

Who's negative about American culture? You'd be surprised...

In a recent survey The Wall Street Journal asked more than 18,000 people in 18 countries (16 European nations, plus the US and Russia) to identify the best and worst parts of US cultural influence in the world.

What Europeans think

Among Europeans, 32% said US influence was negative, while 26% gave a positive response. 40% said American films and television programmes were the best contribution, making this the most popular category overall. All of the European countries said American food was the worst contribution. 65% of French people gave this answer, the highest in the group.

What Americans think

Surprisingly, many Americans view their own country more negatively than Europeans do. 46% of Americans said the US has a negative influence in the world, while only 33% described it as positive. Americans named a number of different things as their country's best contribution to world culture, including the food at 11%. When asked to identify America's worst contribution, 32% of Americans pointed to film and television, much higher than in any other country.

6 Things Americans Do That Drive Brits Crazy

By Ruth Margolis

American people are some of the friendliest you'll ever meet. But occasionally they do things that we find a bit... eccentric?

1 **Saying 'I love your accent!'**

Before I moved to the USA, I never imagined that my London accent made me sound intelligent. At first the compliments were nice, but then a New York mum asked me to teach her two-year-old how to talk like me. A bit too much, I thought.

2

In America, people in shops say things like 'Ma'am, you have been an awesome customer today' just because I bought some toilet paper. I do not want that.

3

American waiters love to please, but sometimes they're too helpful. Overenthusiastic waiters take away your plate the second it's empty, even if no one else at the table has finished.

4 **Insisting that turkey is tasty**

There's a good reason why Brits only eat this bird at Christmas. Turkey meat is dry and tasteless. But Americans put it in everything – burgers, meatballs, lasagna – everything!



5

We get it, you're proud to be an American. We Brits like our country too, but to your average Brit, hanging a giant flag from your house is a little bit creepy.

6

Having to remove 'u's from words like 'colour' and change 're' to 'er' in words like 'theatre' is a headache. And Americans, please note: saying 'erb' instead of 'herb' and pronouncing 'fillet' as 'fillay' (without the 't') is not clever or sophisticated. You are not French.



6 Things Brits Do That Drive Americans Crazy

By Maria Roth

We Americans love Brits. They're so charming and smart! But there are some things about them that we don't quite understand.

1

When strangers in stores and people on the street make eye contact, nod, or say 'Hi!' it's OK to smile and say hello back. We won't bite!

2 Overcooking vegetables

The authentic British way to prepare vegetables is to put them in boiling water for a fortnight. We Americans think this is weird and unpleasant.

3

Oh, we fat Americans with our big cars and flags! Too many Brits are convinced that this inaccurate picture of us is true, and we are not amused.

4

It seems that some Brits would rather not leave a 15 to 20 per cent tip for their waitress. They may not realize that waiters in the US are paid very low wages and depend on tips to survive.



5

We get it, in British English ‘trousers’ means pants and ‘pants’ are really underwear. And the letter z is ‘zee’ to Americans, but ‘zed’ to Brits. We Americans just have a different way of speaking and writing. It doesn’t mean we’re stupid, and I promise we’re not trying to offend you.

6 **Not wanting to ‘share’**

Brits are famous for being reserved – they never complain or discuss their problems. But that’s not the way we do things here. We’re more open with our friends, and even with strangers, and when people don’t share we find it strange.

Adapted from www.bbcamerica.com

A nation prepares for the dreaded gaokao



Shanghai, 5 June – Tomorrow cities throughout China **(1) will close** roads near schools, prohibit the hooting of car horns, and even change some aeroplane flight paths, so that nine million students can concentrate on the gaokao, the three-day-long national university entrance exam.

University places are scarce in China, and most students **(2) are not going to have** a chance if they do not do well on the gaokao, a name which means ‘high exam’ in Mandarin Chinese. The stakes are very high indeed: a place in a top university will almost always lead to a high-paid job after graduation. For millions of Chinese, the exam is an important chance to improve their lives, and because most Chinese families **(3) have** only one child, the pressure on candidates is intense.

We spoke to students who **(4) hadn’t been** out with their friends for many months, and who **(5) were studying** all the time that they weren’t sleeping. And while some cram, others cheat. Each year, candidates **(6) are caught** with high-tech devices such as wireless earphones, as well as pens and watches with tiny scanners. James Bond would be proud.



Teachers' lives are difficult, too. One gaokao tutor **(7) explained** her schedule: morning exercises start at 6:10 a.m.; evening classes end at 10 p.m.; students get only one day off a month – and teachers must spend that day marking practice exams.

To prepare for the exam, students memorize past exam papers and try to guess what questions **(8) will be asked** this year. All candidates answer questions in Chinese, Maths, and English, then choose two additional subjects: History, Geography, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, or Political Ideology. Some of the unusual essay questions that **(9) have appeared** on past papers include:

- 'An Englishman dreams of living in Western China in another era. Write a story based on this.'
- 'Why chase mice when there are fish to eat?'
- 'Talk about water.'
- 'Why do we want to return to our childhood?'

The exam **(10) has been criticized** for testing endurance rather than intelligence. Small reforms **(11) were made** to the exam a few years ago, but little has changed overall. More and more Chinese students **(12) have been moving** overseas for university or even secondary school, just to avoid the gaokao. The number of candidates who sit the exam has fallen dramatically in recent years, from 10.2 million in 2009 to nine million this year.

However, at the same time, the gaokao **(13) is beginning** to be more widely recognized abroad. The University of Sydney has said it will accept gaokao scores from Chinese students in place of its own entrance exam. China may not need to reform the gaokao after all – it will reform the rest of us.