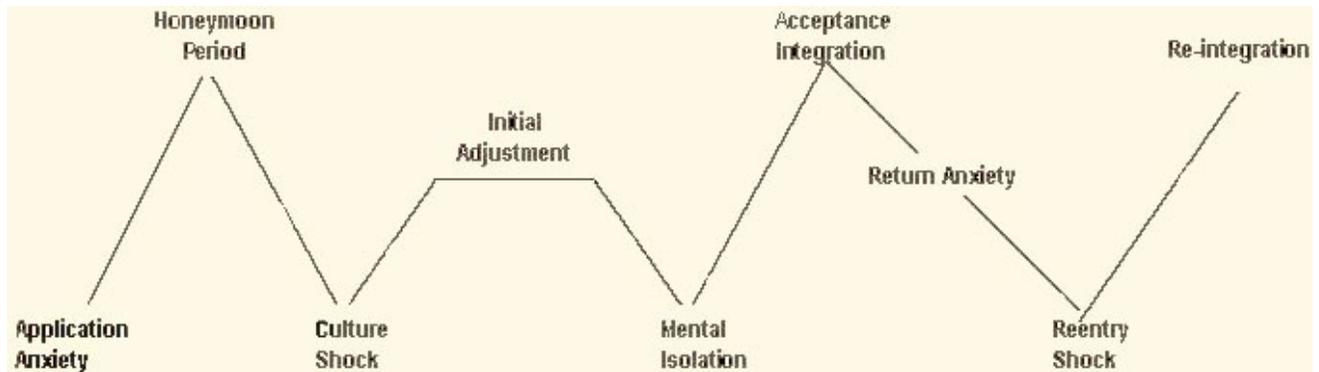


CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Culture Shock

We are surrounded by elements in our own culture that influence who we are and how we relate to the world. Because we have grown up with this culture, we are comfortable with it. Our values and attitudes have been shaped by our experiences in our native culture. What happens when we suddenly lose cues and symbols that orient us to situations of daily life? What happens when facial expressions, gestures, and words are no longer familiar? The psychological discomfort one feels in a foreign situation is commonly known as *culture shock*.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment Cycle



Each stage in this process is characterized by “symptoms” or outward and inward signs representing certain kinds of behavior.

- **Honeymoon Period:** Initially, you will probably be fascinated and excited by everything new. Visitors are at first elated to be in a new culture.
- **Culture Shock:** The visitor is immersed in new problems: housing, transportation, food, language, and new friends. Fatigue may result from continuously trying to comprehend and use the second language. You may wonder, “Why did I come here?”
- **Initial Adjustment:** Everyday activities such as housing and going to school are no longer major problems. Although the visitor may not yet be perfectly fluent in the language spoken, basic ideas and feelings in the second language can be expressed.
- **Mental Isolation:** Individuals have been away from their families and good friends for a long period of time and may feel lonely. Many still feel they cannot express themselves as well as they can in their native language. Frustrations and sometimes a loss of self-confidence result. Some individuals remain at this stage.
- **Acceptance and Integration:** A routine (e.g., work, school, social life) has been established. The visitor has accepted the habits, customs, food, and characteristics of the friends, associates and the language of the country.

Return Anxiety, Re-entry Shock, Reintegration

While these stages play an important role in a visitors’ adaptation to a new culture, many students are surprised to experience the very same feelings upon reentry to the U.S. Re-entry shock can be even more difficult than the initial culture shock because it is so unexpected.

Suggestions for Dealing with Culture Shock

- Try to look for logical reasons why things happen. This may help you view your host culture in a more positive light.
- Be slow to judge; observe first, show respect, and invite conversation. Try not to dwell on the negative things about your host culture, and don’t hang around with people who do.
- Explore! Get a sense for the physical environment, look for parks, sports facilities, bus stops, etc. Get a sense for the behavioral norms; how do they greet each other, wait in line, etc. Find out where people meet and socialize. Make an effort to go to those places.

- Try to fit into a rhythm of life in your host culture. Adjust to their time schedule for meals and work. Read local newspapers and books.
- Keep your sense of humor!
- Set small goals for yourself, as high expectations may be difficult to meet.
- Speak the language of the country you are in, and don't worry if you only know a few phrases.
- Take care of yourself by exercising, getting enough sleep, eating properly, and doing things you enjoy.
- Keep in touch with friends and family at home.
- Draw on your personal resources for handling stress. You've done it many times before, and you can do it again.