

ReEntry 101 - Writing Letters to Yourself
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PURPOSE:

Receiving a letter from your pre-sojourner self while away, and consequently, receiving a similar letter once you return, is a splendid way to bridge the gap between your experience abroad and your time at home. Not only does letter-writing require deep and critical reflection, but it forces you to think about the its future reader (that is, you several months after writing it). In this way, you are able to remind yourself of past goals or aspirations that are easily forgotten in the flurry of culture-shock or re-entry struggles.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Step 1: Before leaving for your host country, draft a letter that you'd like sent to yourself after a couple of months. If your abroad address is already handy, you can go through the process of addressing and sealing the envelop yourself; if not, communicate with someone back home once you figure out where you will be staying. Recruit a friend / family member to send you the letter in the coming months.

You may choose to write about goals you have for your time abroad, encouraging words for a potentially homesick self, a self-evaluation of "where you are now" (in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes), an inside joke, or perhaps a drawing or poem. Think of what you might want to receive in a letter sometime down the road.

Step 2: Once abroad (for at least month or so), take the time to write a letter yourself as an eventual returner. Ask a friend to mail it you once you have been home for bit.

One topic for reflection might be recounting instances of learning (either from experience or contemplation) that you have experienced abroad. Others include, but are not limited to, recounting embarrassing moments, citing various cultural differences you find interesting, imagining your returner "self" and offering words of encouragement / support, or basic things that you don't want to forget.

DEBRIEF:

Ideally these letters will help combat possible feelings of alienation, both abroad and back home. We've found that the process of writing the letters is easily forgotten, which makes receiving them even more of a surprise.