

Haverford College

Re-Entry Guide

Exploring the Re-Entry Process

To better understand reentry, it is helpful to view the process as one of a series of transitions and adaptations occasioned by your moving from the home culture to your host culture and then back to your home culture. It's actually a multi-step process, but we will focus on the three critical steps: leaving, entry, and settling in reentry.

The act of leaving involves:

- Separation: Cutting oneself off from friends and family; leaving the social-cultural support system that defines who we are as individuals and our 'place' and role(s) in the culture of the US.
- Repudiation: In assuming the role of 'departee', we begin the process of finding substitutes for the home support system.
- Loss: In departing, we lose all of our familiar surroundings (including geographic locations, services, personal belongings, home environment, status symbols, support of family and friends, etc.)

The act of entry and settling in involves:

- Survival: Finding what we need to function in the new environment is typically our most important preoccupation upon arrival.
- Perspective: While members of the host culture perceive their culture from the inside, we, the newly arrived sojourners, perceive it from the outside and must discover how it can be penetrated. In the process, we frequently discover that our accustomed behavior (what occurs automatically) and our expectations are not always acceptable or appropriate. We experience a certain discomfort of our expectations and our hopes. At that point we typically decide to either: throw in the towel and leave, wall ourselves off from the experience and attempt to continue our American lifestyle abroad, or adapt to the new place and discover as much as possible about it.
- Knowledge Acquisition: In departing, we lose all of our familiar surroundings (including geographic locations, services, personal belongings, home environment, status symbols, support of family and friends, etc.)

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The act of re-entering involves:

- Separation: We have to say good-bye to the new life we've made in the host country, leaving routines, habits, and friends.
- Expectation of Predictability: We assume that we already know what it will be like to go home again. We have as our reference point what home meant before we left.
- Disconfirmation: We discover that our image of home fails to conform to reality: people and places have changed, and we have changed too. Our expectations of how things will be are not met, and sometimes home is not quite as perfect as it may seem from a distance.
- Loss: We may at times grieve for things lost - friends, host families, resources, opportunities, a unique way of life and freedoms.

Deciding how to live in the "Home Society" - research has indicated four "re-entry styles":

1. Rejection: You do not try to reintegrate into American society but rather continue to judge and separate yourself from the norm.
2. Toleration: You reluctantly integrate as little as possible in order to survive.
3. Reversion: You conserve the overseas experience in an album or some other symbolic shoebox and put it away. You quickly revert to being the same person you were before going away; the experience has left you unchanged.
4. Affirmation: You find the best fit for yourself that uses both the home and other culture experiences. You accept the fact that you are not the same person you were before leaving; you use the skills developed in the integration process to reintegrate back home. You may hope to return abroad again.

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Tips for Making a Good Re-Entry

Here are some suggestions from students who have had to deal with the reentry process.

Anticipate problems. Although many students anticipate problems associated with culture shock in the host country, few anticipate adjustment problems upon their return. It is the unexpected that causes the most difficulty. Assume that your readjustment will take some time.

Relax. Give yourself time to process all that has happened and to readjust to life back in the US.

Be as open and flexible as possible. Remember how important these traits were during your overseas experience? They are equally important when readapting to life in the US. Skills developed while abroad that may be useful now include looking at things objectively and with an open mind, acceptance of differences, patience in the face of frustration, and the ability to suspend judgment.

Find other people who have spent time abroad that you can commiserate with. It is highly likely that others are experiencing the same difficulties as you. These are people who can on some level share or relate to your feelings.

Listen to those who have remained at home. Show an interest in friends and family members from home. They have changed too, and need to feel your interest in their experiences as much as you need to feel their interest in yours.

Lower your expectations in a positive way about yourself and others. Don't be too hard on yourself if you are having trouble adapting, or others who may need time to adjust to ways in which you have changed.

Be diplomatic when raving about your host country and your experience abroad. Be sensitive to your friends' and family's feelings and don't go overboard. Accept the fact that others may not be able to relate to your experiences as intensely as you may wish. Try to distinguish the mildly interested from those who want to hear every detail. Don't insist upon showing your entire 500-photo album in one sitting.

Maintain your social contacts and the networks you established abroad. Do not let these go! Keep in touch: e-mail, letters, phone, birthday and holiday cards, etc. Invite them to visit you in the US, and if some of the friends you made through your program are American, plan to visit them. You may even find a way to return abroad and visit your friends there!

Find ways to put your new knowledge and experience to work. Share the knowledge that you have brought back to the US. Some suggestions include:

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- Contact the Dean's Office to learn if there will be a representative from your host country on-campus next fall. Volunteer to assist them, along with other new overseas students.
- Help others to identify study abroad options and to prepare for the overseas experience. The main way to do this is by joining the Study Abroad Advisory Board (contact the Director of Study Abroad for more information). You can also contact the Office of International Programs to get information about participating in Study Abroad Information Sessions for underclassmen and the Pre-Departure Orientation for those about to study abroad.

Get plenty of physical exercise and stay healthy. Stress may cause you to feel fatigued, easily depressed, or subject to minor illness. Be careful about getting lots of rest when you come back to Haverford.

Maintain excitement about the country you visited. Keep learning about your host country, either formally through coursework or informally through reading. You can watch bilingual TV, attend foreign films, watch the nightly news from your host country, or see if there is a language club that you can become involved in. If you started learning a language which isn't offered in the Tri-Co, you may be able to continue your studies by taking courses at UPenn or online.

Practice "cultural catch-up". Eat food from your former host country, make scrapbooks from your pictures and mementos, write a journal about what the experience meant to you, speak the language with others who have studied abroad in the same country.

Allow yourself some time alone to sort out your feelings. Time to put things into perspective, to figure out what are the lasting benefits from your experience, to perhaps reorganize and set new goals and priorities. It may be helpful to think about how the US has changed during your absence and how your worldview has changed.

Seek assistance if you need it. If you begin to feel overwhelmed coping with cultural readjustment and/or the pressures of being back at Haverford call Psychological Services (x 1290) for an appointment. We have experienced professionals on hand to help in this and life's other major transitions.

Explore the possibilities offered by international careers. Many returnees hope to work overseas and/or expect to live geographically mobile lives. The [Center for Career and Professional Advising](#) has extensive information on careers in international business or law, diplomatic work or Foreign Service, international development agencies, overseas teaching opportunities, etc. In addition, there are many jobs in the US, as well as abroad, that need bilingual employees.