

Habits



The British are very reserved and private people. They do not like to put their emotions on public display. They are generally not very openly demonstrative, and they do not appreciate other people's arms around their shoulders, unless they are close friends. Privacy is extremely important and this means not asking personal questions. Kissing is often reserved to family members in the privacy of home.

They use an interesting mix of communication styles including both understatement and direct communication. Most British are masters of understatement and do not use effusive language. If anything, they have a marked tendency to use qualifiers such as *perhaps*, *possibly* or *it could be*.

When communicating with people they see as equal to themselves in rank or class, the British are direct, but modest. If communicating with someone they know well, their style may be more informal, although they will still be reserved.

In most houses in Britain, the doors are generally kept closed and people usually make visits at a pre-arranged time and day.

During Birthday and Christmas celebrations, it is common for the British to exchange gifts between family members and close friends. The gift need not be expensive, but it should usually demonstrate an attempt to find something that is related to the recipient's interests.

Queuing is a unique part of the British culture. People in Britain usually form a queue or a single line in a shop, or when they want to buy a ticket, with the intention of allowing those who arrived first to be served first.

The Brits are generally punctual, especially the Scots. They consider it rude and impolite to turn up late for an appointment.



If there is one thing that characterises an "All-American" it is their infallibly cheery outlook on life. Unlike the British, renowned for their cynicism, the Americans seem to maintain eternal optimism even in very difficult situations. Research has demonstrated that the key to success does not in fact lie with innate intellect or wealth, but simply with the conviction that you will achieve. This positive attitude and behaviour can at times be misconstrued as insincere, but it comes from the desire of the Americans to make everyone feel welcome.

Smiling at a stranger in the street is totally acceptable. It is, however, simply courteous and polite and requires no deeper analysis. The same applies to the infamous *How are you?*, which will be the greeting of choice for many Americans. It is the verbal equivalent of smiling at someone, and should not be taken as an opportunity to relate your life story. The correct response is merely *fine* or *okay*.

American manners also extend to the way in which they interact. Eye contact is mandatory during all meetings, and reflects a desire for openness. Small talk is the way most relationships begin. Americans avoid talking politics or religion, unless they know the leanings of their company; this way, no one can be offended.

Conversely, the Americans are noted for their blunt, to the point way of doing business. In some cultures this could be thought of as rude, but in the US niceties are not necessary. Time indeed is money, so there is no beating around the bush in American business.

On a first introduction it is not uncommon to be abruptly asked, 'What do you do?'. The American work ethic means that judgement of character is based largely on one's profession; the work you do and your identity are inextricably linked in the eyes of an American.





1 Read the text and match the habits with their descriptions.

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| a. Apologizing unnecessarily | f. Enjoying the misfortune of others |
| b. Doing oneself down | g. Poor communication skills |
| c. Drinking too much | h. The desire to laugh at oneself |
| d. Driving on the wrong side of the road | i. The reluctance to fix teeth |
| e. Forgetting to eat | j. Thinking tea will fix everything |



10 BRITISH HABITS AMERICANS WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND

- How often do Brits living in the US auto-deliver a completely unnecessary "Sorry"? Sometimes, the American, instead of simply ignoring it or looking confused, will ask: "Why are you apologising?". They never receive a satisfactory answer.
- In America, all-day boozing sessions are for alcoholics, tramps and the seriously miserable. A happy Brit, meanwhile, is one whose weekend pub-crawl starts at 6pm on a Friday and ends Sunday evening.
- Often because they've indulged in point number two, Brits are terrible at remembering to feed themselves at regular intervals. Americans, meanwhile, make brunch, lunch or dinner dates. All other activities, like drinking, are supplementary.
- Nothing brightens a Brit's day more than discovering someone he didn't particularly like has lost their job or misspelled a status update. Americans, meanwhile, seem to spend less time thinking about other people, in a positive way.
- As previously mentioned, Brits revel in the downfall of others. But they don't want to appear mean so they also make a point of knocking their own achievements. This makes them miserable.
- Whether you've chipped a nail, broken up with your boyfriend or narrowly avoided being murdered, the first person on-scene will offer you a cuppa. This way, they get to keep busy, feel useful and put off coming up with soothing, wise words.
- Having aesthetically displeasing teeth is every Brit's right.
- Brits are abysmal at eye contact, telling you how they feel and what they'd like to happen. They overuse phrases like, "I think maybe..." and "Perhaps we could just..."
- Some Americans believe that driving on the left is an eccentric choice made by individuals, not a rule laid down by British law.
- Brits are masters of the self-deprecating gags, and this is confusing to countries like America with aggressively high self-esteem.



Adapted from: <http://www.bbcamerica.com/anglophenia/2013/04/10-british-habits-americans-will-never-understand>



2 Listen to a radio programme on Strange American Habits and find out what they are.

	Tradition	Description
1	Inches, Teaspoons and a Ton of Bricks	
2	Groundhog Day Prognosticating	
3	Black Friday Shopping Sprees	
4	Presidential Turkey Pardons	
5	Trick or Treating	
6	Punkin Chunkin	
7	Holding Trials of the Century	
8	Celebrating the American Dream	
9	Watching Super Bowl Commercials	
10	Throwing Tailgate Parties	

