

# Diversity Tip Sheet

## Communicating With Non-Native English Speakers

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### Communication Tips

- Physically demonstrate what you are explaining.
- Slow down a little, but not too much. Your natural inflection and intonation communicates a great deal of meaning that you don't want to lose.
- Don't raise your voice.
- Enunciate.
- Use small, ordinary words. Avoid business jargon.
- Omit extra words (Why don't you try putting this there? Vs. Put this there.)
- Repeat what you are trying to say in different words.
- Avoid sarcasm or irony.
- Avoid negative questions. English is one of the only languages in the world where a negatively phrased question takes a negative answer. When you ask someone, "You don't mind if I sit here, do you?" you expect the answer to be "No." However, an English learner will frequently answer "Yes," meaning, "I agree with you; I don't mind if you sit here.
- Avoid cultural references (I need your John Hancock), slang, and idioms (We need to wrap this up).
- WAIT for an answer when you ask a question. It may take some time for an English learner to mentally compose a response. Then wait for them to finish speaking.
- To check comprehension, ask them to repeat back to you or demonstrate what you have explained.
- Keep in mind that it is much easier for English learners to understand spoken words in person than it is over the telephone, when all nonverbal cues are stripped away.

**Translation  
Resources**

**IMAA:** The Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association provides interpretation and document translation services to and from 48 different languages. To learn more about rates and specific languages available, contact:

Ponloeu Chim  
(507) 289-5960  
ponloeu.chim@imaa.net

**Garden & Associates Translators & Interpreters:** Located in the Twin Cities, Garden & Associates provide professional interpreters and translators in over 100 languages and dialects 24 hours a day. They also offer seminars on communicating in a multicultural workplace.

Tel. (952) 920-6160  
Toll Free: (877) 859-8800  
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