

When You Return

Re- entry

"I don't want to go home!"

When travelling overseas, many students are so excited about their upcoming adventure that they forget what it will be like to come home. Adjusting to an unfamiliar country and culture is difficult yet many people do not realize that re-adjusting to a familiar country may be just as hard!

Returning home is often difficult. You must re-familiarize yourself with friends, family and a way of life that may suddenly appear very different. You may miss the joys and frustrations of your host culture and it may be hard to reintegrate yourself into Canadian culture.

Re-entry and cultural adjustment

Those who keep the fact of their return in mind usually become better adjusted to their new environment and are better prepared for their departure for home.

Thinking about how the experience abroad will affect you will help both with the adjustment process and the reentry process. Remember why you chose to go abroad. Prepare to fulfill these obligations.

Similar to the cultural adjustment pattern when arriving in a foreign culture, there are stages of "re?entry cultural adjustment". You may again experience the "honeymoon" phase, where excitement upon seeing friends and family, familiar food and North American washrooms is the overriding emotion.

This period is often followed by frustration, disorientation and depression and is called "reentry shock". Reentry shock can take on many forms and differs in length and intensity among individuals. There are no universal symptoms that all sufferers share yet some common ones include:

- A sense of no longer belonging to your home culture.
- The frustration of adjusting to a different pace of life in Canada.
- The sense that friends, family, or colleagues are not interested in discussing your experience.
- Friends made abroad are sorely missed, as well as the culture and way of life in the host country.

Reentry adjustment is common and can be expected but there are ways to prepare for it before returning home. The skills you used to adjust to the new culture are skills which will be useful to you on your reentry to your culture:

- While away keep up-to-date on what's going on with friends and family and try to keep track of local and national news so you do not feel totally lost when you get back home.
- Continually recognize that you will develop at a personal level. Don't forget that people at home are growing and changing too.
- Think about what you want to do when you get back. What courses do you want to take? Do you want to get involved with new groups or clubs? Do you want to find a job? Try to have a plan for your arrival back home. Resist the tendency to think that your friends and family have "not done anything" during the time you were away.
- Plan your finances for your return. How will you pay for school, rent and food? Do you need to apply for provincial student loans or other financial support?



Adjusting to Life at Home

When you do return, try to make the most out of what you have learned from your travels. Take time to reflect. Keep writing in your journal. Then turn your reflections into action:

- Give presentations to your family, friends, schools and community groups about your experiences abroad. Write an article for your local or campus newspaper (this is when your journal notes will come in handy!). Help other students who are preparing to go abroad. Do anything that allows you to reflect upon and pass on your experiences.
- Take courses where you can directly apply what you have learned. Talk with your instructors about independent studies that continue themes addressed in your time abroad.
- Offer an evening of food and slides and ask your friends and family to bring photos of a recent trip they have taken.
- Look for new opportunities on campus and in the community, such as work or volunteer organizations.
- Volunteer at your international office.
- Complete the [Returning Student Study Abroad Program Evaluation](#). This will allow you to voice your opinions and will provide valuable information for the next students.
- Offer to assist in orientations for other students going abroad. We value your input!
- If you will not be returning to university, engage in a meaningful activity (volunteer at a hospital or school). Sitting at home while friends and family are busy with their everyday lives will not help your readjustment to Canada.

A few last considerations

Allow time for the reentry process. Keep your expectations low. It may take a long time to feel at home in Canada again. Use the extra patience you developed overseas to ease the transition.

- Keep your cultural sensitivity. Observe Canadian culture the same way you observed the foreign culture. Consider what you like about Canada and what you want to keep from the culture you experienced abroad.
- Stay positive and active. There will be some frustrations and disappointments but work through it with the same enthusiasm that you brought to your overseas experience.
- Friends and family may have a difficult time understanding your readjustment difficulties. Try to explain that it is a normal phase in any traveller's journey.
- If you find reentry particularly traumatic, seek support from a counseling service.

Activity: Re-entry Adaptation

Reflect on the following upon your re-entry to your institution and Canada:

- What do you think is good about Canada.
- What do you miss from your host culture? Why?

Revisit the above questions again 12 months after your reentry

Post- travel Health: lingering maladies

If you were ill while abroad or become ill upon return, contact your doctor immediately-especially if you have a fever or a flu-like illness and you've just returned from an area where malaria is common. Tell your doctor all of the countries you visited and be able to provide the specifics of any treatment you received while you were away.

Some diseases may not manifest themselves right away. Most viral, bacterial or parasitic infections will occur within six weeks of returning from international travel, however, some diseases, such as malaria, may not cause symptoms for six months to a year after infection. Always advise a physician of the countries you have visited within the twelve-month period preceding any onset of illness. This will help the physician arrive at a correct diagnosis. Remember to complete the cycle of any prescribed drugs or antibiotics.

Return

Even if you are not sick, have a complete physical as soon as you return.

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