

Resource List: US Professional and Communication Norms

Every culture has unspoken expectations for how colleagues communicate and behave in a professional workplace. When you don't understand local workplace culture and how to work well within it, you can misunderstand and be misunderstood by those who make hiring and/or promotion decisions, as well as the colleagues that you must work well with to be successful. These misunderstandings can lead to you being seen as a "bad fit" and rejected from the recruiting process or let go from your job.

If you are unfamiliar with US tech workplace culture, you must intentionally learn about and demonstrate US cultural expectations for the best chance of launching and sustaining your tech career.

MinT students who are new to the US and/or are the first in their family to pursue a professional/"desk" job in the US: Use these resources and discuss and practice what you learn with your mentors. Ask your mentors: What else should you read, watch, or practice?

What to Read:

- *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business*
 - [Book summary](#), buy on [Amazon](#) or [Bookshop](#)
- *The Great Book of American Idioms: A Dictionary of American Idioms, Sayings, Expressions & Phrases*
 - Buy on [Amazon](#) or [Bookshop](#)

What to Watch:

- **Mainstream American TV:** Popular shows demonstrate American English slang, conversation patterns, cultural references, and common phrases. For example, Kevin intentionally learned conversational English by watching network sitcoms, major American sports telecasts, and evening news broadcasts with captions on. This research helped him improve his fluency, comfort, and familiarity with American phrasing, accents, and idioms.

What to Practice:

- **With your mentors:** Practice professional communication in every interaction including emails and meetings. Send complete emails including a greeting, full sentences, and a sign-off (for example, "Thank you" or "Best"). Ask your mentors throughout the year for feedback on your clarity and professionalism. Always review

your cover letters, emails to recruiters, and other job search communications together to ensure they demonstrate your compatibility with the employer.

- **For mentors:** Model and expect formal professional comms (fully written emails, defined meeting agenda + follow up, etc.) from your mentee, even if your work team typically communicates more informally through Slack/Teams messages or short emails. This is practice for your mentee to interact with recruiters and interviewers. Give direct and detailed feedback as they practice: where are there gaps? How would you view their communications as an applicant for your team?

A Note About AI:

- Do not rely on AI tools to write your emails, resume, cover letters, LinkedIn posts, etc.! AI-generated writing can sound overly generic and raise suspicions about your communication skills. This will not help you stand out from hundreds of other candidates, especially those who used similar tools or prompts!
 - If you are learning English, the best way to improve your written and spoken English is to practice, not to rely on AI tools.
 - If you must use AI, write a draft in your own words, then use AI only to correct spelling and grammar.
- Your written and spoken communication should be similar, even if you are less fluent in English. If your spoken English in an interview is very different from your writing style, interviewers wonder if the written communications are the “real” you.