



First Orientation for New International Students

Short: What you should know!

- **What is culture?**
Norms, rules and values that give orientation — often unconscious.
- **When cultures meet!**
Misunderstandings are normal — with some prior knowledge, sensitivity and clear communication they can usually be resolved quickly.

By the way:

"Travel is fatal to prejudice."

Marc Twain

Quick overview of typical “German culture standards”

(Practical features you will frequently encounter.)

- **Task / subject orientation:** Focus on content and competence; personal signals are less decisive.
- **Rules & structures:** Appointments, formalities and rules are taken seriously.
- **Punctuality & time management:** Time is valuable — arrive on time for classes and appointments.
- **Clear communication (low-context):** Important things are stated explicitly — expect direct feedback and criticism.
- **Separation of private & professional:** Professional interactions are often matter-of-fact; personal matters are not automatically shared.
- **Individualism:** Personal responsibility is important — expect to organize tasks independently.
- **Distance & politeness:** Relationships develop stepwise; personal space is respected.

Practical tips for studies & everyday life

- **Salutation & e-mail:** Use formal address (e.g., *Dear Prof. Müller* | *Dear Dr. Schmidt*), clear subject line, short precise sentences, include name + matriculation number.
- **Preparation & punctuality:** Review reading lists, slides and assignments beforehand; arrive 5–10 minutes before lectures start.
- **Exams & regulations:** Read exam registration rules, deadlines and the examination regulations carefully — deadlines are enforced.
- **Group work:** Agree on clear task division, deadlines and keep communication documented in writing.
- **Feedback & criticism:** Direct criticism is often meant to be factual — don’t take it personally; clarify if unclear.
- **Contacting instructors:** Attend office hours — come prepared with concrete questions; this shows respect.
- **Housing & neighbours:** Quiet hours (often from 10:00/11:00 p.m.), follow waste separation rules, communicate with neighbours if problems arise.
- **Public transport:** Tickets are mandatory — inspections occur regularly.
- **Important numbers:** Emergency (ambulance/fire) 112, Police 110.

How to resolve misunderstandings

Use this model:

1. Stop an automatic judgment.
2. Specify: What exactly is bothering you?
3. Analyze: Is it the person, the situation or culture?
4. Express expectations: Share what you expected.
5. Reflect your own standards: What is your cultural perspective?
6. Seek shared solutions — understanding differences helps both sides.

Helpful contacts at the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg

- **International Office** — advice on visa, insurance, orientation.
- **Student Affairs Department** — study counselling.
- **Examination Offices** — exam registration.
- **Studentenwerk Magdeburg (Student Services)** — housing advice, psychological, social, financial and legal counselling.
- **Language Centre (SPRZ) and International Career Service** — German as a foreign language courses: register early.

Short Do's & Don'ts

Do's

- Be punctual.
- If you have problems, get in touch.
- Make appointments and bring all documents.
- Write clear emails.
- Ask questions if something is unclear.

Don'ts

- Ignore deadlines.
- Expect someone to remind you of everything.
- Rely on unspoken hints.
- Use overly direct emotional expressions in formal situations.
- Address people informally too quickly (don't "du" someone before it's offered).

Welcome to the Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg!
We wish you a successful start!