

# What Is Cultural Competency?

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss what it means to be culturally competent. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Cultural Competency
2. Recognizing Worldview vs. Stereotyping
3. Addressing Culture in Conflict

## 1. Cultural Competency

Culture plays a very large role in determining how we behave and how we view the world. Having a better understanding, not only of our own culture, but of other cultures, goes a long way in helping prevent miscommunication and conflict.

**Cultural competency**, which is different from cultural immersion or cultural fluency, refers to the ability to recognize when culture might be playing a role in any miscommunication or conflict.

Once there is recognition of the possibility, cultural competency involves raising this possibility with the people who are experiencing miscommunication or some sort of issue.

Any conflict-resolver wants to strive for cultural competency, and people sometimes think this requires **cultural immersion**. However, cultural immersion is long-term constant contact with the norms, traditions, and worldviews of any particular culture.

Most of us don't have an opportunity to become totally immersed in a culture that way, so cultural immersion is not necessary to be culturally competent.

Likewise, **cultural fluency** isn't required to achieve cultural competency. Cultural fluency is the ability to function in a culture like a native. This might sound a lot like cultural immersion, but it can be contextual.



**EXAMPLE** Let's say you marry into a culture that is different from your own. Simply by spending time with your in-laws in various situations that bring you very closely into the culture, you can grow to be fluent in that culture.

Cultural fluency doesn't necessarily mean long-term immersion but rather just becoming very familiar with the culture.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Cultural Competency

The ability to recognize when culture may be playing a part in a conflict or communication difficulty and the ability to raise the role of culture in a way that helps overcome the problem.

### Cultural Immersion

Long-term nearly constant contact with the rules, norms, and worldviews of a different culture.

### Cultural Fluency

The ability to function within a given culture as if one were native to that culture.

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## 2. Recognizing Worldview vs. Stereotyping

Again, being culturally competent doesn't mean that you have to be fluent in the culture; you simply need to be able to recognize that there might be cultural issues at play, and then be able to bring them up.

This requires being aware of **worldview** and that worldviews differ. As you've learned, worldview is the way we see the world. Everybody has a worldview; we come from a culture with a particular worldview, and that's how we interpret the world.

Our worldview is how we judge what is right, correct, and normal. Thus, we tend to think that the way we do things, our own particular worldview, is the "right way" and universally true for everyone.

But worldviews differ, and cultural competency is being able to recognize worldview and avoid stereotyping.

As you may know, **stereotyping** is the belief that trends or traits that you see describe everyone, and not recognizing that every culture, every worldview, is made up of people, some of whom aren't going to fit in a certain mold.

We're all individuals, so a worldview doesn't absolutely describe every person in the same way; people can differ in the way they interpret things.

To be culturally competent, we must be aware that every culture has a worldview. We can often see these worldviews expressed through a culture's music, proverbs, art, or literature. We need to recognize worldview, but steer clear of stereotyping.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

### Worldview

The way a person interprets and makes decisions about their environment (world), including beliefs or assumptions about what is considered right or normal.

### Stereotyping

Forming a belief that certain general trends or traits of a group (culture) apply equally strongly to all individual members of that group; perceiving people as simplistic representatives of abstract cultural traits rather than as individuals.

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## 3. Addressing Culture in Conflict

To recognize worldview effectively as a mediator in a conflict resolution situation, you need to be able to raise

the possibility that culture could be at play.

A good way to do that is through questions. If you suspect something cultural could be at play, ask a question for the parties to consider.

You could paraphrase something you heard or reflect your understanding of something to make sure you have it correct in order to pose the possibility that a cultural issue could be at play.

The idea is to build bridges between parties by creating a discussion and mutual understanding. Therefore, the worst thing that you could do would be to say something that could sound like a blaming or stereotypical statement of a culture.

Instead of saying something that you think might be true, but perhaps isn't, the following are much better ways to build that bridge and initiate discussion:

- Asking questions
- Paraphrasing
- Reflecting



#### BIG IDEA

To be culturally competent, a person does not need to immerse themselves in a culture, or even become really fluent or familiar with the culture. A person just needs to be able to recognize that cultures differ in the way they communicate and see the world and then be able to bring up the possibility of cultural differences in a way that could be helpful to the parties.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **cultural competency** does not require total immersion in or fluency with a culture, but rather the ability to **recognize different worldviews and address them instead of stereotyping**. You now understand that in a conflict resolution situation, the best ways to **address the possibility of a cultural issue** are asking the parties questions, paraphrasing what they say and reflecting your understanding of what you heard. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Cultural Competency**

The ability to recognize when culture may be playing a part in a conflict or communication difficulty and the ability to raise the role of culture in a way that helps overcome the problem.

##### **Cultural Fluency**

The ability to function within a given culture as if one were native to that culture.

##### **Cultural Immersion**

Long-term nearly constant contact with the rules, norms, and worldviews of a different culture.

**Stereotyping**

Forming a belief that certain general trends or traits of a group (culture) apply equally strongly to all individual members of that group; perceiving people as simplistic representatives of abstract cultural traits rather than as individuals.

**Worldview**

The way a person interprets and makes decisions about his or her environment (world), including beliefs or assumptions about what is considered right or normal.