



# Social customs

## Names

Most Australians have three names. A first name, for example *Peter* (The name used informally – ‘Hi Peter’); a middle name such as *George*; and a *surname* or family name, such as *Smith*. (Used in formal situations and often when a person is senior to you, for example ‘Mr. Smith, I’d like to introduce you to Mr. Allan’).

Your naming system may differ from this; however, for the sake of clarity it is important that on official documents you always use the same names in the same order. It is a good idea to underline your family name, e.g. Wong Fei Wan.

If you are wondering what to call someone, simply ask: ‘What would you like me to call you?’ When you first meet someone it is also appropriate to tell them the name that you prefer to be called.

## Informality

Australians often use shortened versions of names e.g. Ronald may be shortened to Ron or Ronnie, Elizabeth to Liz, Lizzy, Beth, or Betty.

## Courtesy

Greetings such as ‘Good morning/afternoon’, ‘Hello’, ‘G’day’ and ‘How are you?’ are used commonly even among strangers. It is also usual and expected that you say ‘excuse me’ to attract someone’s attention, when joining in conversations or to be excused from a conversation or meal, ‘please’ when requesting something; and ‘thank you’ when something is done or handed to you. Otherwise, your behaviour may seem very impolite.

## Queues

People form queues to buy goods in shops, to wait for service in banks and when waiting for public transport. Pushing in front of someone in a queue is considered very impolite and will not be tolerated. Australians also value their personal space and privacy. Thus, it is appropriate for you to give more space when queuing, while waiting for your turn at a bank ATM or standing or talking in close proximity to other people.

## Appointments

It is a usual practice for you to make an appointment to see someone at the university or even before dropping in socially at someone's home.

## Invitations

If you are invited formally or even informally (in person or over the phone) to functions, it is polite to reply as soon as possible. Formal invitations usually have a reply (RSVP) date and replies are expected by the date stated. If you have accepted an invitation and later find you cannot attend, it is good manners to inform the person who invited you of this change. It is also considered polite to say directly if you do not want to accept an invitation.

## Punctuality

Punctuality is important. Check your appointment times and locations and allow enough time for travel. If you cannot keep an appointment or you are running late, contact the person you're meeting and let them know.

## Dress code

People tend to dress casually at university and during summer clothing is often kept to a minimum. Please note that it is acceptable for women in Australia to wear shorts and brief tops without being considered provocative or immoral. Formal attire may be required occasionally but would be indicated in advance.

## Social gatherings

Social functions such as barbeques, dinners or parties are common and can be held in private homes, parks, restaurants or function centres. Sometimes it can be 'BYO' which means 'bring your own' drinks or your own meat for a barbeque. Alternatively, it can be a 'bring a plate' gathering where each guest brings a plate of food to be shared by everyone. If it is in a restaurant, most of the time the cost of the meals are shared equally.

## Alcohol

Alcohol consumption is prohibited in public spaces such as footpaths, streets and public car parks. On the spot fines will be issued to people drinking alcohol in prohibited places by patrolling Police

## Physical contact

Handshakes are commonly used to greet each other or say goodbye especially among men. Women display greater physical contact by hugging and greeting each other with a kiss on the cheek. You will also see displays of affection such as hugging, kissing and holding hands between couples in public.

## Opening of gifts

While in some cultures, opening a gift/present in front of the person is considered rude, it is just the opposite in Australia. When accepting a gift, you can open it immediately and express your appreciation.



“ Join the International Student Support team at English Conversation Class. Check your campus for times and location. ”

## Smoking

Federation University Australia is a smoke-free environment.

The university recognises the adverse effects of smoking, including passive smoking, and the rights of staff and students to work and study in a safe and healthy environment which is smoke-free.

Smoking is not allowed on public transport, in restaurants, cinemas and public buildings. You can be fined for smoking in prohibited areas. If you are at someone's home, it is polite to excuse yourself and smoke outside.

## Tipping

Australia does not have a strong tipping culture. However, some people leave tips in restaurants and cafés if the service is good.

## Independence

Very few Australians have servants. Most people are independent and cook and clean for themselves. Some people may pay a person to come to their home once a week to help with domestic tasks. Manual work is not looked down upon and it is common to see men and women alike doing various chores around the house or garden.

## Body Language and Personal Space

People of every culture have particular ways of using their hands, eyes, arms and even standing, that have meaning within that culture. A gesture may mean one thing within one culture but something entirely different in another.

For example, when an Australian is talking to someone, he/she will usually look that person in the eye. We think this shows that we are sincere and are giving the other person our full attention. In some other cultures this would be considered impolite. Likewise, handing someone something with the left hand is an insult in some countries. In Australia, we use either hand to pass things.

When talking, Australians don't stand very close to each other. Nor do they touch each other as much as people from some other cultures do. If you are staying with an Australian family, do not enter the bedrooms of family members unless invited to do so. These are regarded as personal space.

## Relationships

Young people in Australia are sometimes portrayed as being sexually promiscuous. Do not assume that this is the case. It is quite normal in Western cultures for relationships to develop slowly.

Sometimes people misunderstand each other in social relationships. Someone that you go out with may think that you are willing to have sex because you let them kiss you or are willing to have them visit you alone in your room.

In Australia, if you do not want to have sexual intercourse with someone, you always have the right to say 'no'. Although this can sometimes be difficult and people can sometimes persist when they should not, your rights remain constant. To protect people from rape or sexual activity without consent, there are severe legal penalties for those who commit such crimes.