

# 101 Characteristics of Americans/American Culture

To help you compare and contrast what you observe of American culture and your own, mark the similarities and differences between your culture and what you have read about in this book.

1. America is enormous: the third largest country in the world with a population of more than 300 million people.
2. Americans come in all colors, have all types of religions, and speak many languages from all over the world.
3. Americans are extremely independent, individualistic, and like to be different from each other.
4. 66% of Americans are overweight; 37% of those are obese.
5. Americans believe in freedom of choice.
6. Americans need a lot of “elbow room”; they like personal space around them.
7. Approximately 1% of Americans are homeless (3.5 million people).
8. Americans talk easily to the homeless but use good judgment and are careful with whom they talk.
9. Sadly, the streets of major cities are often dirty.
10. Many people, especially teenagers, wear strange clothes, and many have tattoos and body piercings.
11. Americans follow the rule of law.

12. Littering (throwing garbage on the street), graffiti and tagging (writing on the walls), and loitering (standing around and doing nothing) are against the law and are punishable by a fine or jail.
13. Discriminating against or making any insulting statement about someone else's religion or ethnicity is against the law and could be punishable as a *hate crime*.
14. You must be over the age of 21 and you must have an identification card with a photo to buy or drink alcohol.
15. In most states, it is illegal to buy cigarettes if you are under the age of 18 and often you can only smoke in certain places.
16. Americans are extremely informal and call most people by their first name or nickname.
17. Americans smile a lot and talk easily to strangers, sharing personal stories.
18. Asking "How are you?" is simply a greeting and is not a question about your health.
19. When Americans put their hands on their hips, they are usually relaxed; when they fold their arms tightly across their chests, they are angry or very serious (or cold).
20. Americans don't push or stand too close to anyone in line. They always wait their turn.
21. In a restaurant, the server is usually very friendly and helpful and often will tell you his or her name.
22. When the service is good, tipping is expected to be 15–20% of the bill.

23. Polite Americans eat with one hand while the other one is under the table on their laps.
24. Usually, when friends meet at a restaurant they each pay their share of the bill or split the bill in half. It's called *going Dutch*.
25. If you have guests over to your house, turn off the television, make sure your music isn't too loud.
26. Americans have parties for many reasons. Sometimes they are held for friends to get together and to meet new people. There is rarely music or dancing at a typical American party.
27. When you meet Americans, be sure to look them in the eye, smile, and shake hands.
28. Make small talk at the beginning of a conversation. After a few questions, you will be asked, "What do you do?" (This means what is your job?)
29. For weddings and showers, people register for gifts at a specific place.
30. Americans open presents and cards in front of people.
31. Be sure you include a card with your gift. The person given the gift will send you a thank you card.
32. At an American funeral, it is not normal to make loud sad sounds. Americans try to keep strong emotions inside.
33. There is no traditional color or flower that symbolizes death. Any and all flowers can be used at funerals.
34. We do not give money at a funeral. Sometimes, we send flowers or plants to the ceremony.
35. After the funeral, there is usually a reception at the home of the family. There is usually a lot of food and sometimes alcohol.

36. Never ask Americans a direct question about their religion, age, money, salary, weight, or dress/suit size.
37. Do not make any racist or negative remarks about someone's religion, family background, or sexual preferences.
38. Men should not make any "sexist" remarks to or about women—anything that would make women unequal to men.
39. Americans say that they don't want to talk about politics, but sometimes they do. It's best to just listen first to see the other person's point of view before you let them know your thoughts.
40. Never go to someone's house without calling first to see if it is convenient.
41. If you are invited to an American party, do not bring your children, friends, or family members without first asking the permission of the host.
42. Time is money. Never be late to classes, employment interviews, appointments, parties (especially your wedding!), etc.
43. Some Americans hug a lot. It is okay for women and men to hug even if they are not close friends.
44. It is normal for American women to have male friends who are just friends (and vice versa).
45. It is not uncommon for American men and women to share an apartment as roommates and not have a sexual relationship with each other.
46. Most American women do not like possessive or jealous men.
47. Most American women do not feel comfortable having the man pay for everything all of the time.

48. Be careful: Meet new friends in a public place many times before you get into a car or give out your address.
49. American parents speak to their children as adults and teach them how to be responsible for their actions.
50. American parents encourage their children to question and always ask “Why?”
51. It is normal for American children to have very messy rooms.
52. It is common for young Americans to carry *security blankets* or a stuffed toy.
53. Americans do not hit their children but discipline them by taking things away.
54. American men try to share equally with their wives in parenting and housework.
55. Americans hire “babysitters” to take care of their children when they go out or are at work.
56. Americans love their pets, sometimes more than they love people.
57. Homosexuality is protected by law in the United States.
58. The majority of older Americans prefer to live in *retirement homes* for independent living rather than to live with their grown children.
59. Americans admire youth and often work past age 65 and/or go back to school.
60. Domestic violence is against the law. It is illegal to hit anyone: a spouse, a parent, a child, and even a pet.
61. There are special seats in the front of buses reserved for disabled people or senior citizens.

62. Be careful when you offer your seat on the bus to an older or a disabled person. Most older people do not want to be thought of as someone needing help.
63. Most buses require the exact amount of money and cannot make change.
64. Because of pick-pockets, Americans carry credit cards and checks, instead of a lot of cash.
65. Pedestrians always have the right of way.
66. Pedestrians must cross at a cross walk or unmarked intersection. Crossing in the middle of the road is against the law.
67. If it is not a life or death emergency, do not call 911.
68. Rent must be paid on time or there is usually a late fee.
69. If you pay your rent by cash, be sure to get a receipt.
70. Americans love to hunt for bargains and often buy used things.
71. If the police put the lights on to tell you to stop your car, move to the side of the road right away. Stay in your car.
72. Look directly at the officer. Smile and say, "What seems to be the problem, Officer?"
73. When you drive, be sure to always have your license, registration, and proof of insurance with you.
74. Never, for any reason, argue with or give money to a police officer.
75. Always be on time to the job interview and to your job.
76. Dress appropriately for the job interview.

77. Smile, look the interviewer in the eye, and shake hands firmly when you meet.
78. At the interview, be positive and describe your good qualities.
79. Sexual harassment is against the law.
80. Students are expected to ask questions.
81. Never use a cell phone in class.
82. It is normal for an American teacher to sit on the desk.
83. Always call your teacher by his or her name.
84. It is never too late to go back to school and you can almost always find free adult education classes.
85. It is permitted to visit most college and university campuses to see what they are like.
86. Children from the ages of 6 to 16 must attend school in the United States.
87. Do your own work. Copying from a book, a friend, or the Internet is called *plagiarism*.
88. Cheating is serious, and the punishment is strong.
89. Americans try to take care of a medical problem early.
90. When you have a serious medical problem, it's a good idea to get a second opinion.
91. You can always ask the receptionist how much a doctor's appointment will cost.
92. When you need to make an appointment with a doctor, list all of your symptoms in English before you call.
93. Most states have free or low-cost clinics.

94. Never go to a hospital emergency room unless it is a matter of life or death.
95. Americans are really careful about not bothering anyone else with their body odor or bad breath.
96. Most Americans take at least one bath or shower each day.
97. Most Americans put on a good underarm deodorant after bathing.
98. Throw all toilet paper and seat covers in the toilet to be flushed away.
99. If you can't understand the sign on the restroom door, ask someone or check to see who goes in or comes out.
100. Americans often talk to each other or on the cell phone while using the bathroom.
101. There are very few "public" bathrooms available in U.S. cities and towns.