

Keeping Track: Start a Journal/Blog (Recommendations)

You have probably been told by several people to keep a daily journal of your travel experiences. The recommendation here is to start now — before you leave — and to continue the journal for several months after your return. This will provide an opportunity to have the whole experience recorded. In other words, think of the education abroad experience not just in terms of your time in another culture, but rather as a process of learning that does not have a specific entry point — it begins well before you get on the plane and extends beyond your return through Canada customs! Few have regretted keeping a journal — however, many regret not doing it. Odds are that you will have more time for journal writing during this experience than any time in the near future — so take advantage of it!

Reasons for keeping a journal

- Record your goals and personal agenda for your time abroad
- Note your reflections during the self-audit and research process
- Enter your feelings about your pending journey
- List the addresses and references collected during your research for ideal sojourn abroad and later during your time abroad
- Use as a record during your time abroad to record your experiences, study assignments, field trips and routines in your daily life
- Act as a vehicle for creative thinking through observation, reflection and analysis
- Assist in the cultural adaptation process by describing your feelings and interactions in your new cultural milieu
- Record your feelings upon and after re-entry
- Act as a record/document which can be submitted for academic credit
- Assist you with communication with your faculty advisor

Hints on selecting your approach to keeping a journal

J. Daniel Hess, in his book *The Whole World Guide to Culture Learning* (p. 168), notes that there are four traditional modes of discourse that you can use individually or in combination in your journal:

1. description - to describe, define, delineate, reveal, picture, show, list, trace, outline
2. narration - to narrate, tell a story, give an account, report an action
3. exposition - to analyze, detail, explain, explicate, interpret
4. argumentation - to argue, test, evaluate

If your journal will be read by others, the reader's interest will be piqued if you:

- Write in the same fashion as you would in a letter to a close friend
- Provide a context for the stories and descriptions you relate
- Include specific names of things you discover in your new environment
- Provide translations of the indigenous words you include
- Use adjectives and adverbs to increase the descriptive quality of the text
- Tell stories and use quotes from the people you meet, always remembering the importance of confidentiality

Some questions for your consideration when writing your journal

The following questions are meant to help you reflect on the process of exploring the implications of moving across cultures, how to be effective in another culture, and how to learn about that culture.

Before leaving...

1. What do I want to get out of this experience?
 - If I expect to make friends from the culture, how can I go about doing this?
 - If I expect to improve my language skills, will I have to separate myself from other English speakers — including travel partners — to do this?
 - If I have to do a project, are my objectives realistic?
 - Why did I select the program I did?
2. Does it matter to which country I go?
3. Why have I selected the country I will be going to?
4. Am I concerned about missing friends, family, significant other(s)?
 - How do I plan to stay in touch with them?
 - What are some strategies I have to deal with missing my family and close friends?
5. What is culture anyway? How would I draw "culture"?
 - How would I describe Canada? Canadians? Myself as a Canadian?
 - How comfortable am I interviewing and talking with people from my host culture?

While in the host country... (weekly journal suggestions)

1. What are my initial reactions upon arrival? After a week? Ongoing?
2. What type of experience do I feel engages me most? Isolates me most?
3. What interaction was the most confusing of the past week? Most stressful?
4. How effectively did I deal with these confusing and stressful situations?
5. What are my most important insights about my cultural adjustment over this past week?
6. What am I doing to meet people from the host culture?
7. Am I being viewed as an individual, as a Canadian, as a foreigner? How does this make me feel about myself?
8. What were my goals before leaving? Are they achievable? Why?
9. What can I do here that I cannot do at home? What can't I do here?
10. Compared to Canada, what are the differences/similarities of health care and the role of nurses?

Upon returning...

1. What did I learn about the host culture? About myself?
2. How can I apply what I learned to my life back in Canada?
3. Who will listen to my stories? Who could I seek out — campus organizations, the study abroad office — to get more involved in international activities?
4. Do I think of Canada any differently now that I have returned? What do I like the most about my home culture? The least?
5. What advice would I give to those who are leaving tomorrow for my host culture? How did I learn these things?
6. How has my experience informed my nursing practice?

Resources

The Whole World Guide to Culture Learning. J. Daniel Hess. Intercultural Press. Yarmouth, ME: 1994. "Student Transition Experiences in a Developing Country" (unpublished conference presentation). Nancy Arthur.

Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. Edmonton, Alberta: 1995.

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