

ReEntry 101 - The Five Whys
Adapted from Rich Kurtzman, Barcelona Study Abroad Experience

PURPOSE:

Do a quick Google search of the “Five Why’s” question-asking technique and you’ll find that it was initially developed by a Japanese inventor as a diagnostic tool for manufacturing problems. Even so, we’ve adapted the technique for *both* pre-departure and re-entry reflection. Often sojourners cite university encouragement as the primary reason for studying away, yet this exercise helps students to find “the deep, personal reasons behind what they want to get out of the experience” (Kurtzman, 2013) and subsequent reasons for why they’ve chosen to sojourn. Those returning from time abroad can also utilize the “Five Why’s” to determine what they got out of the experience.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Step 1: Ask yourself a simple question: “Why have you chosen to study in Rome [replace with applicable country]?” (returnees can frame the question in a different tense: “Why did you study in Rome?”).

Possible response: “I studied in Rome because I wanted to see what life was like in Italy.”

Step 2: Take the answer and ask why to that: “Why did you want to see what life was like in Italy?”

Possible response: “Because I wanted to open my mind to different ways of thinking...”

Step 3: Continue with another why: “Why did you want to open your mind to different ways of thinking?”

Possible response: “Because I knew it would help me in the future if I can look at things from different perspectives”

Step 4: Continue until students have completed five levels of “why”.

DEBRIEFING / QUESTIONS:

We believe that this resource will aid you in piecing together a concrete rationale for studying away, and additionally, a statement related to the learning that took place abroad. Finding adequate language when talking about one’s experience abroad is frequently a formidable challenge after re-entry (and sometimes prior to departure); hopefully the “Five Why’s” have helped you to construct some language that makes these transitions less daunting. Below are some additional questions to consider:

Ideally you will have complete the “Five Whys” both prior to departing and after returning from your sojourn. Is there any overlap between your answers beforehand and your

answers now? Are there distinct differences in how you approached your experience then and now?

Are you satisfied with your fifth-level answer? Why or why not?

Consider ways in which you can incorporate your responses from this exercise into fielding the ever-challenging question: "How was your time abroad?"