



District 5360 Youth Exchange Information Sheet #2 – Keeping a Journal



You may have heard that keeping a daily journal of your exchange experience can be a very valuable thing to do. The recommendation here is to start now – before you leave – and to continue for several months after you return. This will provide an opportunity to have the whole experience recorded. In other words think of your exchange experience not just in terms of your time away in another culture, but rather as a process of learning that does not have a specific entry point – it begins well before you get on the airplane and extends beyond your return through Canada customs! Few have regretted keeping a journal – however, many regret not doing it. Odds are that you will have more time for journal writing during this experience than any time in the near future so take advantage of it!

Reasons for keeping a journal

- ◆ Record your goals and personal agenda for your exchange experience
- ◆ Note your reflections during your self-audit and research process
- ◆ Enter your feelings about your pending journey
- ◆ List addresses and contact information for people here and people there
- ◆ While away, record your experiences, school assignments, trips and routines in your daily life
- ◆ Use as a vehicle for creative thinking through observation, reflection and analysis
- ◆ Assist in cultural adaptation by describing your feelings and interactions in your new cultural environment
- ◆ Record your feelings on and after re-entry

Ideas on your approach to keeping a journal

- ◆ Write in the same fashion as you would write a letter to a close friend
- ◆ Provide a context for the stories and descriptions you relate
- ◆ Include specific names of things you discover in your new environment (you don't think you'll forget, but you will)
- ◆ Provide translations for the new language words that you include
- ◆ Tell stories and use quotes from the people you meet

NOTE: If you use your journal (or any other form of writing) to vent your frustrations, either keep it very safe or do not write anything you wouldn't want someone else to read.





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Some questions for consideration when writing your journal

The following questions may help you reflect on the process of exploring the implications of moving across cultures, how to be effective in another culture and how to learn about that culture.

Before leaving...

- ◆ What do I want to get out of this experience?
 - If I expect to make friends from the culture, how can I do this?
 - If I expect to improve my language skills, will I have to separate myself from other English speakers – including other exchange students – to do this?
 - Are my expectations realistic?
- ◆ Am I concerned about missing family/friends? How do I plan to stay in touch with them?
- ◆ What is culture anyway? How would I describe “culture”?
- ◆ How would I describe Canada? Canadians? Myself as a Canadian?
- ◆ What am I most anxious about? What am I most excited about?

When in the host country...

- ◆ What are my initial reactions?
- ◆ Are my reactions different from those of other exchange students?
- ◆ What do I like most about this culture? The least? Why?
- ◆ What types of experiences engage me the most? Isolate me most?
- ◆ What interactions was the most confusing of the past week? Most stressful?
- ◆ How effectively did I deal with these confusing and stressful situations?
- ◆ Who was the most helpful to me this past week? How did that happen?
- ◆ What are my most important insights about my cultural adjustment over this past week?
- ◆ What was my greatest accomplishment this past week?
- ◆ What am I doing to meet people from my host culture?
- ◆ How am I being viewed as an individual, a Canadian, a foreigner? How does this make me feel about myself?
- ◆ What were my goals before leaving? Have they changed?
- ◆ What can I do here that I cannot do at home? What can't I do here? How do I know these things?

Upon returning...

- ◆ What did I learn about my host culture? About myself?
- ◆ How can I apply what I learned to my life in Canada?
- ◆ Who will listen to my stories? Who can I seek out to stay involved in international/ Rotary activities? Do I want to stay involved?
- ◆ Do I think about Canada differently now that I have returned home? What do I like the most about my home culture? The least?
- ◆ What advice would I give to others who are leaving for my host culture? How did I learn these things?

