# Personal Space Around the World

Teacher's Key | Level B1 | EnglishBridges.com

*Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.*

## Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. awkward
2. invade
3. bubble
4. anthropologist
5. observed
6. strict
7. vary
8. tended to
9. challenges
10. stereotypes
11. crowded
12. assume
13. signals
14. offend

## Word Partners

**Part A.** 1 e 2 d 3 b 4 a 5 g 6 h 7 f 8 c

Phrases: an awkward silence; invade someone's privacy; a strict rule; vary from place to place; challenge a stereotype; a crowded train; send mixed signals; come across as friendly.

**Part B.** 1 assumption 2 offensive 3 observation 4 variation / variety 5 anthropology 6 strictly

## Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

**1.** *Why does the person in the elevator feel awkward?*
A stranger gets in and stands right next to them, although there is plenty of room.

**2.** *What did Edward Hall do?*
He observed how close people stood in different situations and described four zones of personal space.

**3.** *Why are Hall's numbers not true for every country?*
His notes came from people in the United States, and he said his numbers were not strict rules.

**4.** *In the survey, which country chose a smaller distance from strangers, Argentina or Romania? Give the numbers.*
Argentina chose the smaller distance, about 80 centimeters. Romania chose about 140 centimeters.

**5.** *What did the survey find about women and older people?*
They tended to choose a little more space.

**6.** *What did the survey find about warmer countries, and how sure are we about the reason?*
People in warmer countries preferred slightly less distance from strangers, but nobody knows for sure why.

**7.** *Why does the writer mention Saudi Arabia?*
To show that a stereotype does not match the survey: some people believe everyone in the Middle East stands very close, but people in Saudi Arabia chose one of the widest distances for strangers.

**8.** *Why do many people on a crowded train look at their phones?*
They cannot move away, so looking at their phones creates some distance in their minds.

9. *Do you think the writer's advice in the last paragraph is useful? Give two reasons.*
   Open answer. Accept reasons such as: it helps you avoid offending people; it reminds you not to assume what is normal; watching for signals is easy to do. Accept a reasoned disagreement, for example that the right distance depends on the person.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Edward Hall collected his distance numbers in 42 different countries." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    False. Hall's notes came from people in the United States. The 42-country survey was a different, later study.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that a person who stands close to you is probably being rude." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says that someone who stands close is probably not trying to be rude.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer begin with a story about an elevator? Is it (a) to describe a situation most readers know, (b) to prove that elevators are too small, or (c) to explain how Hall collected his data?*
    (a) To describe a situation most readers know. The elevator scene makes the idea of personal space easy to recognize before the facts begin.

## True or False

1. **T.** The reading calls the invisible area around your body personal space.
2. **F.** He was an American anthropologist.
3. **T.** He divided the space into four zones.
4. **F.** He said they were not strict rules.
5. **T.** Romania was about 140 centimeters and Argentina about 80.
6. **F.** People in Saudi Arabia chose one of the widest distances for strangers.
7. **F.** Nobody knows for sure why.
8. **F.** They tended to choose a little more space.
9. **T.** These are the signals the reading describes.
10. **T.** It creates some distance in their minds.

## Language Focus: Zero and First Conditionals

*Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.*

1. If I feel awkward in a crowded elevator, I usually look at my phone.
2. If I don't get enough sleep, I feel tired all day.
3. If someone is rude to me, I usually stay calm and walk away.
4. If I finish my work early this week, I will go to the gym.
5. If it rains this weekend, I will stay home and watch a movie.
6. If I can't sleep, I usually read a book.
7. If I forget my phone, I feel lost all day.
8. If I have free time, I will visit my grandparents.
9. If a stranger stands too close, I will step back and say nothing.
10. If a friend visits next month, I will take them to the market.

Item 5 has no auxiliary in the starter, so accept will, might, or may.

## Notes on the Evidence

Survey: Sorokowska et al., Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 48(5), 577-592 (2017). Sample: 8,943 participants in 42 countries (53 sites). Participants showed on a graphic scale (0 to 220 cm) the distance they preferred for strangers, acquaintances, and close people. These are stated preferences, not observed behavior, and country samples were small (usually under about 200 people). Country figures in the reading (Argentina about 80 cm, Romania about 140 cm, England about 100 cm) are rounded from the BPS Research Digest (2017), Newstalk (2017), and MinnPost (2017); Argentina is given as about 79 cm by MinnPost, and the full table is in Figure 2 of the paper, which could not be opened in full. Saudi Arabia was among the countries with the widest stranger distances (after Romania and Hungary, per Newstalk and MinnPost).

Discrepancies: (1) Some secondary pages give mean distances of 135 cm (strangers), 92 cm (acquaintances), and 32 cm (close people) and give Argentina and Peru about 62 cm and Hungary and Saudi Arabia about 105 cm. These do not fit the stranger values above if Romania is about 140 cm, and the labels may be mixed up between the stranger and acquaintance conditions. The reading avoids these numbers. (2) Temperature: the paper says some variation is explained by temperature. Secondary sources say warmer countries preferred smaller distances from strangers but larger distances from intimate partners. The reading gives only the stranger finding, with a hedge. The explanation about warm weather is a suggestion, not a tested result. (3) Gender and age: the paper says both matter. BPS and MinnPost say women and older people preferred more space; Newstalk says men. The reading follows the paper-based sources and says 'slightly' (differences were small).

Hall: proxemics was coined by Edward T. Hall in 1963 and developed in The Hidden Dimension (1966). Zone limits differ by source. Intimate: up to about 18 inches (Wikipedia: 6 to 18 inches in the far phase). Personal: about 18 inches to 4 feet. Social: 4 to 10 feet (A First Look at Communication Theory) or 4 to 12 feet (Wikipedia). The reading gives only the first two zones, where sources agree. Wikipedia states that Hall did not mean the distances as strict rules. Hall's observations were based on a small, mostly upper-middle-class group of Eastern professionals in the United States (A First Look chapter). Hall also divided cultures into 'contact' and 'noncontact' groups; the 42-country survey does not support a simple version of that idea (Saudi Arabia and Turkey were among the widest stranger distances; Argentina and Peru among the closest). The reading does not present Hall's categories as fact.

Crowding: paragraph 5 is a general point (people accept closer distance when there is no choice and often avoid eye contact or use phones). The ISVD column, which is not a peer-reviewed source, describes this for Tokyo trains and quotes Japan at about 100 cm for strangers in the survey; this was not checked against the paper. The reading does not name a country in paragraph 5 and does not claim that all people look at phones. The practical advice in paragraphs 6 and 7 (watch for signals, do not assume, leave a little room, ask) is common intercultural guidance, not a research finding, and is written as hedged advice.

Dated figures: all survey figures are from data collected before 2017; preferences may have changed. The reading is an original text. Resource links were opened with a fetch tool on 5 October 2026 except where noted: the SAGE page returned the abstract and bibliographic details; the Warwick copy of the full paper was read through a summarizer, and its country statements were inconsistent with other sources, so they were not used.