

# DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION, AND EVALUATION

## Facilitators' Guidelines

### EXERCISE:

**Purpose:** To allow participants to practice an effective classroom exercise. To become familiar with the concept of description, interpretation, and evaluation. To establish norms of classroom discussion. To become aware of value judgments. To show the personal and cultural relativity of interpretations and evaluation.

**Group size:** Ten to fifty people

**Time required:** Fifty minutes

**Materials:** Whiteboard, or flipchart, and markers or blackboard and chalk  
“Description, Interpretation, Evaluation” participant handout  
Large pictures of “other-culture” scenes (one for each five participants) \*  
Two “ambiguous objects” \*\*

\* The facilitator should select pictures of cultural scenes from cultures other than the culture of the participants. The best pictures are the most ambiguous ones, photographs which depict a form of interaction or a scene which is not familiar to participants. Old National Geographics or LIFE magazines often have such pictures. Captions to the pictures should be retained, since participants will be eager to know the "real" description after the exercise.

\*\* The facilitator should select two “ambiguous objects” to use for the opening section of the exercise. Any object which is unknown to all participants can be used for this demonstration. Objects from unusual hobbies (lobster bait bags, pitons for mountain climbing, etc.), objects from other cultures (Japanese sword-cleaning items, or flower-arranging equipment, etc.), or unusual hardware or kitchen utensils may be good choices.

**Room arrangement:** Large group, informal; break down into small groups of five chairs for the small group interactions

### PROCEDURE:

1. Select one of the ambiguous objects. Ask the large group to tell you something about it. The phrasing of this question is very important, otherwise it skews the answers. You should say, “Tell me something about this.” (DO NOT ask them what they “see” or to describe it.) Let them touch the object, keep it moving very quickly. (“What else can you say?”) Spend two-three minutes on this.

Your assistant should be writing on a board in three columns those statements that fit description, interpretation, and evaluation. Do not yet write these terms on the board; simply have the recorder divide the responses into these three categories.

2. Explain description, interpretation, and evaluation. Show how what they said divides into three columns.

Use the second object, and ask them first to describe only what they *see*. Chart in the “description” column. Correct them if they make any interpretations or evaluations. Next, have them interpret, charting their responses. Finally, ask them to evaluate it, both a positive and a negative evaluation for each interpretation. Spend about five minutes.

3. Give each group a photograph and ask them to complete the form according to directions. Spend about ten minutes, but if they need more time, allow it.

**EXAMPLE:**

Description: I can see a woman of Asian origin covering her mouth.

Interpretation: She’s yawning, so she must be bored.

Evaluation: That’s all right, I don’t blame her a bit.

**Interpretation #1:** She’s burping, and trying to be polite by covering her mouth.

**Alternative Evaluation #1:** I think that’s great, that she’s trying to be polite.

**Alternative Evaluation #2:** I think that’s too repressed, she should relax.

**Interpretation #2:** I think she’s surprised.

**Alternative Evaluation #1:** That’s a natural reaction to a shock.

**Alternative Evaluation #2:** She’s overdoing that reaction, no big deal.

**Interpretation #3:** I think she’s smiling because she’s embarrassed.

**Alternative Evaluation #1:** She shouldn’t be so concerned, smiling is nice.

**Alternative Evaluation #2:** She’s should be embarrassed for exhibiting so much openness in her smiling.

4. Reassemble the small groups for the debriefing. If the groups number more than four, go very quickly through only one description, two interpretations, and four evaluations for each, up to six groups. More than six groups should not be processed in the large group because it is too redundant. Relate the exercise to their experience. Frequently, the participants will be curious about the “real” interpretation of the picture. After each group’s report, the facilitator can share the photographer’s interpretation of the photo.
5. Reassemble the large group, and ask participants to share the most difficult aspect of the exercise. Usually, the response to this is that it is difficult to keep the original description free of evaluative terminology, and that it taxes the world view of the individual to create alternative frames of reference. The value of heightened awareness in describing *before* interpreting and evaluating should be stressed as an essential prerequisite to intercultural communication. The facilitator should note that the processes we use to describe, interpret, and evaluate are culture bound, and limit our ability to understand other cultures.

This entire process should be completed comfortably in fifty minutes.

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**DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION, AND EVALUATION**  
**Cultural Objects**

**DESCRIPTION:**           What I See (only observed facts)  
**INTERPRETATION:**    What I Think (about what I see)  
**EVALUATION:**           What I Feel (about what I think...positive or negative)

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Your group will receive an object from another culture outside the U.S.A. After looking at the object, please fill in your own brief description of it.

The task for the group is:

1. to agree on a single description
2. based on the description, to suggest two interpretations
3. for each interpretation, to suggest both a positive and a negative evaluation.

DESCRIPTION

INTERPRETATION #1

EVALUATION (POSITIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #1

EVALUATION (NEGATIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #1

INTERPRETATION #2

EVALUATION (POSITIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #2

EVALUATION (NEGATIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #2