

# Journalistic Writing Skills

Final assignment

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JIC-D 10

Reverse Culture Shock:

## Bubble hits the ground

When young travelers stay abroad for university exchange, participate in volunteer work and wander through entire continents, they are experiencing drastic changes in relation to mental shifts that take place at home. How exactly do the euphoric, emancipated globetrotters manage to tumble back into routine? How do they find balance between their previous and newly acquired insights when they return home?



Photo: Emma Ricketts

## Soft landing expected

After three months of exploring the tropical South East Asia, **Roosa Murto**, 22, stepped out of the airplane, discovered huge snow banks and felt -25°C degrees tingling her skin at Helsinki-Vantaa airport. She had just experienced the longest journey of her life and felt relieved to see her friends and family again. However, weeks later she realized that the re-adaptation to Finland was surprisingly challenging in the middle of winter.

“My skin turned extremely dry and I felt depressed. It also seemed like my friends didn't understand my experience, which made me feel a bit lonely”, Roosa describes.

Large portion of those who return home feel utter excitement about eating in their favorite restaurants and reading the newspaper in their mother tongue. Specific food products and local transportation may suddenly seem like mindless miracles. This phase is called “honeymoon month” – the traveller is blinded by everything good that he or she has been missing from home. Yet just like every honeymoon, it has to end eventually.

## The definition of home goes missing

Multiple stages of culture shock are comparable to a floating bubble. Even when the plane has landed weeks earlier, the traveler is still drifting somewhere else upon unforgettable moments and simultaneously selecting to see merely the best bits of home. As the bubble descends, it breaks down and converts the honeymoon stage into a transition period. The second phase springs up when all the thrill of reunions start to fade.

According to Kevin F. Gaw's research *Reverse Culture Shock in Students Returning from Overseas* (University of Missouri, 1995), helplessness and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured or disregarded might occur. Nevertheless, the most typical symptoms include the impression of being misunderstood, willingness to be alone and confusion caused by changes in personal relationships.

Travelers often become vacant from societal norms and cross certain boundaries while experimenting new things and embracing opportunities. The freedom of choice allows them to do anything and the optimistic ideas can be adapted in a split second, but these limits do not expand as quickly in the travelers' home countries.

Also small anecdotes caused by newly assumed customs are likely to cause confusion. It is often advised that the expats maintain their habits adapted from their new culture, but certain mundane manners require updating.

**Sanni Haahti**, 22, is currently discovering Central America and she has plenty of incidents to enumerate.

“Last year when I came back from Asia, I accidentally lit up a cigarette inside a building. This happened multiple times! I always apologized and greeted in English. I also threw toilet paper to a trashcan instead of toilet seat and since I had gotten used to the left-side traffic, I once drove on a wrong lane. Luckily the red traffic lights were on and nobody was behind me, so I could quickly switch to my own side again.”



Photo: Emma Ricketts

Seeking company of other people who have gone through similar experiences helps the expats to deal with discrepancies and encourage them to carry on as the new person that they've recently become.

## Travels still worth the perplexity

Fifteen people responded to a survey on Facebook this week describing their experiences and reasons for traveling. All of them are still planning to travel with no exception. One very facilitating factor of re-adjustment seems to be the certainty that future brings along more takeoffs. Finding one's feet after wide environmental modifications is a passage of rite that can hardly be dismissed. For many people it takes time and patience, and some of the returnees might even have to redefine their concept of home.

Also **Anna Ridley**, 20, had to cope with feelings of fatigue in the end of her two-year-tour in Asia and Australia. "I got really desensitized to the beauty that I was seeing everyday. I was telling myself, 'Oh, *another* beautiful waterfall, *another* beautiful beach... But I've seen better.' I realized that it was a good timing for a break".

Anna is currently recharging her batteries in her home country, England, but does not intend to stay there longer than six months. She reckons that the post-travel blues would hit her badly in case she was not going to pack her bags again. "Travelling does change you, and often people feel alienated when they come home. I'm just not sure whether this is actually home anymore. Home is where your heart and your friends are. My friends are all over the world, so I feel like the world is my home!"

It is bound to the time and season of homecoming whether the shock strikes strongly or not. Summer and long periods of celebration usually prevent the traveler from feeling over-whelmed, but dramatic contrast such as season, climate and temperature change, tough times in family and unemployment all slow down the readjustment.

Many of the survey respondents state that they now see their home countries in a different light. It can be highly eye-opening and soothing to discover the yet unfamiliar cities, history and beautiful landscape of one's home country just like before overseas.

Moreover, it is important that the returnee understands how temporary the adaptation process is in his or her personal timeline. The readjustment stage usually falls within sixth month of being home and then all the amazing experiences will begin to pay off those contradictory feelings. 😊

## Process Report

I chose this topic because I travelled in Australia and Asia for a year and faced difficulties to re-adjust to Finland afterwards. I began to feel comfortable only right before moving abroad again.

I find it interesting how the time I've spent overseas has been way easier than the process of conforming and fitting back into the conventional mole at home. Talking out loud about the subject seemed heavy, because I had a feeling that I was constantly being misunderstood. Nevertheless, as I interviewed my friends and travelers I had met during my journey, it turned out that all of them had gone through the same issues.

I am into traveling and writing and want to combine those two in the future, so this assignment gave me the opportunity to practice. Of course, one could say that I "stayed in my own backyard" by interviewing people I knew. However, it's better to start with something personal and familiar and then slowly exit one's comfort zone. The interviews also gave replies of overall level that, no matter who the interviewee is, every traveler can probably identify with what they say.

To me, cutting and editing seemed to be the most difficult tasks. I gathered so much information and quotes I personally liked that soon the article was twice as long than it was supposed to be. I also realized that I could have interviewed someone who works for an international exchange organization, e.g. Rotary or EF. I would have gotten answers from a different perspective; an adult who has seen young people go through the re-adaptation process. Such different angles give more character to the feature article.

As I read in the theory section, the newspaper feature writing is shorter than that in magazines. This article is not very deep reaching, and therefore I decided that Metro would be the best medium. I've read Metro in multiple languages and its style is the same in every country. A friend of mine published an article in the Finnish metro, and it was quite similar than mine, although the subject and content were of a complete different order.

Today's media users and readers tend to be continuously distracted by different mediums and sources, but since Metro is a thin paper and aims at offering something for everyone on the daily, it's easy to grab. There are always dozens of copies in every public transport and long metro journeys give an opportunity to concentrate for a moment (pretty much everyone is doing it in the London tube.) This article can offer a refreshing moment for those busy young people who travel or who are interested in traveling by taking them away from the bus seat for 5-10 minutes. Personally I wouldn't have read a lot of Metro's articles unless I still hadn't half an hour remaining of my way to school/work. This is either due to a lack of interest or because I rarely read newspapers off-line.

I read through the course theory and applied it to the extent that I structured my article to have a hook and included the most common problems and possible solutions for them in the body. I additionally looked for scientific proof and added research material, also conducted by myself on Facebook. The conclusion is brief, but very clear.



This article probes the question “How to cope with reverse culture shock?” It has been written for Metro, both for UK and US prints, as London and New York are equally known to be ‘melting pots’. Metro is being read in different languages throughout the world and its distribution is extremely efficient, regarding that it’s free and the massive amount of copies makes it conveniently accessible. Since the same company owns each country’s desks, the same articles might be translated and published in other cities’ copies. For instance, most of the Hollywood stars’ interviews have been written in English and translated into less spoken languages such as Finnish, Swedish and Dutch. Since the subject is universal, there are high chances that also this article could make its way to foreign editions. The paper is accessible in big cities where most of the globetrotters are likely to reside.

The content of this article is relevant especially for young people, as those who have graduated from high school or university are more likely to travel than readers of older generations. However, the article can interest anyone who lives and works abroad. The main target audience consists of young [17-30-year-old], international people. The article includes facts, anecdotes that increase its human interest and interviews with people that I perceived as experts – those who experienced the reverse culture shock for themselves. Thus, it has an emotional appeal and is more subjective and human-centric than objective and scientific. From all the magazines that I thought of Metro was definitely the best medium choice, because it is being read by anyone regardless of political conviction, age, gender and nationality.

## Sources

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