

Help guide: studying at UU

This year, approximately 25 international students will participate in the Clinical and Health psychology master's programme. These international students come from a variety of countries and parts of the world. These countries may have an education system that is very different from the Dutch education system. In this guide, you will find an overview of the Dutch education system and all the information you need to know to successfully complete your master's degree.

Participation during lectures and tutorials

Speak up! It is important in our master's programme that you ask questions if you do not understand something and have comments or remarks. Our education system is quite interactive, because we believe that this way you learn the most. You are challenged to look at things critically and constructively. So **do not feel afraid to ask questions** or make a comment, because most of the time, your fellow students want to ask the same thing but are too afraid. Just raise your hand and wait for the lecturer to give you permission to speak. However, you should think about your question before you ask it, because it does have to be relevant of course. Additionally, every course provides a manual that can be found on Blackboard that contains information like what chapters to prepare, the locations and times of your lectures and the date of your exam. You are expected to read these manuals before a course starts, and questions about matters that can be easily found in these manuals are not appreciated (we call them *read the freaking manual*-questions, or "rtfm's").

Lectures

The lectures usually take one hour and 45 minutes. After approximately 45 minutes, there often is a 15 minute break. During lectures as well, if you have a question or a need for clarification, raise your hand! The lecturers usually like to answer questions because that shows that you really absorb the information they give you. It could also lead to interesting discussions that the lecturers had not even thought of beforehand. But before you raise your hand, please consider your timing, for it can be possible that your question will be answered in slides that are yet to come.

Teacher – student relationship

At Utrecht, the teacher-student relationship is rather informal. The tutorial-teachers often know their students by name, and the students address the teachers with their first name. However, this is not a must, so if you are not comfortable by it, you can address your teacher by his or hers last name. Written communication does proceed formally. In that I mean that the opening of your email should be something like "Dear *name*" instead of "hey there".

Communication system in the Netherlands

This year, the Clinical and Health Psychology master's programme will welcome roughly 25 to 30 international students, all with different nationalities and cultures. Communication – apart from a lack of a shared mother language – can therefore be difficult, because it seems that countries differ substantially in the way they communicate, both in terms of content and

on a non-verbal level. Cultural anthropologists Edward and Mildred Hall have come up with a list of how to communicate with someone from another culture (Hall & Hall, 1990). They make a distinction between high-context cultures and low-context cultures. Your culture highly influences the way you speak and answer questions. High-context countries allegedly are France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, and countries close to the Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin-America. So if you come from any of these countries, please pay attention to the way we communicate in the Netherlands, because it will avoid any discrepancy between what you mean with an answer or statement, and how your Dutch teachers interpret it. Of course, this is only a generalization that does not take individual variation within cultures and countries in account, so please do not take this information too literally (but rather see it as free advice).

In the Netherlands, we have a low-context culture, meaning that information is communicated explicitly. Dutch people have the need to apply structure to information or to divide it into segments. Therefore, the Dutch norm is to communicate without much context: to the point and concise (some even call it blunt). See the table below for the characteristics of low- and high-context cultures.

Low context communication (Holland)	High context communication
Information is structured in different “compartments”	Information is not structured and comes across easy and flexible
Communication is direct	Communication is indirect, thereby avoiding the risk to hurt someone’s feelings
Information is almost always literally	Sometimes figuratively
Non-verbal information is of minor importance	Emphasis on non-verbal communication
An answer starts with its core, and you tell secondary matters later.	An answer starts with its context, and leads up to the core

You see that especially the way your Dutch teachers prefer you to answer questions differs highly from high-context cultures. When your university professors ask a question, they expect their students to answer to the point and concise. When you give an answer coming from a high-context culture, your teacher could think that you don’t know the answer and are just blathering around. Please keep this in mind when you are taking an exam or writing a paper during your master’s, because it could help you avoid a low mark due to miscommunication. Communicating in the low-context way will help you make the most of your master’s programme.

Communication with other international students

Although it can be difficult due to differences in cultures and ways of doing things, we hope that you approach the other international students with respect. We at Utrecht University believe that respect, open mindedness, curiosity and exchange are the foundations of successful international communication.

Additional information on studying at UU

See [this link](#) for all the additional information that you need as a student (about counseling, enrolment, graduation, financial matters, academic policies, and more):

Grading system

A final important matter about the education system at Utrecht University is our grading system. In the Netherlands, the traditional grading system is from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest grade and 10 is the highest. One thing in which the Netherlands differ from for example the United Kingdom or the United States is that 9's and 10's are very rarely awarded in oral examinations or open question testing, such as essays, presentations, project reports or dissertations. At UU, a grade of 7 means you have performed well, a 7.5 means you have done very well and everything above an 8 means you have performed exceptionally well. A 9 or a 10 is only awarded for (near) perfection, and not to encourage the students (as they tend to do in North America; Nuffic, 2013). A comparison table is shown below. So please, do not feel disappointed if you received a 7.5, because that is actually a very nice grade for Dutch standards.

NL	UK	US
10	A*	A+
9.5	A*	A+
9	A*	A+
8.5	A*	A+
8	A	A
7.5	A-	A
7	B	B+
6.5	C	B
6	D	C
5.5	E	D
5	F	F
4	F	F
3	F	F
2	F	F
1	F	F

The Department

The Department of Clinical and Health Psychology of UU has approximately 60 staff members. For their personal web pages (including pictures), look [here](#) for details and professional profiles.

Literature

Hall, E. & Reed Hall, M. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.

Nuffic (2013). Grading systems in the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom. Retrieved from: www.nuffic.nl.