

Unwritten rules

LINKS TO:

Stage 3, Module 13

 Learning Object 2: *Camp race*

Exercise 1

1.1 What are some of the explicit rules in your family or community? Write down three that you can think of, and give details about how you learnt these rules.

In my family, we have several explicit rules that we follow. For example, we never wear our shoes inside the house. I learnt this when I was very small, but I also know that it is a rule because there is a sign at the front door asking people to remove their shoes.

You are not allowed to park in my street for more than two hours unless you live there. I learned this rule when we moved into the area. It is made explicit by parking signs on our street and, if you look closely, many of the cars parked there display a resident's parking permit.

There is a park at the end of our street. One enclosed area in the park is set aside for dogs who are off their leashes. Dogs have to be kept on their leashes in other areas of the park. This is made explicit by signs displayed throughout the park.

1.2 What are some of the unwritten rules of behaviour that most Australians follow? You might also like to consider any unwritten rules that are applied only in a community or social group to which you belong.

Most Australians queue in order of their arrival at places like bus stops, coffee shops and amusement parks.

Most Australians, if they smoke, would not light a cigarette in another person's home without asking if it is okay with the home owner.

In my group of friends, everyone listens to alternative music. We consider people who listen to popular music

uncool, even though this is unspoken. (Sometimes, at home, I listen to and enjoy music that my friends would hate, but I would never admit that I liked it!)

1.3 Are any of the unwritten rules you have identified in conflict with any explicit Australian rules? Give details of any conflicts you can identify.

I don't think any of the unwritten rules I have identified are in conflict with explicit rules regarding conduct in Australia. However, my friends often talk about how they are more 'open-minded' than other people in terms of the music they listen to, and are prepared to listen to anything. This does seem to contradict their unwritten rule about not listening to or enjoying popular or mainstream music.

1.4 What values, attitudes or beliefs influence the unwritten rules you have identified in Exercise 1.2?

I think that queuing is partly about good manners. Australians see themselves as polite people and would consider it rude to 'push in' to another's place in a queue. Perhaps our orderly queues also reflect our respect for the law, and the value Australians place on equality and democracy — it is an unwritten rule that you cannot 'jump' the queue just because you are famous or wealthy. Sometimes, however, people will stand aside to allow an elderly person to board a bus first, which reflects a belief that elderly people deserve special consideration.

The unwritten rule about smoking in another person's home reflects a widespread belief, in Australia, that smoking is a health risk and that individuals who choose to smoke should not endanger other people's health by smoking around them. This is explicit in laws about smoking in public places like restaurants, and is reinforced in unwritten rules about smoking in private homes.

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Exercise 2

Now let's consider the unwritten rules of Indonesian culture.

2.1 What are some of the explicit rules of Indonesian social behaviour? Write down three that you can think of, and give details about where these rules are made explicit.

1. Everyone in Indonesia is explicitly expected to follow one of the six official state religions. Indonesian law requires that every citizen carry a national identity card that states the person's religion.

2. The *Dua Anak Cukup* slogan or 'Two children only' is explicitly designed to control family planning. Banners and advertisements containing the slogan are displayed in strategic locations around cities and towns, as well as in the print and electronic media.

3. There is an expectation in Indonesia that children respect and obey their elders because they are higher up the pecking order in Indonesian culture.

2.2 What are some of the unwritten rules of behaviour that most Indonesian people follow? You might also like to consider any unwritten rules you are aware of that are applied only in a community or social group.

It is important that you address other people using the right title. Indonesians see this as a sign of respect. You can use the titles *Bapak* or *Ibu*, or *Oom* meaning 'uncle' and *tante* meaning 'aunty' from the Dutch, even though the people you are referring to are not actually related to you. *Mas* and *Mbak* are also widely used, especially in Java, or *Kakak*. In Indonesia, it is very common for everyone to address each other using these titles, so much so that you would feel very awkward if you addressed someone just by using their name.

It is also very important to be aware of your posture, gestures or facial expressions when you are communicating with another person. Unlike Australia, where eye contact, for example, is seen as an important feature in communication, in Indonesia avoiding eye contact is necessary when you want to

show respect for the person you are talking to. Putting both hands on your hips may also be seen as rude.

In classrooms in Indonesia, it is not the custom for students to raise their hands to answer questions. Students usually wait to be invited to say something or to contribute to a discussion. Teachers do not normally mind if you raise your hand to answer something, but to some of the students you might be seen as showing off if you do that too often.

2.3 Are any of the unwritten Indonesian rules you have identified in conflict with any explicit Indonesian rules? Give details of any conflicts you can identify.

I know there is a saying in Indonesia, *banyak anak banyak rezeki*, or 'the more children you have the more prosperous you become'. While people do not necessarily adopt this as a rule, I know that many people in Indonesia still believe this. I can see a possible conflict between this belief and the *Dua Anak Cukup* slogan. If the Indonesian government is trying to curb population growth by encouraging people to have only two children, it will not be very successful if people still believe that many children will bring prosperity to the family.

2.4 What Indonesian values, attitudes or beliefs inform the unwritten rules you have identified in Exercise 2.2?

Based on the unwritten rules I have identified in Exercise 2.2, I can see that Indonesians regard social hierarchy to be very important. Equality and familiarity with another person are not shown in the same way they are in Australia. A young person would not address an older person just by using his or her name. Respect is also shown differently: in Indonesia, it is not rude to avoid eye contact when talking to a person you respect. The more respectful the person, the lower the gaze is to be directed. To an Australian, the behaviour of Indonesian students in class might be considered passive, whereas to an Indonesian, to speak out of turn is considered rude.

Exercise 3

3.1 What unwritten rules are there in Indonesia that relate to what teenagers wear, particularly when going to a party? If you don't already know, how could you find out?

Teenagers are expected to dress comfortably and modestly. This means you should not show your midriff or too much leg. In some parts of Indonesia, showing your upper arm is not common. Therefore, a cut-off top, micro-mini skirt or a tank top might not be suitable for a party. But of course it depends on the kind of party it is and where it is held. Indonesians are usually too polite to comment if someone is dressed inappropriately. However, they would probably stare or make embarrassed comments — they are the ones embarrassed — and that would make the person uncomfortable. On the other hand, going to a party dressed too casually can also be seen as disrespectful. It is very important that you find out as many details about the party as you can beforehand, to ensure you dress appropriately — what kind of party it is, where it will be held, and what time of the day the party will take place. If you are unsure about these things, you can always ask your Indonesian friends about what they are going to wear themselves.

3.2 Who, other than Sandra herself, will be affected by her decision about what to wear?

The people who will be most directly affected by Sandra's decision about what to wear, other than herself, include the person who invited her to the party, the person who is hosting the party (if they are a different person), and the other guests at the party.

3.3 Write down Sandra's thought processes as she decides how to resolve her ethical dilemma about what to wear to the party.

In Australia, Sandra would probably choose either the jeans and shirt, or the short dress, for a party with other people her own age. The unwritten dress code at a typical teenage party is to be fashionable without trying too hard, and to look comfortable and casual. Sandra would probably be most comfortable in something she feels attractive in, and which she considers fashionable.

In Indonesia, the unwritten dress code at a typical teenage party is comfortable, covered and suitable for the occasion. The occasion this time is a birthday party held by a neighbour for her daughter. The invitation says 7 pm and Sandra has been told there will be food served in the typical buffet style, and plenty of opportunity to meet with other young people living in the neighbourhood. The mini dress is a lovely party dress. It is comfortable to wear but she thinks it might be a tad too short. The jeans and t-shirt would be comfortable and covered, but they might be too casual for the occasion. She doesn't want them to think she's being rude by dressing in her everyday clothes. That leaves her with the formal dress. Sandra thinks it might be a bit boring for a party in Australia, but it is definitely modest and suitable for this occasion, even if it is a bit uncomfortable for her. Nevertheless, she would rather feel a bit uncomfortable for a few hours than risk offending people in her new neighbourhood.

Sandra should feel confident that what she wears does not contradict either her own personal ethics or cultural beliefs about appropriate clothing, or the values, attitudes and beliefs of those whose country she is visiting. This is particularly important when she is invited into the homes of local people.

If Sandra wears something that people at the party feel is inappropriate in some way, they may be offended or upset. If they are very upset, it may ruin their enjoyment of the party, or even ruin the friendly relationship between them and Sandra.

I don't think it would be ethical of Sandra to knowingly offend or upset someone who invited her to a party, or their friends.