

Padnos International Center

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**Preparing for your Journey Home**

**A Guide to Understanding Reverse Culture Shock**

Grand Valley State University

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**As you get ready to return to your home country, you may be experiencing feelings of excitement, sadness or anxiety. We at Grand Valley State University and the Padnos International Center want to prepare you for your journey home and make you aware of the phenomenon known as reverse culture shock.**

***CULTURE SHOCK* is defined as the cultural adjustment process students go through when arriving in a new country that is foreign to them. It is characterized by four major stages: Honeymoon, Crisis, Adjustment, and Biculturalism. As students move through the “U-Curve” of culture shock, they can experience frustration, depression, isolation or loneliness.**

***What is Reverse Culture Shock?***

**Reverse culture shock is a repetition of the *culture shock* process that international students initially experience during their arrival in the U.S. Symptoms may include:**

* **Irritability**
* **Anger**
* **Sadness**
* **Sleeping too much/too little**

**Stages of Reverse Culture Shock:**

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1. **Disengagement: While nearing the end of your experience in the U.S. you may begin thinking of your move home before the time arrives. You may begin to prepare your journey home by preparing yourself to leave friends and experiences behind.**
2. **Euphoria: You’re thrilled to be back in your home country and your family and friends are just as excited to have you back. However, you may quite suddenly and often painfully realize that they’re not as happy to hear about all of your overseas experiences as you thought they would be.**
3. **Alienation: You start feeling like an outsider in your own country. Home is no longer how you remembered it. You may become impatient and frustrated with others and you might also begin to feel lonely, disoriented or even depressed. You might become more critical of policies/practices that were once acceptable but are no longer agreeable to you.**
4. **Gradual Readjustment: You begin to readjust to being back in your home country. It no longer feels like you are surrounded by foreign ideas.**

**Challenges of Reverse Culture Shock:**

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* **A new perspective – Your perceptions of the world in general, your home country and of the United States may have most likely changed with your experience abroad.**
* **A breakdown in communication – You’ve now had the opportunity to refine your English language skills. When you return home, your English skills may far exceed those of your friends and peers which may cause you to feel frustrated.**
* **A lack of interest from friends & family – You’ll be returning home excited to share the details of your experience abroad. While they may initially be eager and willing to listen to your adventures, friends and family may quickly lose interest or become unappreciative of the stories you have to share. They may be resentful, jealous, or simply cannot relate to all of the new experiences you have gained.**

**Understand that while *YOU* have changed, *HOME* may have also changed!**

1. ***Share your experiences with others back home.* Join clubs/organizations where you might be able to share thoughts with others who may be interested in your experience. Try to get in contact with individuals in your community who may have also visited the U.S.**

***Tips on how to prevent Reverse Culture Shock***

1. ***Redecorate your space.* When you get home, your room/space may not feel the same. You’re a changed person now and should fill your personal space with things that remind you of your travels.**
2. ***Prepare yourself for a new routine.* Whether you have a job waiting back home for you or not, remind yourself that your daily schedule will no longer be the same. Adjust to and plan out the time differences between the U.S. and your native country.**
3. ***Maintain your English language proficiency.* Find ways/outlets to continue practicing your English language skills. This might include conversing with English speakers in your home country, enrolling in more language classes in your country, or simply by continuing to communicate with your American friends.**

***Tips on how to prevent Reverse Culture Shock***

1. ***Treat yourself to what you’ve been missing most.* Have you missed your favorite restaurant back home? A favorite food dish? Maybe a favorite shopping spot? Slowly revisit all of the things you have missed the most while studying abroad.**
2. ***Give yourself time to transition.* Don’t expect old routines and habits to fall back into place immediately. It *will* take time to adjust back to your surroundings. Communicate with other international students who may be going through your same adjustment period and compare notes.**
3. ***Keep in touch!* One of the best ways to prevent reverse culture shock is to continue to communicate with your friends and acquaintances from the U.S. Facebook and Skype are great examples of ways to stay in touch. You can also stay updated with current events in the U.S. and the Grand Rapids community by accessing newspapers online.**

*Complete the following worksheet after you have been back in your home country for a couple of weeks. It will help you recognize how well you are readjusting to being back at home. It will also make you aware of the expectations and anticipations you have about returning from your studies abroad.*

***Tips on how to prevent Reverse***

***Re-entry into your home country***

1. Five things that have ***bothered*** me most about being back at home:
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
7. Five things that I have ***enjoyed*** the most about being back at home:
8. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
13. Five international things (places, people, items, events, etc.) I am missing *least* since returning home:
14. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
15. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
16. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
17. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
18. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
19. Five international things (places, people, items, events, etc.) I am missing the *most* since returning home:
20. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
21. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
22. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
23. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
24. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Re-entry into your home country***

Some things to think about after you have completed the worksheet:

1. Sometimes there are substantial differences between what one expected overseas study to be like and how it actually turned out. For example, things you worried about and thought were going to cause problems or be difficult to deal with, turn out not to have been as big a challenge as you anticipated. Re-entry has similar potential pitfalls because *most students assume that going home will be a stress-free and completely natural event.* This is often not true. Having absolutely no concern about coming back home can lead to more problems upon return than were experienced abroad.

***Evaluating your answers***

1. Our flawed projections about what overseas life was going to be like before we went abroad were often paralleled to some extent in our preconceptions of re-entry. Just as confronting reality once abroad, although painful, often leads to personal growth and a far deeper understanding and appreciation of things cultural, so can the struggle to readjust and readapt life in your home country after an significant study abroad experience.
2. Reentering one’s own country can be unsettling because you and your perceptions have been altered by your international experiences, and returnees often see the familiar as “strange,” like seeing something old as “new” for the first time. It often takes a while to adapt to the “new lenses” we have acquired overseas.

***Evaluating your answers***

1. Comparing pre-and post-sojourn perceptions is a good way to become more sensitive to the role preconceptions play, not only in study abroad but in any of life’s many transitions. Knowing why and how such preconceptions can influence our satisfaction with our experiences will enable us to make more judicious judgments and lower any tendency to indulge in premature and unrealistic expectations in the future.
2. Someone once said: Unrealistic Expectations = Premature Disappointments! As always, we advise students to allow experiences to unfold and be open and flexible, including applying what you have learned about adjustment when contemplating issues involved in returning home.
3. Questions to ponder:

HOW MIGHT ANY OF THIS APPLY TO MY FUTURE EXPECTATIONS ABOUT MY LIFE AFTER GRADUATION AND THE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES I CAN PROBABLY EXPECT AS PART OF MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE? HOW CAN I APPLY THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE I GAINED AS PART OF STUDY ABROAD IN ALL THE IMPORTANT AREAS OF MY LIFE AND FUTURE TRANSITIONS?

***Transferable skills***

**Remember that your experience abroad has taught you a whole new array of skills to take back with you to your home country. Some or all of the skills below are all transferable and can be taken with you to use towards your career aspirations:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Flexibility** | **Self-reliance** |
| **Enhanced listening skills** | **Sense of curiosity** |
| **Independence** | **Motivation** |
| **Demonstrated initiative** | **Time management** |
| **Clearer written and oral communication skills** | **Perseverance** |
| **Ability to work in a multicultural environment** | **Tolerance for stress** |
| **Sensitivity to new cultures** | **Negotiation** |
| **Increased self-confidence** | **Problem solving** |

**Here are some suggestions of ways you can stay in touch with your friends at GVSU, your international friends, and the Grand Rapids community:**

***A Guide to Staying in Touch***

* **GVSU International Students page on Facebook**
* **Padnos International Center’s webpage at: http://www.gvsu.edu/pic/istudents/**
* **Grand Rapids Press newspaper: http://www.mlive.com/grpress/**
* **http://www.mondotimes.com/world/usa.html**
* **Skype (free Internet calls): www.skype.com**
* **Oovoo (free video chat): www.oovoo.com**
* **LinkedIn (networking): www.linkedin.com**
* **GVSU’s Counseling Center**

**Allendale Campus**

**(616) 331-3266; www.gvsu.edu/counsel**

**Want to know more about reverse culture shock? Below is a list of resources for more information:**

***Additional Information***

Austin, Clyde. “Cross-Cultural Re-entry: A Book of Readings”. Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1986.

Kauffman, N. L., J. N. Martin and H. D. Weaver with J. Weaver. *Students Abroad—Strangers at Home: Education for a Global Society.* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1992.

Smith, C. D. (Ed.). Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming "Home" to a Strange Land. Bayside, NY: Aletheia Publications, 1996.

Storti, Craig (1997). *The Art of Coming Home.* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Ward, C., S. Bochner, & A. Furnham. *The Psychology of Culture Shock,* 2nd. ed.  East Sussex, Great Britain: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001.

University of the Pacific’s online cultural training resource “What’s Up with Culture?” : http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/

**Write about your experience! The following online magazines accept stories from students about their study abroad experiences:**

*Glimpse Magazine*: http://glimpse.org/

*Abroad View*: www.abroadviewmagazine.com



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