

Students can learn valuable skills by going abroad, and not just through coursework or employment. By actively participating in a new cultural experience, students learn to appreciate, analyze, and adapt to cultural differences, preparing them for a global future.

Prior to Travelling

please consider familiarizing yourself with the fundamentals of cultural analysis to facilitate post-travel analysis:

- **Cultural Dimensions Video** and **Slides**: Overview of the 8 Cultural Dimensions
- **Cultural Analysis Toolkit**: In-depth discussion of cultural analysis methodology
- **Change Your Lens**: Technique for adjusting your cultural lens

While Abroad

1. Keep a Journal of Cultural Differences

To make it easier to reflect on and describe your experience, you should keep a journal, and make entries *at least* weekly. Bullets are enough, and they should:

(a) Record Observations. Record your observations of attitudes, expectations, and behaviors of people in your host country and try to identify the sociopolitical, historical and cultural tendencies underlying their perspective. If you can't figure it out for yourself, asking a professor, classmate, or employer may be helpful. Watch for things that surprise you regarding:

- The way people think and the opinions they express.
- The way people act/react to situations.
- Systems and processes in place.
- If you're doing an internship, describe any salient business practices.

It will be helpful to reflect on the cultural tendencies we have discussed, but don't force it – not everything is related to one of the dimensions in the framework.

(b) Chronicle Your Adaptation. Try to chronicle your experience of adaptation to the majority culture by:

- Describing any frustrations you've had with new attitudes, behavior, or systems.
- Recording times you get angry or frustrated and what your judgments are.
- Reflecting on strategies you're developing for adaptation and how they've worked.
- Reflecting on situations where you didn't/couldn't adapt or couldn't think of a strategy.
- Towards the end of your experience, reflecting on stages you've gone through in learning to deal with cultural difference

The more detail you provide the easier it will be to write your paper and the more useful your journal will be to any future cultural analysis.

2. Practice Changing Your Lens

Choose a situation that caused you to have a significant reaction of frustration. Describe your experience of reflection and whether it helped you reorient in a useful way by using the steps in the **Change Your Lens** process:

Look objectively
List what occurred

Examine your assumptions
Explore inside

Note other possibilities
Judge yourself to grow

Substantial with locals
Seek out more

Note that being frustrated in a new cultural environment is completely normal, and the fact that this has happened to you, perhaps frequently, is perfectly natural. This exercise is not about trying to analyze whether you handled the situation “correctly” or determine what you “should” have done differently. There are many reasons why a particular experience may have “pushed your buttons.” The *Change Your Lens* process is there to help you gain perspective by encouraging you to think through possible alternatives to your initial interpretation and identify a perspective of empathy for the frustrating behavior that you might use in the future.

3. Read Corporate Management Articles

While you’re abroad, read articles on corporate management written by an author from your host country. To find these:

- Ask faculty, coworkers, or homestay parents what business people in your host country read.
- Check the business section of newspapers and magazines for English language resources if you don’t speak the local language.
- Identify online sources written by local managers or management gurus about managing teams, employees, corporate strategy, etc.

Focus on articles about management style, HR practices, and other employment issues. The more detail they give you, the better. Articles that critique US-style management, that compare management styles in your host country to those in another country (etc.) will also help you understand the local perspective.

4. Interview a Local Businessperson

Interviewing a businessperson in your host country about the way business is conducted there will give you excellent material as well. This person could be a faculty member if you’re studying business, a homestay parent, a local shop owner, or anyone you encounter who runs a business. Collecting examples of the attitudes towards business there will help you recognize the connection between culture and business practices and will give you valuable material to work with when you return.