

PROFESSOR WIBBLEWORTH PRESENTS...

A STUDENT GUIDE TO BRITISH ETIQUETTE

COMMON THINGS INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SHOULD
KNOW BEFORE STUDYING ENGLISH IN THE UK

Everything
you need to
know!

Please and thank you

On time

Queuing

Small talk





Wand at the ready!


WELCOME TO THE UK

Coming to the UK to study English is **exciting**. You will meet new people, hear different accents, practise English every day and experience British culture in real life. Many international students know about famous UK places such as **London, Cambridge, Oxford, Brighton** and **Edinburgh**.

But everyday culture is just as important. Small things like saying “please”, queuing correctly or arriving on time can help you feel **more confident** and make a **good impression**. This guide explains common British etiquette in simple English. It is designed for international students who want to understand British habits before they arrive.

QUICK BRITISH ETIQUETTE CHECKLIST

- Say please and thank you often.
- Queue and wait your turn.
- Arrive on time for lessons, appointments and meetings.
- Respect personal space and privacy.
- Use polite language when asking for help.
- Be careful with noise in shared accommodation.
- Ask before taking photos of people.
- Keep public spaces clean and tidy.
- Be friendly, but avoid very personal questions at first.
- If you are unsure, ask politely.



**BRITISH
ETIQUETTE IS
NOT ABOUT
BEING PERFECT.
IT IS ABOUT
BEING POLITE,
RESPECTFUL AND
AWARE OF
EVERYDAY
HABITS IN THE
UK.**

1. SAYING PLEASE, THANK YOU AND SORRY

British people often use **polite words** in everyday situations. You will hear “please”, “thank you”, “thanks”, “cheers” and “sorry” many times each day.

- Say “please” when asking for something: “Can I have a coffee, please?”
- Say “thank you” when someone helps you.
- Say “sorry” if you bump into someone, interrupt someone or need to pass in a narrow space.
- “Cheers” can mean “thank you” in informal British English.

USEFUL PHRASES

- Can I have this, please?
- Thank you very much.
- Sorry, could I ask a question?
- Excuse me, is this seat free?



2. QUEUING: WAITING YOUR TURN

Queuing is very important in the UK. People usually wait in a line at bus stops, shops, cafés, banks, toilets and ticket offices.

- Do not push in front of people.
- If you are not sure where the queue starts, ask: “Is this the queue?”
- Wait calmly and move forward when it is your turn.

3. BEING ON TIME

- Arrive on time for lessons.
- Tell someone if you are going to be late.
- For a social event, arriving 5-10 minutes late is usually acceptable, but do not be very late without messaging.



4. PERSONAL SPACE AND PRIVACY

British people are usually friendly, but many also value **personal space** and **privacy**.

- Do not stand too close in queues or conversations.
- Avoid asking very personal questions when you first meet someone.
- Questions about salary, religion, politics or relationship status can feel too direct.
- Small talk is usually safer at first.

5. SMALL TALK: WHAT TO SAY

Small talk is **light conversation**. It helps people feel comfortable before talking about more serious topics.

- The weather is a very common topic.
- You can talk about travel, food, studies, hobbies, sport or places to visit.
- A simple “How was your weekend?” is common.



6. CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

In an English language school, teachers want students to **ask questions** and **participate**. But it is also important to respect the class.

- Arrive on time.
- Put your phone on silent.
- Listen when other students are speaking.
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes - this is part of learning.
- Ask questions politely if you do not understand.

7. HOMESTAY ETIQUETTE

If you stay with a host family, you are living in someone's home.

Homestay can be a great way to practise English and experience British life.

- Tell your host if you will be late for dinner.
- Ask before using the kitchen, washing machine or other household items.
- Keep your room tidy.
- Be respectful with noise, especially at night.
- Say thank you for meals and help.



8. STUDENT RESIDENCE AND SHARED ACCOMMODATION

In a residence or shared house, you may live with other international students. Respect and communication are important.

- Clean up after yourself in shared kitchens and bathrooms.
- Do not leave dirty dishes for other people.
- Keep noise low late at night.
- Ask before borrowing anything.
- Respect shared spaces.

9. PUBLIC TRANSPORT ETIQUETTE

Students often use buses, trains, the Underground or bikes in the UK. Public transport has its own polite habits.

- Let people get off before you get on.
- Offer your seat to elderly people, pregnant women or someone who needs it more.
- Keep phone calls quiet.
- Have your ticket, card or phone ready.
- Stand on the right on London Underground escalators.



10. EATING OUT, CAFÉS AND TIPPING

Eating out in the UK is usually relaxed. In cafés, you often order at the counter. In restaurants, staff usually come to your table.

- Say “please” and “thank you” when ordering.
- Check whether service charge is included before tipping.
- Tipping is appreciated in restaurants, but not always required.
- It is normal to split the bill with friends.



11. BRITISH HUMOUR AND INDIRECT LANGUAGE



British people often use humour, understatement and indirect language. This can sometimes confuse students.

- “Not bad” can mean quite good.
- “Maybe” may sometimes mean no.
- “That’s interesting” can be positive, neutral or polite disagreement depending on tone.
- If you are unsure, ask politely for clarification.

12. EVERYDAY MANNERS IN PUBLIC PLACES

Polite behaviour in public places is important.

- Do not play loud music on public transport.
- Put rubbish in bins.
- Do not block pavements or doorways.
- Ask before taking photos of people.
- Be patient with staff in shops, cafés and stations.





USEFUL POLITE PHRASES

Situation	Phrase
Asking for help	<i>Excuse me, could you help me, please?</i>
Asking a teacher	<i>Sorry, could you explain that again?</i>
In a shop	<i>Can I pay by card, please?</i>
In a café	<i>Could I have a tea, please?</i>
At school	<i>I'm sorry I'm late.</i>
With a host family	<i>Thank you for dinner.</i>
On public transport	<i>Is this seat free?</i>
If you do not understand	<i>Sorry, I didn't quite understand. Could you repeat that?</i>



COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Pushing into a queue: Always wait your turn.

Being too direct: Use polite phrases such as “Could you...” and “Would it be possible...?”

Arriving late without a message: If you are late, tell someone as soon as possible.

Making noise in shared accommodation: Remember other students may be studying or sleeping.

Forgetting “please” and “thank you”: These small words are very important in British English.

Not checking what is included in a booking: Always ask about course fees, accommodation, meals and extra costs.

Careful now, young scholar!



STUDYING ENGLISH IN THE UK

Understanding etiquette can help you enjoy your time in the UK, but the best way to improve your English is to use it **every day**. An English course in the UK gives you the chance to practise in class, meet students from around the world and use English in real situations.

World Study Solutions helps international students choose English language courses, UK cities and accommodation options. Our guidance is **free** for students, and if you book a course, you pay the school directly.

NOT SURE WHERE TO STUDY ENGLISH IN THE UK?

Free guidance for international students

Take the free **Find My English Course quiz** at World Study Solutions and let us help you choose the right course, city and accommodation option.

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