

AMELIE' S LETTER

Dear Exchange Friends,

When I was about to leave my home country to come to the States, I wasn't really scared. Sure, I was pretty excited and maybe a bit nervous, but never scared. But, when I had to leave my new found home-country, the US, I was scared out of my mind.

When I was leaving the US, I was freaked out with everything changing: me having to leave, having to decide which things I was gonna take with me, and how to say goodbye to certain people, friends, places and habits. You may not be experiencing the same thing. I remember hearing about situations and problems related to leaving, but, I was like "Well, no, I don't really think I am going through anything like that," and I hope you aren't going through any huge problems right now or when you arrive home; but realize that it will probably happen.

What I also spent a lot of time thinking about was returning back to my German school and how to actualize and share my experiences with others so I wouldn't lose them or forget. How do you explain such amazing experiences? There were a couple other fears, but all in all, they are all summed up in me being scared of not feeling home in my own home country and not being able to re-adapt to the culture and people I had grown up with. I always like to describe this feeling with "a key suddenly not fitting back to its lock anymore".

Also, when you left your first home county you had a certain personality and now that you are about to leave the States you realize you have changed a lot. You may not feel it now or the first days after your re-entry, but you will notice as soon as you see yourself changing back to the old you. Don't get this wrong: you won't change back completely but you definitely have to find a balance. That was something I was really worried about too. I liked my new me and I didn't want to go back in time again to the old me.

So, now a year later, after exchange, I think I never will stop being homesick because I have two homes now and I can't be both places at the same time. But I have my own second home, in the US, so I think that was totally worth it! My advice to get through your first year back in your home country: Don't take everything back in the US for granted, and don't think back about the things you could have done. We all have experienced something great and I don't ever want to forget it. To me, it still sometimes feels like my time in the US was a dream. But I have figured out that I need to use what I have learned, appreciate what I was allowed to experience and combine my two lives (my American me and my German me).

Good luck!

Amelie



THE NEW ME WORKSHEET

IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONAL CULTURE

1. What is something you did this year that you will remember for the rest of your life?

2. What is something you accomplished this year that makes you proud?

3. If you could change one thing that happened this year, what would it be?

4. What was the nicest thing someone did for you this year?

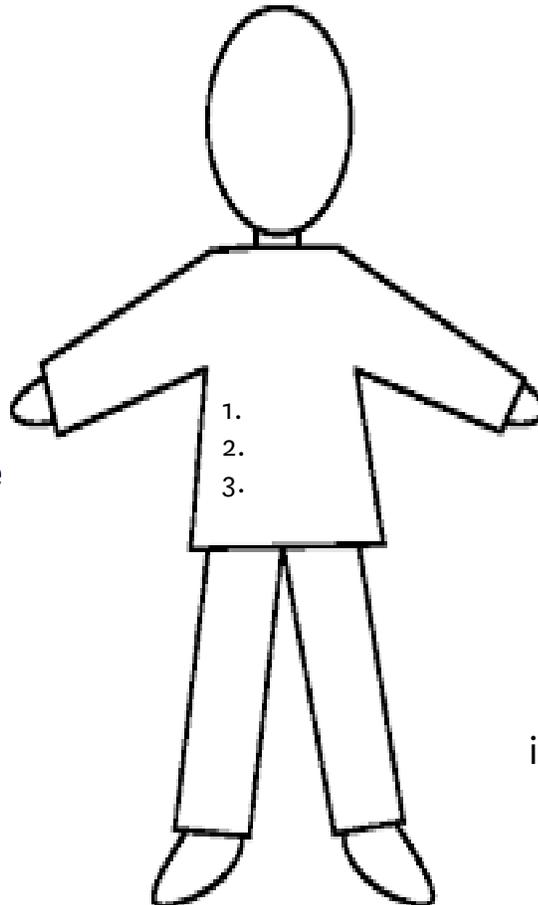
5. What new skill did you learn this year?

6. What is something that was hard for you at the start of the year, but is easy now?

7. In what area do you feel you made your biggest improvements?

8. What person in your exchange experience has made the biggest impact on your life this year? Why?

9. What is something you taught someone this year?





THE STAGES OF RE-ENTRY SORTING ACTIVITY

TO BE CUT APART AND USED FOR SESSION # 3, ACTIVITY # 2

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Stage 1 - The Honeymoon

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Similar to when you first arrived in America, upon return to your home country you may experience a “honeymoon” stage characterized primarily by positive feelings and excitement about being back home; seeing friends and family, sleeping in your own bed, eating your favorite foods, etc. You may even have a heightened sense of awareness of your surroundings, almost as if you are seeing things for the first time, in slow motion, or watching a movie. This temporary shift in perspective may also cause you to be surprised by things that were once so familiar to you; the room where you sleep, the corner market, the smell of the air, the traffic, or lack thereof, in the streets, etc.

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Stage 2 - Reverse Culture Shock

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In this stage the “honeymoon” is over and you experience a let-down. You may feel frustrated, alone, and/or like an outsider or a foreigner in your own country. You may also find yourself irritated with others for no apparent reason and frustrated at not being able to express yourself in your language as well as you would like. You probably feel “homesick” for America, disoriented and maybe even resentful about the fact that you are back home. Your home country will be different from how you remembered it. You may also find that many of your friends and family members have lost interest in hearing about your time overseas and you will really feel the need to connect with others who can relate to what you are going through.

Stage 3 – Recovery

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This stage is characterized by a gradual re-adjustment to life at home. Less and less about life “back home” surprises, angers or frustrates you. Any self-imposed isolation subsides and you can more easily express yourself in your native language. You begin to fall into familiar or new routines which provide rhythm to your daily life.

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Stage 4 - Adjustment

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At this point you will have found your place, so to speak, back home. You will have established or reestablished relationships with a circle of people with whom you feel comfortable and have a more balanced perspective on both life in your home country and in America. You may find that your behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and values have shifted a little or a lot as a result of your cross-cultural encounter. We also hope at this stage you will recognize the many ways in which you have grown as a result of your experience and actively seek out ways to use the knowledge, skills and attitudes that you gained in the process.



WORKSHEET: REACTIONS TO THE 'NEW ME'

“The New Me is someone who...”	Possible positive reactions back home	Possible negative reactions back home
<p>Is...</p> <p>(adjectives: describing words)</p>		
<p>Wants to...</p> <p>(verbs: action)</p>		
<p>Loves...</p> <p>(noun: person, place, thing or idea)</p>		
<p>Dislikes...</p> <p>(noun: person, place, thing or idea)</p>		



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR READJUSTMENT & HANDLING REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

Tips for You:

- Remind yourself that Reverse Culture Shock is difficult and normal. Stay positive and know that just like you adapted in the US, you will feel comfortable again in your home country.
- Keep in touch with your American friends and family; they will also remind you that you adapted well, and you can do it again.
- Keep in touch with the other exchange students that you met through YFU. They are facing the same challenges and understand what you are going through. Get involved and volunteer with YFU in your home country.
- Ask a close friend or family member to help you readjust. Explain that you need a special friend to help you through what can sometimes be a difficult time. Explain the concept of reverse culture shock so this friend knows why you may feel certain ways.
- Remember that you have changed a lot; it may take some time for friends and family to get to know the new you. Be patient as this occurs and be active in strengthening your relationships.
- Journal and write down your feelings; think about what you learned about reverse culture shock and recognize your progress in adapting back to your home country. If you wrote a journal or blog during your exchange experience, review it now as some of the strategies you used to adjust to your American life may help you again back in your home country.
- Keep a sense of humor; laugh at your mistakes as you readjust.
- Seek out opportunities to share your experiences with others. Ask teachers if you can do a presentation about your experience; talk with the local library or community center about opportunities to showcase your photos and souvenirs.
- If you enjoy writing, offer to write an article about your experiences in the US for your school newspaper, or your local newspaper.
- Seek out new relationships with the international community; find new restaurants or cultural centers to learn more about other cultures; volunteer with service groups that serve international clients.
- If you are very sad and are often crying, talk to your doctor. Sometimes people can become very depressed and it is a good idea to get some professional help.

Tips for Interacting with Friends and Family

- Often friends and family are overwhelmed by all your stories. Develop “short” stories about your life as an exchange student. Think about how you can share little tidbits about your life in the US, without overwhelming people with too many details that do not make sense to them.
- Share photos, videos, music and souvenirs with friends and family; but be prepared, they may not be ready to spend hours trying to understand why all of these items are so significant to you.
- Reassure people that there are many stereotypes about America, but they are not all true. Explain some of your own surprises as you built relationships with Americans.
- Reassure people that there are no “dumb questions” and that your whole experience was about learning new things about America. Encourage friends and family to ask questions.
- Show interest in others and don’t feel the need to tell everything to everyone all at once.
- Ask friends and family about what you missed while you were away. How did the local sports teams do, what were the big events at school, are there any new shops or restaurants in town?
- Ask friends and family about what significant things they experienced while you were away? How did they feel about you being gone for so long?
- Make plans with friends and family to do new, exciting activities together. This will help you develop new memories and strengthen your relationships.



ASPECTS OF GOODBYE

(Facilitator needs to post the descriptions on a slide or flipchart. Have the examples ready to further describe the stages. Read this prior to the session so you can speak about these stages)

Denial: You do not want to say goodbye. In fact, you pretend that it is not happening at all. You deny that that you are actually leaving. This is a defense mechanism that protects us from the shock, disappointment and sadness of this stage of the experience ending. We block out the reality and hide from the facts. This is a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of saying goodbye.

Possible behaviors or actions: Not wanting to pack, not wanting to make arrangement to ship luggage home. Avoids discussion about plans for the airport. Does not make arrangements to say goodbye to important people. Today, one might be thinking: I don't need this Re-Entry orientation.

Anger: When you feel scared, nervous, anxious, and sad, you might deal with all of these emotions by being angry. Arguing, fighting, and being rebellious are all defense mechanisms. You are not ready to leave, and sometimes it is easier to be angry with people rather than looking at the real cause of the anger- which is actually sadness.

Examples: Reacting impatiently to host family requests. Arguing with family and friends. Not wanting to listen to others. Being tempted to break rules. Easily frustrated and on edge.

Bargaining: The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness or anxiety is often a need to regain control. This sometimes occurs by trying to "bargain" and change the situation.

Example: Wanting to change your travel plans. Looking for ways to prolong the departure. Making plans that are not realistic- I will get a job this summer and stay in the States. If I get all As, I can I just stay and go to college here in the US.

Sadness/Sorrow: Feeling of sadness and regret are a normal reaction to this stage of your exchange experience. These feelings can happen before or after you have left the US.

Example: Not wanting to talk to anyone, isolating oneself. Staying away from friends and family, and just wanting to be alone.

Adjustment: Let others be there for you and help comfort you through the process of saying goodbye. The best thing you can do is to allow yourself to feel the emotions as they come over you. Resisting it only will prolong the natural process of healing.

Example: Make plans to continue interacting with the international students that you have met. Figure out ways to stay in touch with your American family and friends. Realize how much you have grown and recognize that this special experience will be with you forever.



IN MY HOST FAMILY'S SHOES



1. How do you think your host family might act if they are having difficulty saying goodbye to you?
2. How do you think your host family will feel a week before you go?
3. What kinds of things do you think your host family wants to do with you before you leave?
4. Who should go to the airport with you? (This is an important discussion to have with your host family!)
5. How will your host family remember you after you have left?



GOODBYE PLAN WORKSHEET

List all the things you need to do and the people you need to see. As departure time gets closer check these off under the done column as you complete them.

Three to Four Weeks Before You Leave:

DONE

1. Special Items to ship home
2. Addresses & contact information to keep/ Thank You notes to write
3. Activities with special people (Who, What, When, Where, Why)

Two Weeks Before You Leave

4. Fulfill responsibilities such as banking or other paperwork
5. Gifts for people (Area Rep, Host Family, Favorite Teacher)
6. Who will go to the airport (How do you arrange this?)
7. Other

Two to Three Days Before You Leave

8. Carry-on Items to pack
9. Activities with Host Family
10. Other

Departure Day:

11. Plan for the day



Three to Four Weeks Before You Leave:

- Go through your possessions. Play "keep, throw away, or give to charity"
- Box up and mail those items you will no longer need while you are here (winter clothes, souvenirs, mementos). You can only check one bag (less than 50 lbs) when you travel home, so make arrangements in advance if you have a lot of baggage. Consider buying and checking a 2nd suitcase, as that will be less expensive than mailing 50 pounds of your belongings home.
- Do a "practice run" of packing your suitcase and carry-on. Make sure everything fits in the proper sized suitcases. You are usually allowed only one checked bag without any extra fees. This bag cannot weigh more than 50 Lbs. Additional bags and additional weight will require a payment at the ticket counter. Weigh your packed luggage and carry on to see if there are more things you will need to send home by mail.
- Write and mail thank you notes to your counselor, principal, favorite teachers, YFU Area Representative, and anyone else who has played an important role in your life while you were here.
- Email yourself a list of everyone's addresses, phone numbers and email addresses of host family members, friends and others who you might want to contact after you leave home. Make sure these same people have your address, phone number and email.
- Write down special dates like birthdays and anniversaries of your host family members and friends. Get recipes of your favorite foods, take pictures of your host family, friends, home, school and neighborhood.
- Think about the important people that you want to make sure you can have a thoughtful goodbye. Talk with them about a special activity that you can do together- set a date for this.

Two Weeks Before You Leave:

- Close your bank accounts. Be sure to leave money with your host family to pay for phone bills or other expenses they may have after you leave.
- Write a thank you letter to your host family.
- Visit a local place or two that you really enjoy.
- Call friends to say good-bye (you should spend your last day or two with your host family).
- Start packing
- Think about leaving a nice gift or memento for your host family members.

Two to Three Days Before You Leave:

- Finish packing.
- WEIGH YOUR BAGS!!!!
- If they are too heavy, you need to mail some more stuff or plan to pay for an extra bag.
- Call the airline and ask about the airline regulations about what you can and cannot take. NO fruits, meats or plants are allowed. Make sure the items you wish to take in your carry-on bag conform to your airline regulations. You will risk losing anything that is not allowed on the plane.
- Make sure your passport, YFU travel emergency numbers and e-ticket are in your carry-on luggage.
- Emergency travel numbers: Students can reach YFU toll-free 24 hours a day from any payphone anywhere in the U.S at 1-800-705-9510 and in Frankfurt, Germany at 0800-759-5465. From outside the U.S and Germany, YFU can be reached at 1-202-774-5690 (not toll-free). If you get the recording when you are in the airport, press 1.
- Call the airlines to confirm your travel plans. Check in on-line up to 24 hours in advance.
- Make sure you have written a nice letter to your host family.
- Spend the last night at home with your host family and say your goodbyes
- REMEMBER TO SAY THANK YOU!

Departure Day:

- Check on-line for any updates or changes to your flight information.
- Make sure you get to the airport **at least** 2 hours before your flight departure time.
- Make sure you have your Passport, other paperwork, and your e-ticket
- Hugs and kisses good-bye at the airport (take Kleenex)
- Remember, this is not an ending. It is another new stage of your YFU experience.

Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened!

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

★ *Honorary American* ★

This certificate is awarded to

for contributions to cultural understanding
during the exchange year 2015-2016.



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING USA
Intercultural Exchange Programs

YFU USA Field Director

Date

Date

Michael E. Geis

YFU USA President & CEO

Date

Date