

## GOOD MANNERS, PLEASE

### A look at politeness across the globe. By Sam Gordon

Do you think you're a **polite** person? Good **manners** are important across the globe, but that doesn't mean that they're the same everywhere.

The concept of politeness varies greatly from country to country. Something that might be considered polite in one place could be thought of as very **rude** in another. For example, it's good manners to leave a tip in a restaurant in Europe. However, in Japan it's likely to **cause embarrassment** or even offence. In fact, manners while dining are a very good example of just how varied "polite behaviour" is all over the world. The Japanese may not like tipping but they aren't so **fussy** when it comes to **slurping** (which would be considered impolite in many western countries). In fact, noodles should be slurped!

Good manners are taken extremely seriously in Japan. It's considered rude to **blow your nose** in front of other people, and it's impolite to eat while standing or walking in the street (ice-cream excepted). When visiting someone's house you should always take off your shoes, and you should be very careful what you say. The Japanese are so well-mannered that it's considered rude to express your opinion too directly. In fact, the Japanese have two different words for opinions: "honne" which is your real opinion; and "tatemae" which is your public opinion.

Generally, Japanese express the latter so as not to cause offence.

But it isn't only in Japan where confusions can arise. A good, firm **handshake** is considered correct in many countries, but in others it might be seen as aggressive. Meanwhile in many parts of Asia, it's best to avoid a handshake altogether and to **bow**. And while in western cultures it's polite to **maintain eye-contact** during a conversation, in other countries it's best to show your respect by *not* looking directly at the speaker. Just to add to the confusion, whereas we usually **nod our heads** as a way of saying "yes" and shake them to say "no", in some parts of the Middle East, **shaking your head** means "yes" and nodding it means "no"!

Some people are worried about the disappearance of good manners. A recent survey in America by *Public Agenda* has shown that 73% of Americans think that manners are worse now than 20 years ago. Meanwhile in China the government had to launch a campaign during the Olympics to **discourage** bad habits such as **spitting** in public, **littering** the streets, "jumping" queues and using bad language. And in England, a government adviser has suggested that announcements are made on trains to remind people to give up their seats for the elderly and pregnant women. Now, all those in agreement with that, nod your head... or shake it.

**TASK 1:** Read the text and decide if the following statements are **TRUE** or **FALSE**.

1. It's generally good manners to leave a tip in a restaurant in Europe. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Japanese are very generous tippers. \_\_\_\_\_
3. It's OK to blow your nose in front of other people in Japan. \_\_\_\_\_
4. In general, the Japanese don't like to express their opinion too openly. \_\_\_\_\_
5. A firm handshake is considered aggressive in some countries. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Nodding your head can mean both "yes" and "no" in different parts of the world. \_\_\_\_\_

**TASK 2:** Match the words and expressions in **bold** with the definitions.

| WORD/ EXPRESSION                          | ANSWER | DEFINITION                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>Polite</b> (adj.)                   |        | a. To move your body down and forward as a form of greeting or respect                               |
| 2. <b>Manners</b> (n)                     |        | b. To drink some liquid noisily                                                                      |
| 3. <b>Rude</b> (adj.)                     |        | c. To join hands with a person and move your hands up and down as a form of greeting                 |
| 4. <b>To cause embarrassment</b> (exp.)   |        | d. People who are difficult to make happy or please                                                  |
| 5. <b>Fussy</b> (adj.)                    |        | e. When you want to stop people doing something                                                      |
| 6. <b>To slurp</b> (vb)                   |        | f. to move your head from side to side                                                               |
| 7. <b>To blow your nose</b> (exp.)        |        | g. not polite; not respectful of others                                                              |
| 8. <b>a handshake</b> (n)                 |        | h. to move your head up and down                                                                     |
| 9. <b>To bow</b> / <b>bow</b> / (vb)      |        | i. to throw rubbish (old bits of paper/ food, etc.) on the ground/floor and not in bins / trash cans |
| 10. <b>To maintain eye-contact</b> (exp.) |        | j. to make someone feel uncomfortable/silly/stupid                                                   |
| 11. <b>To nod your head</b> (exp.)        |        | k. A socially accepted way of behaving                                                               |
| 12. <b>To shake your head</b> (exp.)      |        | l. to force air out of the nose in order to clean your nose                                          |
| 13. <b>To discourage</b> (vb)             |        | m. to force liquid out the mouth                                                                     |
| 14. <b>To spit</b> (vb)                   |        | n. showing respect to others                                                                         |
| 15. <b>To litter</b> (vb)                 |        | o. to look at someone in the eyes while they are talking to you                                      |