

What is culture shock?

It's common to experience culture shock when you're transplanted into a foreign setting. This is a normal reaction to a new environment where you are no longer in control as you have been at home. You may experience a range of emotions when adapting to a foreign culture, from excitement and interest to frustration, depression and fear of the unknown. Culture shock is a term used to describe what happens to people when they encounter unfamiliar surroundings and conditions.

Stages of culture shock

The five stages of culture shock are:

1. **The Honeymoon Stage** - You are very positive, curious, and anticipate new exciting experiences. You even idealize the host culture.
2. **Irritability and Hostility** - You start to feel that what is different is actually inferior. The host culture is confusing or the systems are frustrating. It's a small step from saying that they do things in a different way to saying that they do things in a stupid way. You may blame your frustrations on the new culture (and its shortcomings) rather than on the adaptation process.
3. **Gradual Adjustment** - You feel more relaxed and develop a more balanced, objective view of your experience.
4. **Adaptation of Biculturalism** - You feel a new sense of belonging and sensitivity to the host culture.
5. **Re-entry Shock** - You go home and it isn't what you expected it to be.

Sign/ Symptoms of culture shock

People differ greatly in the degree to which culture shock affects them, but almost everyone is affected by it in one way or another. Symptoms vary, but can include:

- boredom
- withdrawal (e.g. spending excessive amounts of time reading; avoiding contact with host nationals)
- feeling isolated or helpless
- sleeping a lot or tiring easily
- irritation over delays and other minor frustrations
- suffering from body pains and aches
- longing to be back home
- unduly criticizing local customs or ways of doing things
- overeating or loss of appetite
- sadness or unexplained crying

Tips for dealing with culture shock

- Talk to other international students who can give you practical advice.
- Decorate your room with objects that remind you of home.
- Make a list of things you want to accomplish while you are here and follow through with them. As you are settling in to life, remind yourself to be patient. Don't expect perfection. Keep an open mind and try not to be judgmental!
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Establish simple goals and celebrate each success.
- Give yourself time to adapt and allow yourself to feel sad about the things you have left behind.
- Get out there! Make friends and try to meet locals or other international students.
- Take up a hobby that will help you learn more about where you are.
- Do things you can only do where you are or maybe cannot do back home.
- Volunteer in community activities that will allow you get involved and perhaps practice your English.
- If there's something you did at home to help relieve stress, keep doing it!
- Find ways to live with the things that don't satisfy you 100%.
- Try not to be too hard on yourself and stay confident—most of all, keep your sense of humor!
- Join a Club/ find ways to get connected to campus, UWEC even has an International Students Club!

(Adapted from: Marx, Elisabeth. Breaking Through Culture Shock and <https://www.sfu.ca/students/isap/current/adjust-to-a-new-culture/stages-symptoms-culture-shock.html>.)

Counseling Services is also a free and confidential space to process this experience!

Phone: 715-836-5521

Email: counsl01@uwec.edu

Location: VLL 2122 (previously Old Library)

