

that direct discussion will be accepted in the constructive way that is intended; and, paradoxically,

- they know the other person very well (it might be a spouse or close friend) and they do not wish to risk giving offense and creating negative feelings by talking about some delicate problem. . . .

All of this is to say that Americans, even though they see themselves as properly assertive and even though they often behave in open and direct ways, have limits on their openness. It is not unusual for them to try to avoid direct confrontations with other people when they are not confident that the interaction can be carried out in a constructive way that will result in an acceptable compromise. . . .

Despite these limitations, Americans are generally more direct and open than people from almost all other countries with the exception of Israel and Australia. They will not try to mask their emotions, as Scandinavians or Japanese tend to do. They are much less concerned with “face” (that is, avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others) than most Asians are. To them, being honest is usually more important than preserving harmony in interpersonal relationships.

Americans use the words *pushy* or *aggressive* to describe a person who is excessively assertive in expressing opinions or making requests. The line between acceptable assertiveness and unacceptable aggressiveness is difficult to draw. Iranians and people from other countries where forceful arguing and negotiating are common forms of interaction risk being seen as aggressive or pushy when they treat Americans in the way they treat people at home.

Reading Journal

In your journal, write about one of the following topics.

- 1 Explain what a visitor to your country should know in order to avoid intercultural misunderstandings.
- 2 Describe an experience you had in a foreign country or culture that helped you understand it better.
- 3 Choose a topic of your own related to the reading.

Main Ideas

One of the most important skills you can develop as a good reader is the ability to recognize the **main idea** in a piece of writing. Although writers often include many ideas, there is usually a central point, or message, they wish to convey. When you read something, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What main idea is the writer trying to communicate?
- How does the main idea relate to other ideas in the reading?
- How does the writer develop his or her main point? What does the writer want me to remember about this subject?

Answer the following questions, referring to the notes you took when reading the selection. Then share your answers with a partner.

- 1 According to the reading, what is the most important thing to understand about U.S. culture? Explain.
- 2 In the reading, Althen provides many examples of cross-cultural differences in values and assumptions. Which consequences of these differences does he focus on? Give two examples.
- 3 What is the main point Althen makes in the reading? Summarize his central idea in one or two sentences. Use your own words. Begin with the sentence *In the chapter "American Values and Assumptions," Gary Althen maintains that . . .*

Reflecting on Content

Answer the following questions with a partner. When possible, support your answers with observations based on your own experiences.

- 1 In paragraph 2, Althen says that the values and assumptions discussed in the reading "overlap with and support each other. In general, they agree with each other. They fit together." Give two examples of cultural values mentioned in the reading that you think overlap with and support each other.
- 2 Are the U.S. values that Althen discusses similar to or different from those in the culture with which you are most familiar? Explain. Focus on one or two of the values mentioned in the reading.
- 3 Can you tell how Althen feels about the issues he discusses? How objective do you consider his writing to be? Be as specific as possible.

A Writer's Technique: Supporting Details

Good writers provide sufficient details such as examples, facts, quotations, and definitions to support their ideas. Writers use this information, known as **supporting detail**, to explain, clarify, or illustrate their main points. Without such specific material, a writer's ideas remain abstract and unconvincing. Experienced writers try, whenever possible, to show rather than simply tell their readers what their ideas mean.

Look at these statements from "American Values and Assumptions." Locate them in the reading and then write a sentence that describes the main idea the statement supports or illustrates. Then share your answers with a partner.

Example: *A brochure . . . contains a photograph showing the college's president, dressed in shorts and an old T-shirt, jogging past one of the classroom buildings on his campus. (par. 23)*

Main Idea: *People from the United States value informality and equality in their everyday lives.*

- 1 If it is economically feasible for them to do so, young adult Americans are expected to live apart from their parents, either on their own or in college, or risk being viewed as immature. (par. 10)
- 2 Americans' houses, yards, and even their offices can seem open and inviting, yet, in the Americans' minds, there are boundaries that other people are simply not supposed to cross. (par. 17)
- 3 Early Americans cleared forests, drained swamps, and altered the course of rivers in order to "build" the country. (par. 27)
- 4 Thus, Americans admire a "well-organized" person, one who has a written list of things to do and a schedule for doing them. (par. 30)
- 5 Even recreation, for Americans, is often a matter of acquiring lavish equipment, making elaborate plans, then going somewhere to *do* something. (par. 37)

Vocabulary: Negative Prefixes

Studying the parts of words is a good way to develop your vocabulary. Often in English a word is formed by adding a group of letters to the beginning or the end of the **word root** – the basic part of the word. Groups of letters attached to the beginning of a word root are called **prefixes**. Those attached to the end of a word root are called **suffixes**. In general, prefixes change the meaning of a word and suffixes change its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, and adverb).

Look at the following examples of roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

Root	Prefix	Suffix
operate (<i>verb</i>)	cooperate (<i>verb</i>)	cooperation (<i>noun</i>)
conscious (<i>adjective</i>)	unconscious (<i>adjective</i>)	unconsciously (<i>adverb</i>)

In English, many prefixes indicate something negative – that is, the prefixes mean “not,” “the opposite of,” or “lacking in.”

- 1 Following are twelve words from the reading, each with its negative prefix removed. Fill in the blank with the proper negative prefix from the list below. In some cases, there might be more than one possible response. Then find the words in the reading and check your answers.

un-, in-, im-, il-, ir-, a-, ab-, non-, dis-, mis-

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. ___desirable (par. 1) | g. ___formal (par. 25) |
| b. ___belief (par. 7) | h. ___patient (par. 29) |
| c. ___specified (par. 7) | i. ___Europeans (par. 31) |
| d. ___mature (par. 10) | j. ___human (par. 32) |
| e. ___decisive (par. 11) | k. ___adequately (par. 42) |
| f. ___respectful (par. 20) | l. ___emotional (par. 43) |

2 The following words appear in the reading without negative prefixes. Make each word negative by filling in the blank with the proper prefix or prefixes from the list on page 15.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. ___normal (par. 10) | f. ___typical (par. 34) |
| b. ___associated (par. 16) | g. ___proper (par. 39) |
| c. ___appealing (par. 23) | h. ___inclined (par. 43) |
| d. ___reverence (par. 28) | i. ___logical (par. 44) |
| e. ___considerate (par. 30) | j. ___behave (par. 45) |

Vocabulary in Context

Locate the following italicized vocabulary items in the reading and see if you can determine their meaning from the context. Then think of an example or situation to illustrate each item, using your personal experience if possible. Do not just define the italicized words and expressions. When you are done, share your answers with a partner.

- 1 a time in a new culture when you felt liberated from certain *constraints* (par. 11)
- 2 an idea that has strong, positive *connotations* in your culture (par. 12)
- 3 someone you think *stands out from the crowd*, and why (par. 14)
- 4 whether *self-reliance* is valued in your culture (par. 14)
- 5 a reason someone might behave in an *aloof* manner (par. 17)
- 6 something you *place a premium on*, and why (par. 33)
- 7 a time when you *saw something through* to a successful conclusion (par. 34)
- 8 a situation in which someone might say, "Let's *lay our cards on the table*" (par. 40)
- 9 the degree to which speaking in a direct and *forthright* manner is valued in your culture (par. 41)
- 10 whether people in your culture are *inclined to* display their emotions in public (par. 43)

Discussion

Choose one of the following activities to do with a partner or in a small group.

- 1 Review the major categories of U.S. values and assumptions in Althen's chapter. Choose two or three of the categories and discuss whether similar cultural patterns are seen in the culture with which you are most familiar. Think of examples that reflect the existence or the lack of such ways of thinking, behaving, and viewing the world.
- 2 One way to get a sense of the values and assumptions of a culture is to look at its proverbs and sayings. Following are ten common proverbs in English. Choose five of the proverbs and discuss (1) the meaning of each proverb, (2) a