to know them, find what you have in common, those things you “don’t see” at a first glance, you may share more than you think as individuals and members of the UW community.

Be a support