

# Culture as an Iceberg

Surface / External Top 10%

**Visible Cultural Expressions:**  
food, clothing, music, dance, popular culture...

**Language & Communication Verbal and Non-verbal**

**Relationships  
& Roles**

**Attitudes  
& Norms**

**Beliefs & Values**

Deep Bottom 90%

Adapted from Edward T. Hall's Cultural Iceberg Model (1976)  
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## Culture as an Iceberg

This iceberg model, adapted from Edward T. Hall, can be used to show how difficult it can be to understand other cultures.

The ways people act express their cultures, as well as individual personalities and experiences. The iceberg model helps us understand.

1. What can be seen above the surface is much smaller (only 10% of the iceberg size)  
Parts of culture that are visible are easier to learn about: **Art, food, clothing, music, dance, sport, popular culture**
2. What is hidden under the water is a much bigger part (90% of the iceberg size)  
These parts of culture that cannot be seen are much harder to learn and understand, even for our own cultures:
  - **Beliefs and Values** shape how we see the world (humans in relation to the world, religious beliefs & practices, modesty, time, justice, cooperation vs. competition, death, etc.)

**Everything is influenced by the worldviews, beliefs and values we hold.**

- **Relationships** (parenting, marriage, status) and **Roles** (gender, age, authority),
- **Attitudes** (towards power, education, change) and **Norms** (family, beauty, work),

**These are expressed through:**

- **Language and communication** (verbal and non-verbal) (just under the surface)  
**in ways that are visible at the tip of the iceberg.**

When we don't understand our own or other cultures, we often see ourselves as *normal* and see others as *different or strange*. Understanding similarities and differences between cultural groups at these different levels, can increase respect to improve cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution and relationships.

**It is important not to judge others based on what we see; we do not always know what is beneath the surface.**