Turkey

**Focus on Turkey**

**Capital:** Ankara  
**Population:** 65,000,000  
**Size:** 301,382 sq. mi. (780,580 sq. km.)  
**Location:** occupies Asia Minor and straddles the Bosporus into southeastern Europe, occupying parts of two continents.  
**Climate:** 3 zones, namely, Mediterranean (hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters), Continental (hot, dry summers and cold, harsh winters), and Black Sea (temperate and wet all year long)  
**Monetary Unit:** Turkish lira  
**Urban/Rural Life:** 69% urban, 31% rural  
**Religion:** 98% Muslim; 2% Eastern Orthodox, Gregorian, Jewish, and Protestant  
**Languages:** 82% of the population speaks Turkish as a first language; 17% speak Kurdish; about 1% speak Greek, Ladino, Yiddish, Arabic, Armenian, or other Caucasus languages.  
**Ethnicity:** 80% Turkish; 10% Kurdish; small numbers of Arabs, Armenians, Jews (primarily Sephardi, with smaller elements of Ashkenazi), Donme, and others  
**Government:** parliamentary democracy. Universal suffrage, nominal democratic rights, and regular elections in a secular state, the constitution also gives extensive powers to the executive and military branches of government, to the extent that the state can be said to be somewhat authoritarian. The course of Turkish history has also displayed a back-and-forth wavering between free-market capitalism with etatism (limited state socialism with state control of certain economic functions).

**Personal Snapshot**

My first impressions of the United States when I came from Turkey were very positive. For example, in Turkey, our bureaucracy is very large and very slow: you cannot just go and get a driver’s license in an hour or sell your car...
in one day. In Turkey, these things can take a long time. I was also surprised to see how close teachers and students sometimes are at U.S. universities. In Turkey, we students can like our teachers, but we must be a little more formal with them. Life is faster in the United States than in Turkey, and in the United States, you have less time to enjoy things. But the U.S. system works well. I also think that Americans are a little bit friendly to strangers, maybe more than the Turkish are.

**Cultural Closeup**

- Turkish culture is based on millennia of successive empires and civilizations. Although the population is primarily Muslim, Turkey differs from other Muslim states in that the Turkish state (founded in 1923 from the Anatolian remnants of the Ottoman Empire) is secular and was organized along Western liberal lines. Because Turkey has been “the crossroads of civilization,” Turkish culture has been in continuous contact with numerous surrounding cultures, giving it a somewhat more cosmopolitan awareness than many surrounding societies. Its history of mingling with Persian, Ottoman, and Arabic societies has given Turkey not only a unique culture that has absorbed elements of all of these societies but also a nationalist culture that is distinctly Turkish. With respect to Islam, the country is heterogeneous, the Muslim population being roughly 66 percent Shia and 33 percent Sunni Muslim.

- Development within the state varies greatly. Istanbul is an international and cosmopolitan city, but traditional ways of life exist more or less the way they have for centuries in mountainous regions and in the eastern provinces. Turkey is both a modern developed nation and a developing nation.

- The founder of the Turkish state was Mustafa Kemal, also known as Atatürk. He is revered and respected on both cultural and nationalist levels, because of his organization of the Turkish state as a separate entity from a formerly great superstate, the Ottoman Empire. The nationalist cultural, political, and linguistic body of revolutionary reforms that established the shape of the modern Turkish state are known generally as Kemalism. Atatürk is so important in the nationalist ideology that the national curriculum contains courses specific to the history of Atatürk and the founding of the Turkish state, completely separate from other mandatory history courses.

- Although the modern secular state set forth equal rights for women in contrast to previous Islamic laws, there is a continuing sociopolitical tension with regard to gender relations, even among the urban elite, who are generally the most supportive of the liberal state. This tension is also reflected in the dichotomy that exists between the rural traditional sector and the urban and modernist elite, in which Islam, old cultural practices, and assorted anti-Kemalist political movements compete against the status quo established by Atatürk.
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<th>Level/Age</th>
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<td>Preschool, ages 5–6</td>
<td>Monthly cycle, 9:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M., Mon.–Fri.</td>
<td>Drawing, singing, basic socialization, preliteracy activities</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Benches, shared desks; one teacher</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary, grades 1–8, ages 7–14</td>
<td>Sept.–May, 5–6 hours/day, 5 days/week, mornings or afternoons, Mon.–Fri.</td>
<td>Literacy, social skills, hygiene, basic math and science, sports, music, optional religion classes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30–40 in public schools; 15–20 in private schools</td>
<td>Monthly exams and semester final exams are given in every academic subject. Test type is usually problem solving or written essay.</td>
<td>1–5 with a 2 required to pass. Grade weights may vary from semester to semester. Parents may negotiate or challenge grades with teachers.</td>
<td>Benches, shared desks; assigned daily; teacher at front of class; group work and cooperative learning circles uncommon</td>
<td>Assigned daily; includes reading, writing, problem solving, memorization of literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>High, grades 9–12, ages 15–18</td>
<td>Sept.–May, 7:00 A.M.–1:00 P.M. or 1:00 P.M.–7:00 P.M. in private schools</td>
<td>Depends on type of school: science, vocational/technical, art, business, agricultural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>40 in public schools; 15–20 in private schools</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>50% is required for passing. Grade weights may vary from semester to semester. Students may negotiate grades with teachers.</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>Same as above; with additional lengthy projects and research. Students usually work independently on projects but together on homework. Homework is not collected but is necessary for the next day's lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>University, age 18+</td>
<td>3 terms/year with flexible schedules</td>
<td>Entrance dependent on national exam; major chosen on entrance; bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees in a variety of fields</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>10–30</td>
<td>Exam systems vary among universities, but generally there are 2 midterms and a final exam. Test type is typically essay, except in the sciences.</td>
<td>Differing systems (1–4, 1–5, 1–10). Generally, 60% is required to pass.</td>
<td>Individual desks in rows; little accommodation for group work</td>
<td>There is no homework, but group and individual semester projects are taken as seriously as exams.</td>
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A Closer Look

Policy
- Every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, is to receive equal opportunity for education and the country’s goal is to develop the economy and society into that of a modern, developed nation-state.

Teaching Style
- Classrooms are teacher-fronted.
- Cooperative learning, group work, and pair work are uncommon. Teachers mostly lecture.

Learning Style
- Students’ learning style is passive, with a focus on individual work, including board work, writing, rote exercises, projects, and homework.

Instructional Setting
- Classrooms are clean and orderly and have chalkboards. Turkish schools do not have as much instructional technology as do schools in the United States.

Activities
- Turkish students may go with their classmates and teachers on field trips to museums, concerts, industrial or scientific centers, and civic institutions. They may also participate in sports, art, and academic competitions.

Discipline and Class Management
- Mild corporal punishment is allowed, though not encouraged, for students up to 10 years of age. It is generally considered a bad sign if a teacher frequently must resort to corporal punishment. Shouting and humiliation are common disciplinary methods directed toward difficult students.

Teacher-Student Relationship
- The relationship between teacher and student in Turkey is friendly but is not as informal as that in the United States. Students are compelled to show a modicum of respect to teachers. Teachers are generally supportive of students.
- Teachers should not flirt or fraternize with the students or curse at the students. Some teachers, nevertheless, treat unruly students harshly. Positive behavior for teachers includes being vocally supportive of students, and encouraging questions and intelligent comments.
Student-Student Relationship

- Student relationships are generally friendly and noncompetitive, although students at the university level are sometimes ranked against each other.

Protocol

Nonverbal Behavior

- Students often avert their eyes downward or away when they are being chastized by the teacher or if they are unsure of their answers in the presence of their teacher.

Forms of Address

- At all levels, a student may address the teacher as “Teacher” or with titles equivalent to mister and missus plus last name. In high school, teachers may address students by their first name; in the university, they use the formal “you.”

Dress

- There is no dress code for grades 1 through 8. Uniforms are required for students in grades 9 through 12.
- Male teachers wear jackets and leather shoes. Female teachers dress somewhat conservatively.
- In the university, students may dress as they wish, in the same way that they do in the United States.

Polite/Impolite Topics and Behaviors

- It is impolite to engage in any emphatic criticism of Atatürk or Turkish history or to mention the Turkish/Kurdish situation within the country or the Armenian genocide that occurred in 1915. Politics may be a risky topic at times, if one is clumsy or does not know one’s audience.
- Inquiring about Turkish history, sports (especially soccer), or family and discussion of daily news are acceptable.

Gift Giving

- Giving of simple gifts is common.

Problem/Solution

Problem

I have some Turkish students who often interrupt the other students in my class. They don’t seem to be rude or overbearing by nature; they are just
eager to comment on the topic or to say the right answer. But their inter-
ruptive behavior bothers some other students. How can I stop it?

**Solution**

Turntaking conventions vary from culture to culture, and Turkish culture
allows more overlap than does U.S. culture. Explain to the students that
there is a protocol in class that works best when one person at a time
speaks. In addition, they need to know that outside the class as well ideas
should be fully expressed and considered before being added to.

**Problem**

I have a few Turkish students who copy each other’s homework before
turning it in or checking it. They do this in full view of me, but I don’t think
that it is right. Do they realize that this is considered wrong in the United
States? How might I keep them from copying?

**Solution**

This behavior may not be perceived the same way in Turkey as in the United
States. You should explain to the students that not doing their own work
interferes with their learning and that their copying diminishes the honor
and respect that the teacher has for them.

**My Observations**