

Guided Reflection

This handout will help you reflect on your work experience abroad by encouraging you to think about what you learned, how you developed personally and professionally, and how the experience might shape your future. Taking time to reflect can deepen your understanding and make your experience even more meaningful.

We'll explore several aspects of your experience, including:

- First impressions and initial reactions
- Memorable or challenging situations – both positive and negative
- Strategies you used to adapt
- Any surprising or amusing misunderstandings
- How it felt to return home – including possible reverse culture shock

Task 1: Wishes and Worries - Reflecting on Your Expectations

Think back to your expectations before going abroad, as well as any wishes, worries, or stereotypes you may have had. Now that your experience is complete, take a moment to reflect on what has changed.

Read the letter you wrote to yourself before your departure. Then consider the following questions:

- Before your stay: What were your expectations? Why did you have them? (Refer to your letter.)
- Now: Have your expectations or perceptions changed? In what way?
- Did you have any unrealistic expectations or preconceived ideas (stereotypes)? How did reality compare?

Task 2: Culture in Comparison – Using Hofstede's Dimensions

At the pre-departure-training, you have looked at Hofstede's cultural dimensions to understand potential differences between your home country and your host country.

Reflect on the following:

- What cultural differences did you expect based on Hofstede's model?
- What strategies did you plan to use to deal with these differences?
- What differences did you actually notice during your stay?
- Which strategies proved helpful – and were there any new ones you developed along the way?

Task 3: Host & Home Culture

Use the table provided to list positive and negative aspects of both your host culture and your home culture, based on your personal experiences and observations. Be as specific as possible – consider areas such as communication styles, attitudes towards work, social norms, time management, or everyday routines.

This is a helpful exercise to do at the end of your stay or shortly after your return (Castiglioni, 2009). It can help you gain a deeper understanding of both cultures and how your perspective may have changed

Reflect on the following as you complete the table:

- What stood out to you – both in a positive and a challenging way?
- Did anything surprise you or challenge your assumptions?
- How have these experiences shaped your view of your own culture?

Home Culture +	Home Culture -	Host Culture +	Host Culture -

Task 4: Quick Assessment by Bruce La Brack (2009)

	Culturally	Professional
Most enjoyable moments		
Most challenging or uncomfortable moments		
Biggest or most surprising similarities		
Biggest or most surprising differences		
Personal and professional growth/lessons learned		

Task 5 (optional): Looking Back – Personal and Professional Growth

Take some time to reflect on what you have achieved and how you have changed during your time abroad. Use the prompts below to guide your reflection:

1. Did I achieve my goals?
2. My greatest success was:
3. I know that I've changed in the following ways:

 Professionally:

 Personally:
4. The one idea or experience I most want to share with my friends is:
5. The most challenging part of the experience was:
6. What could I have done better?
7. The following cultural learning strategies were key to my success:
8. One activity I would like to continue doing at home is:

ICOS Module

Intercultural Competences for Outgoing Students



Literature:

La Brack, B. (2009). Why Reentry Matters: Critical Lessons and Practical Advice. Portland: Institute for Intercultural Communication.

Paige, R. M., Cohen, A. D., Kappler, B., Chi, J. C. & Lassegard, J. P. (2009). Maximizing study abroad: A student's guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use. (2nd Ed.). Minneapolis: Centre for Advanced research on Language Acquisition.

Stadler, P. (1994). Globales und interkulturelles Lernen in Verbindung mit Auslandsaufenthalt. Ein Bildungskonzept. Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Breitenbach.