

Introduction

Cultural Differences is designed to help high-intermediate to advanced students develop the skills that they will need to be successful in higher-level academic settings. In the process of studying about the reasons behind the norms in different cultures, ESL students develop reading, discussion, and writing skills. The materials are effective in a variety of academic ESL courses, such as in:

- ◆ an integrated academic-skills course
- ◆ a stand-alone reading and writing course
- ◆ a stand-alone discussion-skills course.

Cultural Differences is composed of two books. One book is the main text, which you are presently looking at, and it is composed of 14 units. Each unit includes a reading passage about cultural norms and the reasons for those norms. The exercises that follow the passages are divided into five parts:

- Part 1:** Study Guide questions
- Part 2:** Academic vocabulary exercises
- Part 3:** Preparation for discussion
- Part 4:** Academic writing techniques
- Part 5:** Preview questions for the next unit.

The second book, the *Supplementary Activities*, contains additional materials. This photocopyable book is available as a separate book or available online at no charge at www.prolinguaassociates.com. Included in the *Supplementary Activities* are:

- ◆ Small-group discussion activities for each unit in the form of questions for Student A, Student B and Student C
- ◆ Whole-class discussion techniques and suggested procedures for implementing them
- ◆ Applied outside-of-class activities for each unit
- ◆ An answer key
- ◆ Quizzes.

As the title, **Cultural Differences: Exploring and Understanding Cultures Using Academic Skills**, implies, there are two educational aspects to the book.

1. Exploring and Understanding Cultures

Students learn about the norms in various cultures and the reasons why those norms differ from culture to culture. For example, in social situations, many Asians seem shy while Westerners seem more outgoing. Also, Americans tend to give more compliments to others than do Asians. There are good reasons for these differences, and this book discusses what the research into cultural differences has found. Because this content is particularly relevant to students' personal lives, they tend to find it enlightening and engaging. Students who have studied these materials have stated that the content provided them with a better understanding of their roommates, classmates, and instructors from other countries, and their host family members – and even of people from their own culture.

2. Using Academic Skills

Students develop academic reading, writing, vocabulary, and discussion skills.

Reading and Vocabulary Development. The reading passages are written in an academic style about research. They are similar to the type of reading assignments that students will have in academic courses. Each unit also contains Study Guide questions and academic vocabulary-development exercises.

Writing. To prepare students for the type of writing assignments they will encounter in academic courses, each unit includes specific techniques for developing paraphrasing skills, for writing reflection papers, and for writing essay answers to test questions. These specific writing techniques show students how they can delve more deeply into a topic and impress their instructors. The final units culminate in preparing students to write essays that incorporate information from sources.

Discussion. The discussion questions (available in the free online *Supplementary Activities* or as a separate photocopyable publication) are designed to help students engage in small-group and whole-class discussions. In order to maximize student participation in the discussions, the small-group questions are designated for Student A, Student B and Student C. Using the questions, the students interact with each other in a three-person discussion. These questions include two types: discussion about the content of the reading passages and discussion about students' personal experiences and opinions. In these discussions, the students have the opportunity to explain and to listen to classmates explain information from a passage in their own words, i.e., to paraphrase orally. This step helps students make a smooth transition to producing *written* paraphrases of their own.

Outside-Class Activities. Finally, each unit includes a culminating activity, "Applied outside-class interactions/observations," which can be found in the *Supplementary Activities*. In these activities, students interview someone who is not a classmate about their experiences with that unit's cultural norms.

The *Supplementary Activities* also includes an answer key for each unit and quizzes for Units 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12 and 13-14.

A final note about the Study Guide questions: These questions for students are engaging yet do not burden the teacher with a lot of paper work (e.g. grading). The Study Guide questions and vocabulary exercises are designed to be checked by students themselves in small groups. If group members disagree about a correct answer, it presents an opportunity for them to refer back to the text and to collaborate in finding it. The teacher needs to intervene only when a group cannot agree, or wishes to double-check about whether they had truly arrived at a correct answer. The only assignments that the teacher would need to personally check are the exercises that introduce writing techniques.

An effective approach to using this material

- 1) Students are assigned to read a unit and write the answers to the Study Guide questions and vocabulary exercises. They also read the “Preparation for Discussion” questions.
- 2) In groups of three (or four), students are given the “Small-group discussion questions” (Student A, B, and C), which the teacher has photocopied from the *Supplementary Activities*, and they participate in the discussion. In their groups, they also compare their answers to the Study Guide questions and vocabulary exercises.
- 3) The teacher conducts a whole-class discussion. Prior to the discussions in Units 1-5, the class is introduced to and practices a specific technique which they can use to be active members of a large-group discussion. During the whole-class discussion of the information in the unit, students try to apply these techniques.
- 4) Students are assigned the “Writing Technique” exercise for that unit.
- 5) In order to develop a schema for the next unit, students answer the preview questions.
- 6) Students are assigned the “Applied outside-class interactions/observations” activity (included in the *Supplementary Activities*). While carrying out this activity, they take notes about what they have experienced. These notes can be given to the instructor, shared with classmates during small-group discussions, or explained during the whole-class discussions.
- 7) After completing three units, students take the quiz for those three units. These quizzes are included in the *Supplementary Activities*.