



★ ★
★ ★ MAKE THE MOST
OF YOUR
EXCHANGE! ★ ★

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2026

A?
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Today

About culture

Why misunderstandings happen

Culture shock

Goals of exchange and how to reach them



ABOUT CULTURE

Photo credit: unsplash.com

Culture as iceberg

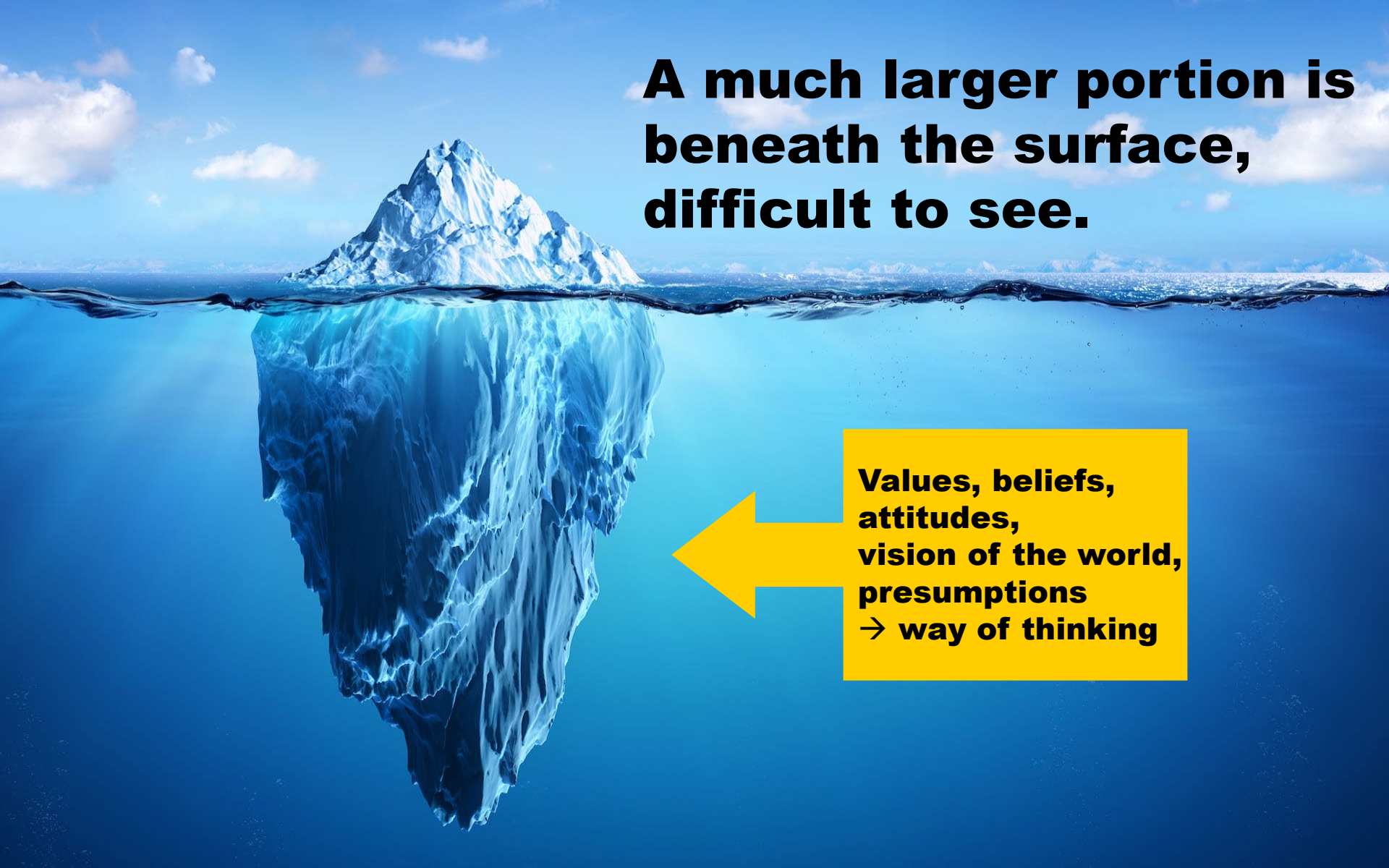
Edward T. Hall: Cultural Iceberg Model

If the culture of a society would be described as an iceberg, then there are some aspects, which are visible, above water.




**Customs,
traditions,
food,
language,
history
→ way of
doing things**

But, the visible part of the iceberg is only a small part of a whole.



**A much larger portion is
beneath the surface,
difficult to see.**



**Values, beliefs,
attitudes,
vision of the world,
presumptions
→ way of thinking**

The Cultural Iceberg

SURFACE CULTURE

Food

Language

Music

Holidays

Literature

Fashion

Arts and crafts

Games

Communication styles and rules:

facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, personal space, touching, body language, displaying emotions, tone of voice

Notions of :

courtesy, friendship, leadership, cleanliness, modesty, beauty

Approaches to:

religion, marriage, raising children, decision making, problem solving

Attitudes towards:

elders, adolescents, expectations, work, authority, animals, age, death, sin

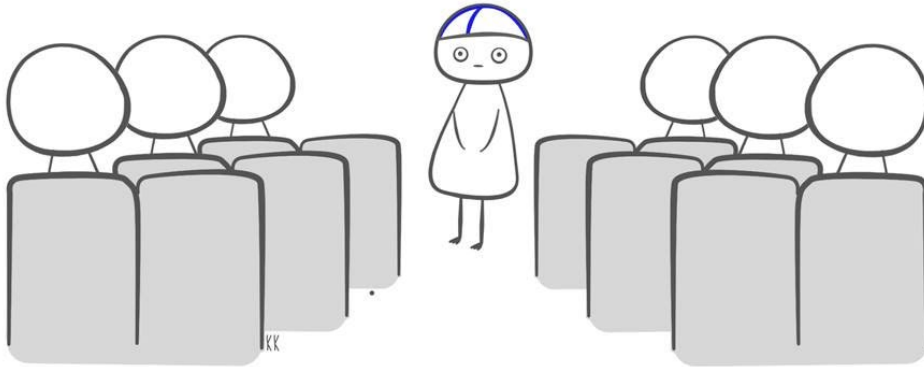
Concepts of:

self, time, past and future, justice, roles related to age, sex, class, family...

DEEP CULTURE

FINNISH NIGHTMARES

FINNISHNIGHTMARES.BLOGSPOT.FI - FACEBOOK.COM/FINNISHNIGHTMARES - TWITTER.COM/FINN_MATTI



THE BUS IS "FULL".

1. What is the *custom*?



2. What is the *value*?



So...what?

To be effective cross-cultural communicators, we need to slow down our interpretations and judgments

and be open to the possibility that what we think and think about something new and different may not match what we see.

We shouldn't jump to conclusions.

Should always try to understand the original context.



When we first enter the new culture, only the visible = easiest things and behavior are apparent.





**When we spend more time
(and effort) in the new
culture,
the underlying beliefs and
values that dictate the
behavior of the locals,
will be uncovered and you
learn to understand more
deeply and more correct
way.**



**But before that...
it may take its toll.**

Intercultural Communication Stumbling Blocks

by Laray M. Bama, 1994

When abroad, most communication problems aren't about language - they're about different expectations and interpretations.

- 1. Language Differences**
- 2. Preconceptions and Stereotypes**
- 3. Nonverbal Misinterpretations**
- 4. Assumption of Similarities**
- 5. Tendency to Evaluate**
- 6. High Anxiety**



1/6 Language differences

- Vocabulary, syntax, idioms, slang, and dialects can all cause difficulty in understanding people from other places
- *Direct* or *indirect* communication, conversational flow and amount of talk. (e.g. the communication style in Finland allows many pauses in a conversation that can be misunderstood)

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- Important details in the conversation may be missed.
- Someone may be afraid to ask for clarification.
- Can lead to frustration.
- Not easy even in one country / culture...

How to avoid or overcome?

- Learn to understand the connotations or contexts.
- Avoid (or explain) slang and abbreviations.
- Flexibility is a skill, not inauthenticity. Indirect cultures → soften requests (“Would it be possible...”) More direct cultures → be clearer and less vague

OLLA VIILIPYTTY
TO BE A TUB FULL OF FERMENTED MILK



TO BE VERY CALM AND RESTRAINED

2/6 Preconceptions, prejudice and stereotypes

- Generalisations based on limited information
→ stereotypes
- → often negative

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- Can be offensive and lead to shutdown and withdrawal.
- May miss important, unique aspects of the individual.

How to avoid or overcome?

- Starting points, but don't get stuck with them.
- Not only about others but ourselves as well
- What kind of photos and images you share?



3/6 Nonverbal misinterpretations

- Position, gestures, facial expression, eye contact, touch, physical reactions, use of space; different manners, e.g. when greeting, when defining politeness.

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- Physical gestures or facial expressions can mean completely different things to different people
- Reading too much into it - someone who is standing with their arms crossed may simply be cold, rather than defensive or disagreeable.
- Polite or respectful in one culture - offensive in another. E.g. eye contact.
- Individual variations, reflexive and non-reflexive movement



How to avoid or overcome?

- Consider the context in which the body language is being used.
- Be aware of your body language (and how others react to it).

4/6 Assuming of similarity.

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- Believing that all people have the same fundamental ideas, values, and perspectives.
- Especially when decoding nonverbal communication, defining politeness
- Assuming differences instead of similarity may lead not to recognising the important things that cultures do share and do have in common.

How to avoid or overcome?

- Take a moment to ask: *“Could there be another explanation?”*
- When in doubt, ask open-ended questions
- Useful phrasing:
 - *“I might be misunderstanding, but...”*
 - *“Can you help me understand what you meant by...?”*
 - *“Is this how it’s usually done here?”*



5/6 Tendency to evaluate, ethnocentrism

- “In my country we do things much better!”
- “I have always done things this way - and it’s the best way!”

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- Judging something as “good” or “bad” based on your own likings.
- Can lead to shutdown and withdrawal if not feeling safe to express their cultural values.

How to avoid or overcome?

- *Cultural relativism*: we must try to understand the other peoples’ behaviour in the context of their own culture before we judge it.
- Do not assign negative value to something just because you do not understand it or do not personally like it.



6/6 High anxiety

- Feeling nervous, confused
- Stress or tension caused by a lack of experience in communicating across cultures or within a specific culture

How is this an obstacle to communication?

- confusion limits interaction with others when focus is on nervous feeling rather than being present at the situation

How to avoid or overcome?

- Be supportive and patient with others who show signs of anxiety or culture shock.
- Normalize discomfort: conflict \neq failure.
 - A normal part of intercultural learning
 - A sign you are engaging deeply, not just staying in a bubble



Accept that not everything will be resolved

- Some differences won't fully or ever make sense
- Agreement isn't always possible
- Respectful coexistence is sometimes the goal

**So when you are in
your host country...
You may suddenly realize
that many of the customs
and expectations,
which seem so intuitive at
home,
can be unexpectedly
different abroad.**



The **constant** need to learn the new society's unspoken rules, gestures, and assumptions about behavior can be **emotionally exhausting**.

New culture - different rules.
Nothing can be taken for granted,
nothing happens easily like at home.

It can be hard **having your values brought into question**.



**Rules and codes you
have learned, do not
apply anymore**

→ Lack of direction

→ Not knowing:

- What to do?
- How to do things?
- When to do things?
- Why things are done some way?

Culture shock

***Stress reaction to a
new environment and
cultural differences***



Common symptoms of culture shock



Anxiety, depression,
loneliness



Being homesick



Disturbed sleep patterns



Remoteness or isolation



Decreased productivity



Poor time management



Drastic personality changes

The 5 stages of culture shock

The honeymoon stage

- Everything is still new and exciting.

Crisis phase

- All the newness starts to feel overwhelming.

Recovery

- Gradual adjustment. I think I will survive.

Adjustment

- Understanding and accepting the cultural differences they are experiencing. New things start to feel normal.

Re-entry shock

- Is this my life now?

Culture shock is a process / phase of individual length depending on how close / distant the new culture is to the home culture.

THE CULTURE SHOCK CURVE/ROLLER COASTER

APR 11/02

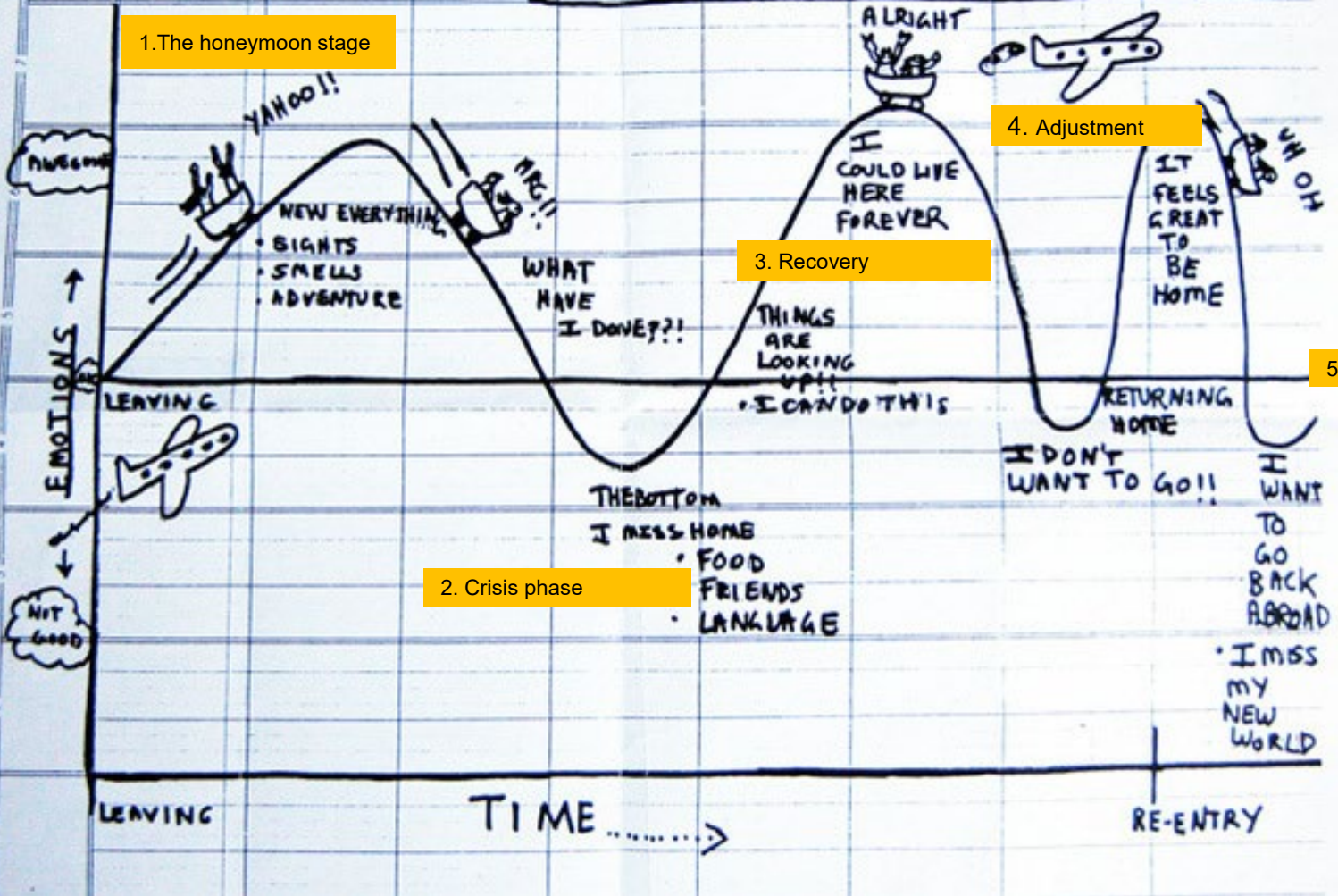
1. The honeymoon stage

4. Adjustment

3. Recovery

5. Re-entry shock

2. Crisis phase




Strategies for dealing with culture shock



Keep an eye on *yourself*:

- Are the studies kicking off okay or do you feel stuck?
- How does the everyday life feel like?
- Are you able to concentrate on things and people around you, are you interested in them?



***What did I expect?
Why?
Was my
expectation
reasonable?***

Managing expectations.

Feelings and expectations

Things to reflect (now or later)

Do you expect exchange to be a life changing experience?

Does change stress you out, excite you, or something else?

What do you look forward to happen during your exchange?

What are your fears of going abroad?

- 1. Recognition**
- 2. Objectivity**
- 3. Setting goals**

RECOGNITION



You should remember that culture shock is a normal part of your adjustment and that you may have some of the symptoms. Some of your reactions may not be normal for you; you may be more emotional or more sensitive, or lose your sense of humour. Recognising your culture shock symptoms will help you learn about yourself as you work your way through it.

BE OBJECTIVE

Try to analyse objectively the differences you are finding between your home and your host country. Look for the reasons your host country does things differently. Remember that host customs and norms are (mostly) logical to them, just as your customs and norms at home are logical to you!



SET GOALS



Set some goals for yourself to redevelop your feeling of control in your life. These should be small tasks that you you can accomplish each day. For example, if you do not feel like leaving your room, plan a short activity each day that will get you out. Each goal that you achieve will give you more and more self-confidence that you can cope.



Get a same culture buddies too (make friends with someone from your home culture). This helps in having someone who either is going through or has recently gone through the same that you are going through.

Bring in some positivity.

Make yourself find every week something new or something that you like about in your host country.

Do also something familiar.

Make your favorite food.
Watch your favorite movies.
Do sports.
Listen to music that makes you feel good in your own language.
Invite people over to celebrate Finnish holidays.
Keep a diary.



Take the benefits!

Having experienced culture shock

1. Teaches you how to survive unfamiliar and tough situations (work interview material!)
2. You will be more comfortable in the next new surroundings and situations
3. You'll become stronger, wiser, more confident



How to make the most of the exchange?

The goals of exchange studies at Aalto

- ✓ **Personal growth** – including academic and ethical growth
- ✓ **Developing** intercultural and international **competencies**
- ✓ Being **ready for a career** in the increasingly international working life
- ✓ **Fluency** in a foreign language.



To develop greater function fluency of foreign language?

- ❑ Continue improving your English/host language proficiency, why not learn some Italian or Estonian from your fellow exchange students?
- ❑ Listen to the local podcasts and local music, follow interesting local people on Instagram..



To grow academically, personally and ethically?

- ❑ Establish academic goals
- ❑ Take the advantage of possible new resources available at your host university
- ❑ Be curious for locally related study topics, that gives you valuable insight to your host country.



To develop higher level of global and intercultural competence? To become better prepared for any career?


- ❑ **Go for walks/bike rides.** Being on foot helps you to notice the little details. Explore: in your own culture, you take for granted how the trash is picked up, how the mail is delivered, the colors that the houses are painted, etc.
- ❑ **Explain your own culture.** The biggest learning experience during the exchange may be to learn about your own culture and personality. When having to explain and rationalize the things you normally take for granted, makes you look at the familiar things with new eyes.
- ❑ **Walk a mile in local shoes.** When trying to live like the locals, you can learn to understand and empathize with their perspectives, opinions or point of views.





**Get a
"local culture
dictionary"
(= make friends with
someone local).**

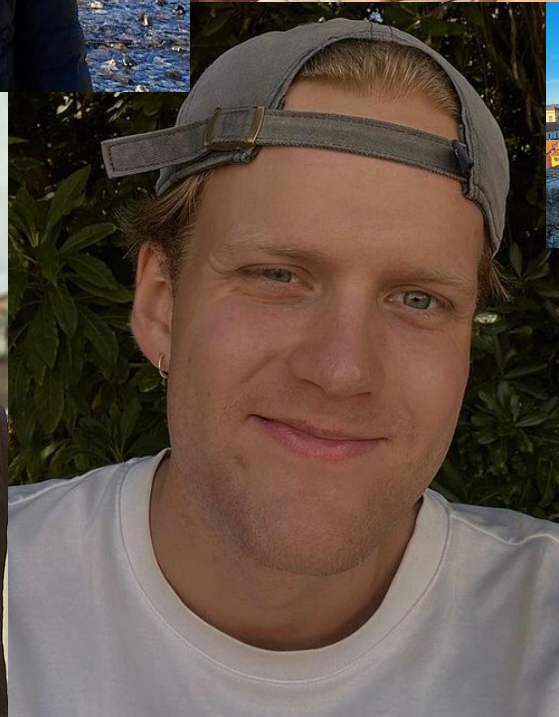
To explain when you
can't make sense of,
or if you have
questions.

A black dog, possibly a Labrador, is sitting on a light-colored wooden floor. The dog is looking directly at the camera with a questioning or confused expression, its ears slightly drooping. The lighting is soft, highlighting the dog's face against the background. A yellow circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

**Dare to say:
sorry, I didn't
understand or
sorry, could you
explain a bit more
what do you
mean?**



**Don't take it
so seriously.
Allow yourself to
see the humor in
misunderstandings
and clumsy
moments.
*Laughing heals.***



Dive deeper! ^{1/3}

Host country

1. Do you know the geopolitical divisions of your host country? Is the country divided into states, provinces, counties or some other way? How many? Name them?
2. Can you name the principal cities?
 - a. The population?
 - b. The main industries?
3. Are you familiar with your host country's basic culture and history? Date of Independence? Relationship to other countries?

In general

1. There are many prominent contemporary and historical people of whom your host country is proud. Can you name any
 - a. politicians?
 - b. poets?
 - c. philosophers/intellectuals?
 - d. musicians?
 - e. actors/actresses?
 - f. artists?
 - g. sports figures/athletes?
 - h. business leaders?

Dive deeper! ^{2/3}

People of your host country

1. What kind of person is a local person? (by character)
2. What would you say is, from your perspective, the most commonly held misconception about the culture and the people or your host country?

Daily Life in your host country

1. What is considered the best thing about living in your host country?
2. What is considered the worst thing about living in your host country?
3. How is the success defined?
4. How important is education and success in the host culture?
5. What is the importance of religion?
6. What taboos are there? What questions should not be asked?
7. What individuals and events in history are a source of pride for the locals?

Customs

1. Do you know how local people greet each others in different kind of circumstances?
2. Do you know if gift-giving is a custom and what kind of gifts are considered good or bad and in what particular occasions?
3. What kind of food is indigenous to your host culture?
4. Is there any eating habits/rituals that are specific to your host culture?
5. What is the most important meal of the day and what do you eat then?
6. Define and describe the most important (or most celebrated) holiday of your host country.
7. What is considered respectful in your host culture?
8. What is considered most disrespectful in your host culture?
9. What clothing is 'typical'? What is worn for special occasions?

Dive deeper! 3/3

Relationships

1. How would you describe the roles of men and women in your host country?
2. How is physical contact (in love and hate) viewed in the host culture? (where is the limit for tolerance towards physical contact in love or hate?)
3. Is there any meanings attached to direct eye contact? How about to eye contact avoidance?
4. Who may disagree with whom? Under what circumstances?

Family

1. How they define "family?" in your host country? (who are the members of a typical family?)
2. Who holds the most "status" in the family? Why?
3. What is the relative importance of an individual family member vs. the family as a whole? What is the degree of solidarity or cohesiveness in the family?

Politics

1. Can you identify current prominent political leaders and their titles?
2. What are the names of the (main) political parties and their beliefs, functions and symbols?
3. How visible or invisible women are in the politics?
4. Is politics appropriate topic for conversation?