

What this guide is about

This guide describes the stages of adjusting to a new culture. It also offers strategies for managing the more difficult stages.

What is culture shock?

Culture shock is the initial, often transitory, negative feelings that occur when in an unfamiliar culture. This may be due to relocation where lifestyles are different or things are unfamiliar. However, there are also many positive feelings that come with living in an unfamiliar culture.

Stages of adaptation

People generally go through four stages when adapting to a new culture, though this may vary from individual to individual. Not everyone experiences all stages. Some people spend a different amount of time in each stage. Some people experience the stages out of order.

Stage	Description
1 Touring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar to a vacation, initial experiences are new and exciting• For a few days, weeks, or even months, you feel like a tourist• Any culture shock is usually overshadowed by constant discovery and excitement
2 Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You lose interest in the culture and isolate yourself from it, with a stronger desire to return home• You notice more negative aspects of the culture and form stereotypes• Feelings of impatience, frustration, irritability, blame, mistrust, and hostility become common
3 Adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You gain a fuller picture of the culture with both positive and negative aspects• Negative emotions are not as strong or overbearing as before• Returning home is not as tempting as you become more socially and emotionally open
4 Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You accept the culture and are comfortable with your level of integration• You are more neutral and understanding and less judgmental about the culture• Difficulties arise occasionally, but do not create the same feelings of anxiety they used to

Strategies

When positive emotions decrease, try to...

- Find new sources of anticipation to create more positive emotions and experiences
 - *Explore new routes to regular destinations / Visit new destinations regularly*
 - *Plan itineraries / Have goals (start small)*
- “Take a break” and return to your home culture
 - *Eat comfort food, meet with old friends, watch familiar TV shows or other media*

When negative emotions increase, try to...

- Avoid negative reinforcement about the culture
 - *Limit time spent with people from your home culture or others who may jump to conclusions*
 - *Understand a culture’s values instead of complaining about it or criticizing its population’s actions*
- Reassess your expectations
 - *Learn and empathize with the culture’s history, expectations, and values*

When adjusted and moving towards integration, try to...

- Form a more complete picture of a culture. Ask yourself...
 - *What are the role expectations with a customer and vendor? With a student and teacher? With colleagues at work? Off work?*
 - *How are these roles established in a first meeting? Through occupation? Through age?*
 - *How is politeness demonstrated? Verbal and/or body language?*
 - *What does the country’s culture value? Modesty? Individuality?*

- *What is the country's history with foreign relations?*
- *How do you fit into the culture? What do people expect from you?*
- Specialize in something to gain recognition, respect, confidence, and self-image
 - *Play sports or games*
 - Physical activities are cathartic and rely less heavily on language
 - You can learn new, culture specific skills or knowledge
 - *Join a club or become part of a larger community that shares your hobby*
 - You can share experience and views on a topic that others are already interested in
 - The language is focused around a familiar topic

Resources

Advice

Counseling & Wellness Services <http://campushealth.unc.edu/cws>

Activities & Events

Carolina Union Activities Board <http://www.unc.edu/cuab/events.shtml>

UNC Campus Recreation <http://campusrec.unc.edu/>

UNC Events Calendar <http://events.unc.edu/>

Student Organizations & Clubs

UNC Student Organizations <http://uncstudentorgs.collegiatelink.net/organizations>

Academic Resources & Culture Clubs <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/campus-resources/>



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