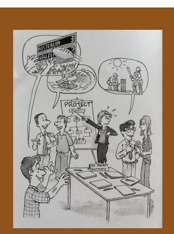
Type your heading...

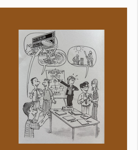
Kick-off meeting

Discuss these images and take notes.



How does it relate to your own culture?

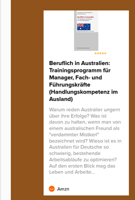
Kick-off meeting



Marianne Schuster works for a German company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels irritated. She simply cannot get started. The colleagues are talking about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy — in short, about private matters that, from her point of view, have nothing to do with work. She has planned and prepared the meeting precisely and sees the risk that she will not be able to discuss all the important points within the scheduled time.

Marianne Schuster works for an Austrian company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels uneasy. She wants to get started with the agenda, but the colleagues are chatting at length about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy — topics that, from her point of view, have little to do with work. Marianne appreciates a bit of polite small talk, but this goes on for too long. She becomes concerned that the important topics will not be discussed within the planned time.

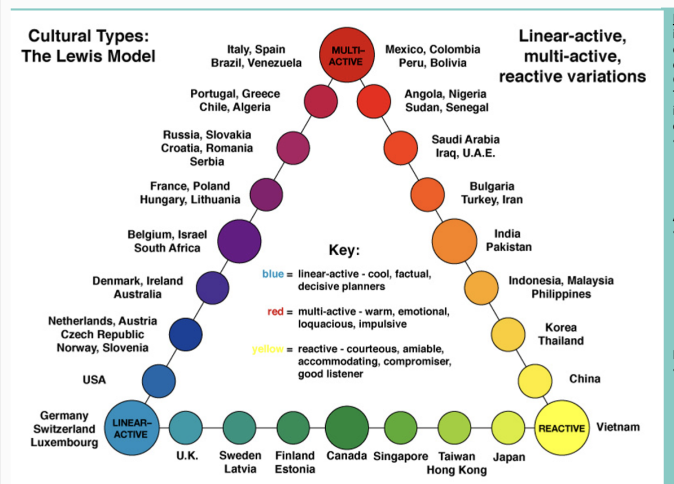
Siobhán O'Connor works for an Irish company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels mildly amused, but also a little unsure how to steer the group back to business. The colleagues are chatting about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy, and the informal atmosphere does not feel completely unfamiliar to her — in Ireland, a bit of banter and relational warm-up is also common. However, the Australian style feels more relaxed and drawn-out than she expected for a project kick-off. Siobhán joins in briefly to build rapport, but starts to worry that the meeting may lose focus and that key responsibilities and next steps will not be clearly agreed.



Beruflich in Australien: Trainingsprogramm für Manager, Fach- und Führungskräfte (Handlungskompetenz im Ausland)

Aisha Rahman works for a Malaysian company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels uncomfortable. The colleagues are chatting openly about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy. For Aisha, this feels unusual — in Malaysia, people often wait to see how a meeting leader will start and are more cautious about speaking too informally at the beginning. She worries that the atmosphere is too relaxed and that her professional role might not be taken seriously. At the same time, she hesitates to interrupt, because in her culture it is important to show respect and not to cut others short. She becomes concerned that the important points may not be discussed in the right depth.

Different perception of time



Richard Donald Lewis (1930-)
is a British polyglot, cross-cultural communication consultant, and author. He developed the Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication
The core of the model classifies cultural norms into Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Re-Active, or some combination.

- Linear-active: **follow tasks sequentially**. Drivers are facts, tasks and efficiency. Communication follows clear structures - „question – answer".
  -> Examples: Northern Europe, North America and related countries.
- Multi-active: **pursue multiple goals simultaneously**. People, relationships and flexibility are the driver. Communication is dialogue-focused and simultaneous. Body language is important. Information is passed on in personal and informal networks.
  -> Examples: Southern European, Latin America, Africa, Middle-East
- Re-active: follow harmonising, solidarity-based strategies. These cultures have a **cyclical understanding for time** following the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. All events, challenges, opportunities will come back eventually. In business, people take a lot of time to make sustainable decisions for the future.

Linear-active
1. Germans, Swiss
2. US-Americans
3. Scandinavian, Austrian
4. Brits, Canadian, NZ
5. Australians, South Africans
6. Dutch, Belgian
7. US subcultures
8. French, Belgian
9. Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian
10. North-Italian
11. Chilean
12. Russians, other Slavish
13. Portuguese
14. Polynesian
15. Spanish, South-Italian
16. Indian, Pakistani
17. Latin-American, Arabs, Africans

Multi-active

highly re-active
1. Japanese*
2. Chinese
3. Taiwanese
4. Singapore, Hongkong Chinese*
5. Finns*
6. Korean
7. Turkish+
8. Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laos
9. Malaysian, Indonesian
10. Pacific Islands+
11. Swedish*
12. Brits*

occasionally re-active

* linear-active tendencies
\+ multi-active tendencies

Contruction and trade

Intercultural lenses

From Austria/Germany

- Perception of Australians: Seen as too casual, too informal and sometimes not detailed enough. Humour, first-name culture and pragmatic problem-solving may appear careless or insufficiently structured.
- Typical irritation: "They are too relaxed. Do they really take the work seriously?"
- Learning potential: Germans/Austrians can benefit from separating informal style from actual work standards. The tone may be casual, but expectations around safety, reliability, performance and results are high.
- Key insight: It's not about perfect procedure for its own sake. It is about practical, safe and reliable completion. However, safety rules are not optional, especially in construction and trade contexts.

From Malaysia/Singapore

- Perception of Australians: Work culture may feel very informal and humorous, even with supervisors, clients or senior staff. To Malaysians/ Singaporeans, this may seem overly casual or lacking respect.
- Typical irritation: "They joke too much at work, even with bosses."
- Learning potential: Joining the informal style can help build trust and rapport, while remembering that responsibility, accountability and performance are still expected.
- Key insight: Hierarchies are flatter in style, but not absent. First names and banter do not mean there is no hierarchy. Australians may still defer to bosses, clients or senior trades, especially in public.

Topic	Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Work attitude	Be practical, reliable and outcome-oriented. When a problem comes up, people expect you to help find a workable solution.	Don't mistake the casual style for low expectations. Poor workmanship, excuses or lack of ownership are not accepted.
Performance standards	Deliver what you said you would deliver. Be on time, prepared, productive and willing to help.	Don't assume "no worries" means nobody cares. Results, quality and reliability matter.
Safety culture	Take WHS seriously. Know the site rules, attend toolbox talks, wear PPE and follow instructions. If you are unsure, ask before acting.	Don't copy what you have seen on another site or assume "this is probably fine." Safety shortcuts can have serious consequences.
White Card	Be aware that construction work generally requires a White Card, also known as general construction induction training. Treat this as a baseline, not a formality.	Don't enter the construction context assuming previous international experience automatically replaces local safety induction.
Personal accountability	Understand that safety responsibility does not only sit with "management." Supervisors, officers and workers can all have duties.	Don't ignore unsafe behaviour because "someone else is responsible." In serious cases, consequences can include heavy fines or personal liability.
Drug and alcohol policy	Expect strict drug and alcohol rules on many worksites, especially in safety-critical environments. Testing may be part of workplace policy, particularly after incidents or where impairment is suspected.	Don't assume cannabis is treated casually. Recreational cannabis is illegal in most Australian states and territories, and a positive test can have workplace consequences.
Communication	Speak clearly, directly and simply. Confirm what needs to be done, by when, and to what standard.	Don't give long theoretical explanations when a clear instruction or practical answer is needed.
Humour and banter	Light humour, self-irony and informal chat can help build trust.	Don't confuse banter with lack of seriousness. Also avoid jokes about safety, drugs, race, gender or someone's competence.
Hierarchy and respect	Use first names and keep the tone informal. Earn respect through reliability, competence and practical contribution. Speak up when safety, quality or delivery are at risk, but read the room.	Don't confuse informality and egalitarianism with absence of hierarchy. Australians may still defer to bosses, clients or senior trades, especially in public. At the same time, overemphasising titles or status can come across as arrogant.
Teamwork on site	Get involved, watch how the team works, ask practical questions and help where appropriate.	Don't stand back too much or behave as if hands-on work is beneath you.
Time and breaks	Be punctual and expect early starts. Breaks such as "smoko" can be important for team connection as well as rest.	Don't arrive late, disappear without communicating, or treat breaks as unimportant to the team rhythm.
Pragmatism vs. rules	Be pragmatic within safe and legal boundaries. Look for practical solutions that still meet safety, quality and compliance expectations.	Don't interpret pragmatism as permission to bypass safety rules, permits, site procedures or legal requirements.
Social interaction	Keep conversation relaxed and grounded. Sport, weekend plans, weather, travel and practical work topics are usually safe.	Don't be overly formal, withdrawn or intense. Avoid sensitive topics such as politics, religion or personal criticism unless the relationship allows it.

Cultural Contrasts with Australia (Summary)

Germany vs. Australia
👉 Germany: strong rule orientation, detail-focus, technical correctness, formal procedures.
👉 Australia: pragmatic, solution-focused, informal and humorous. Work may look relaxed, but expectations around safety, reliability and results are high.

Austria vs. Australia
👉 Austria: structured planning, careful preparation, formal respect for procedures and roles.
👉 Australia: more informal tone, practical problem-solving, flexible communication. However, hierarchy still exists and safety procedures must be taken seriously.

Malaysia vs. Australia
👉 Malaysia: hierarchy and authority are respected, communication may be more indirect, and senior approval can carry strong weight.
👉 Australia: hierarchy is often less visible because of first names, humour and informal speech. However, this does not mean hierarchy disappears, especially with bosses, clients or senior trades.

Ireland vs. Australia
👉 Ireland: informal, humorous and relationship-oriented, with practical problem-solving and a strong ability to read the social tone.
👉 Australia: similarly informal and humorous, but often more direct and more explicit about performance, WHS, personal accountability and speaking up on site.

Case study

Intercultural Case Study: Project Planning & Decision-Making
Teams involved: Germany, Austria, Australia, Ireland, Malaysia
Starting Situation
A German and Austrian engineering consortium is working with an Australian construction company on the planning of a new production hall. The project also involves Irish and Malaysian partners....

Scene 1 – Kick-off Meeting
- The Austrian project leader presents a 120-page plan with milestones, responsibilities, approval steps, safety requirements, and risk analyses.
- The German specialist insists this should be the baseline plan with strict change control, especially for technical, safety, and regulatory topics.
- The Australian project leader shows a two-page Gantt chart: "This will guide us – no need to overcomplicate." • Some Australians joke: "That's a lot of paper, mate — we'll need another project just to read it!"
- The Irish manager smiles at the joke, but also points out: "The detail is useful, but maybe we need a shorter working version everyone can actually use."
- The Malaysian colleague stresses: "We must be sure the director signs off before we proceed."

Tension builds:

The DACH team feels their thorough work isn't fully valued. Australians feel the planning may become too heavy for day-to-day coordination. The Irish side sees value in both approaches but worries that the group may confuse a full reference plan with a practical working tool. Malaysians see the jokes as potentially dismissive of formal process and senior approval.

Scene 2 – Delivery Delay
A key supplier informs the team of a two-week delay.
- Germany: Calls an urgent change control meeting, insists on freezing dependent tasks.
- Austria: Suggests an informal workaround while documenting changes afterwards.
- Australia: "Let's check the options first. If there's an approved alternative supplier, we can keep the unaffected work moving."
- Ireland: Suggests checking quickly whether another supplier is available, but also asks what contractual, safety, or quality approvals would be needed before switching.
- Malaysia: Warns against bypassing the director, worried about damaging trust and causing loss of face.

Tension escalates:
- The DACH side worries that moving too quickly could create technical, contractual, or coordination risks.
- Australians feel the others are turning every adjustment into a major escalation, even when a practical workaround may be possible.
- The Irish side feels the group is creating a false choice between bureaucracy and improvisation.
- Malaysians worry about hierarchy, trust, and harmony.

Scene 3 – Escalation
The conflict spills into a heated call:
- Germans stress rules and safety.
- Austrians try to mediate but insist on at least some formal process.
- Australians joke about "overthinking" and argue that the team should focus on workable next steps rather than reopening the whole plan each time something changes.
- Irish colleagues initially use humour to reduce tension, but become uncomfortable when humour starts to sound dismissive of real concerns.
- Malaysians express discomfort about open disagreement, preferring to take issues offline with senior figures.

Tension becomes visible:

The conflict is not simply about planning versus no planning. Everyone agrees that the project needs structure. The disagreement is about how much detail should guide day-to-day decisions, when a change needs formal escalation, and how much flexibility the team should allow once work is underway.

Scene 4 – On-Site Decision Point (Faulty Component)
At the construction site, a component turns out to be faulty.
- German/Austrian project leader: "We must first get technical approval and management sign-off. Otherwise, we cannot proceed."
- Australian site manager: "We shouldn't hold up the whole site if only one part is affected. Let's document the issue, get the right technical input, and see which work can continue in the meantime."
- Irish manager: "Can we separate what can reasonably move ahead from what needs formal approval? That way, we don't ignore the process, but we also don't stop more than necessary."
- Malaysian colleague: Avoids direct confrontation, but later suggests privately: "We should check with the director first. Making such a decision here could cause loss of face if it goes wrong."

Tension peaks:
- Germans/Austrians may initially interpret the Australian approach as too informal.
- Australians see Germans/Austrians as rigid when every adjustment seems to require another formal approval loop.
- Irish colleagues see both sides as partly right, but become frustrated that the team struggles to distinguish between practical flexibility and decisions requiring formal accountability.
- Malaysians are concerned about hierarchy, harmony, and loss of face.

Reflection Questions (for participants)
1. At which moments did the misunderstandings become visible?
2. How do planning style, hierarchy, risk appetite, and communication style differ between the groups?
3. What values are in conflict here?
4. If you were the overall project lead, how could you:
   • define non-negotiable milestones (safety, regulatory, approvals)?
   • allow flexibility (suppliers, sequencing)?
5. What strategies could reduce frustration and build trust across the cultures?

Open Resolution Directions (Contextual)

Scene 1 – Kick-off Meeting
Teams might explore how different levels of detail serve different needs. The German and Austrian colleagues may need the full plan for risk control, governance, technical quality, and accountability. The Australians may need a short, practical working tool for day-to-day coordination. The Irish colleague may help bridge these needs by suggesting a layered approach: a detailed reference plan, a shorter working version, and clear rules for when decisions need formal approval.
Scene 2 – Delivery Delay
The delay raises the question: When does a change need formal approval, and when is pragmatism acceptable? Different thresholds for risk become visible. The Australian response is not necessarily anti-process; it may be based on the assumption that practical alternatives can be checked quickly. The Irish contribution may be to ask what type of decision this is: technical, contractual, commercial, coordination-related, or merely operational.
Scene 3 – Escalation
The heated call highlights contrasting comfort levels with direct disagreement, humour, documentation, and maintaining harmony. Australians and Irish colleagues may both use humour, but not always in the same way. The group may need to reflect on when humour builds trust and when it starts to undermine seriousness or respect.
Scene 4 – On-Site Decision Point
The faulty component forces a choice: Stop the whole process until formal approval is complete, or continue with unaffected work while the issue is clarified? The group could reflect on how accountability, hierarchy, technical judgement, and practical progress shape such decisions.
The Irish perspective may help reframe the issue: not "process versus pragmatism," but "what can move now, what needs documentation, and what must be approved before we continue?"

Presenting in Austria

Presentation styles in different countries

Country	Presentation tendency	What works best
Germany	Principles-first	Start with context, logic, method, then conclusions.
Austria	Principles-first, but softer	Give context and rationale, with diplomatic tone.
Australia	Applications-first	Start with the point, practical relevance and examples.

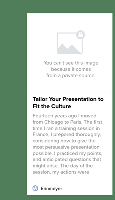
Australian presentation style is usually practical, direct and applications-first.
Audiences often appreciate it when you get to the point early, explain why the topic matters, and quickly connect ideas to real examples, outcomes or next steps.

A typical effective structure is:

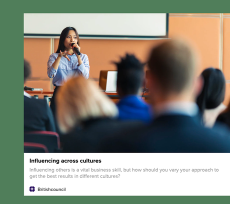
Step	Australian-style presentation
1	Start with the point or issue
2	Explain why it matters
3	Give practical examples or evidence
4	Show options or recommendations
5	End with clear next steps

The tone is often **informal, clear, grounded and low on self-importance**. Too much abstract theory, status signalling or overly polished "big talk" can feel less convincing unless it is quickly linked to practical value.

In one sentence:
Australians often want to know: *What's the point, why does it matter, and what can we do with it?*

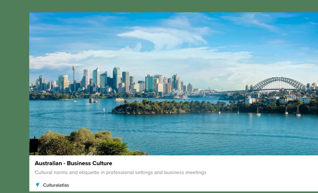


Tailor Your Presentation to Fit the Culture



Influencing across cultures

Support for businesses in Australia | business.gov.au



Australian - Business Culture

Email etiquette

Intercultural lenses

Seen from Austria
- Australians' friendliness at the start of an email ("Hope you enjoyed your weekend") can feel surprisingly casual to us.
- The use of first names without titles is unusual
- in Austria, academic or professional titles are important.
- Short, positive endings ("Best", "Cheers") contrast with our preference for more formal sign-offs.
- The relaxed tone makes communication light, but it can feel as if respect for senior roles is missing.

Seen from Malaysia
- Greetings like "Hi Alex" or personal questions ("How was your trip?") may feel too informal compared to our respectful, formulaic openings.
- First-name use with managers or older colleagues feels overly familiar.
- Humor or casual comments in email may be interpreted as unprofessional.
- The lack of deference in tone - juniors addressing seniors directly - can seem bold or even disrespectful.

Seen from Germany
- Australians' informal greetings ("Hi Chris", "How are you?") can feel unusual compared to our more formal "Sehr geehrter Herr/Frau ...".
- Their brief, relaxed style may look unstructured
- we expect a clearer flow: introduction, explanation, conclusion.
- Closings like "Cheers" or "Thanks" may seem too casual for professional email.
- The downplaying of hierarchy is striking: emails from juniors often read as if they were to equals.

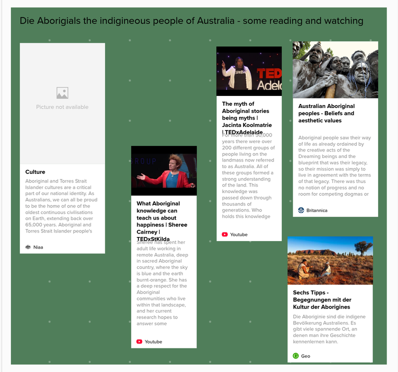
Seen from Ireland
- Australians' friendly and informal email style feels broadly familiar to us, as Irish workplace communication also often values warmth, humour and a personal touch
- The use of first names, even with managers or senior colleagues, is usually not surprising, although Australians may come across as even more direct and stripped-back in writing.
- Short emails with "Cheers", "Thanks" or "No worries" feel approachable, but at times they may seem a little too brief if more context or reassurance is expected.
- The relaxed tone and light humour can build rapport quickly, but Irish colleagues may still read between the lines more than Australians intend, especially when feedback or disagreement is expressed very directly.

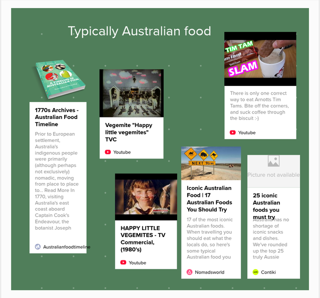
Email Etiquette in Australia

Checklist

Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Keep it short and to the point – clarity matters more than formality.	Don't overuse titles or very formal language ("Dear Mr. Smith" / "Yours faithfully") unless writing to government or very official contacts.
Use first names (even with managers or senior staff).	Don't get straight to the point without a line or two of warm-up.
Start with a friendly, casual greeting ("Hi Alex," or "Hello Sam,").	Don't write long, dense emails – they won't be read carefully.
Add a brief personal touch before business ("How are you?" / "Hope you enjoyed the long weekend").	Don't emphasize hierarchy ("As your manager…") – Australians value equality.
Reply relatively quickly (within 24 hours if possible).	Don't ignore humor or lightness – some informality is expected.
Use a positive, approachable tone.	Don't copy unnecessary people (avoid long CC lists).
End with simple closings ("Cheers," "Best," "Thanks").	

Local lingo





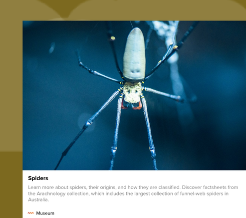
Other things

Nature

Nature and what to be aware of

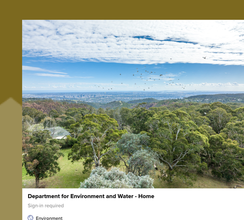
Situation	What to be aware of	Practical advice
Beaches	Rip currents are often a bigger everyday risk than sharks.	Swim **between the red and yellow flags**. If there are no flags, the beach is not supervised.
Heat and sun	Sunburn, dehydration and heat exhaustion can happen quickly.	Use sunscreen, hat, water, shade; avoid long walks in extreme heat.
Bushwalking / hiking	Getting lost, dehydration, injury, sudden weather changes.	Tell someone your route, carry water, wear proper shoes, check conditions.
Moving rocks, logs or garden debris	Snakes, spiders, scorpions or ants may shelter underneath.	Don't use bare hands. Wear gloves and closed shoes; move things carefully.
Reaching into dark spaces	Spiders, snakes or insects may hide in holes, sheds, wood piles or long grass.	Don't put your hands where you can't see. Use a stick or tool first.
Shoes left outside	Spiders or insects may crawl inside.	Shake shoes out before putting them on.
Snakes	Venomous snakes exist, but usually avoid people.	Don't approach or try to move them. Step back slowly and leave them alone.
Snake bite	Movement spreads venom faster.	Call **000**, keep the person still, apply pressure immobilisation if trained.
Spiders	Some species, such as funnel-web spiders, are medically significant.	Avoid blind reaching; use gloves outdoors; seek medical help for serious bites.
Crocodiles	Relevant mainly in northern Australia.	Obey warning signs. Never swim in crocodile habitat.
Marine stingers / jellyfish	Serious in tropical northern waters, especially in stinger season.	Follow local beach advice; use stinger nets or suits where recommended.
Sharks	Rare, but part of ocean risk awareness.	Swim at patrolled beaches, avoid swimming at dawn/dusk or near fishing activity.
Ticks and insects	Bites can cause irritation, allergic reactions or illness.	Use repellent, cover skin in bush areas, check yourself after walks.
Bushfires	Can affect travel, roads, air quality and safety.	Check fire danger ratings and local alerts before travelling.
Wildlife generally	Animals can bite, scratch or become stressed.	Don't touch, feed or corner wildlife. Keep a respectful distance.

Australia's natural environment is beautiful and best approached with respect, not fear. Swim between the flags, follow signs, avoid reaching into places you cannot see, and take sun, heat and water conditions seriously.



Spiders

Travel to Australia - Australian Tourism Information - Tourism Australia

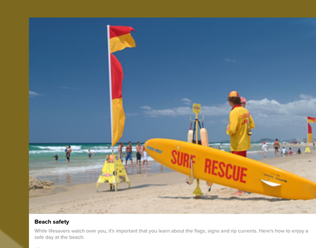


Department for Environment and Water - Home

Be wildlife aware

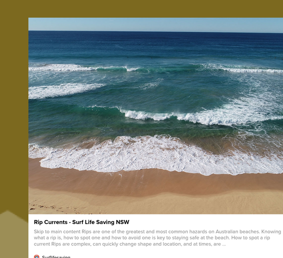
Frequently asked questions about snakes

Surf Safety



Beach safety

Marine Stingers



Rip Currents - Surf Life Saving NSW

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