

Introduction:

This resource includes 17 guided writing exercises that can be used during study abroad or other types of intercultural experiences.

Guided Writing Exercises:

1. What ideas did you have about this country before you got here? What complicated your picture of the country your first few days here? Can you problematize the way this country is represented to you in the West?
2. If one of us is treated in an uncomfortable way owing to how our identity is being read, how might we assert ourselves without coming off as an “ugly American” or otherwise insensitive Westerner?
3. We are going to meet unequal relationships in our school and work life in the US, and we are going to have to take careful steps to navigate them. Here, across the globe, these inequalities are even more prominent. By having a US passport, reasonable resources, and having had a chance to move across the globe, you already have incredible advantages. Please remember the process of questioning and reflecting helps us hold the “and” parts of our lives. We are all part of the problem and solution. Reflect on what this might mean.
4. After at least 2 days on a study abroad trip:

Urban ____ is tough. Traffic, smog, language barrier, noise level, constant adaptation. Visible poverty and injustice.

Please write a letter to yourself AS your fear. Begin it this way:

Dear [your name here], I am your fear. This is what I want you to know. Lately you’ve given a lot of power to me because...But now...

Note: You may change this prompt to fit your context.

5. Stream of consciousness freewrite: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking,” —opening of the story “Goodbye to Berlin” by Christopher Isherwood
6. Informally chat with any ____ resident today and gather these ideas so you can write them up.
 - What foods are considered healthy?
 - How do you think of homemade food versus restaurant food? Is one more of a treat? Why?
 - What are preferred foods?
 - Where is knowledge about food and about food preparation acquired for women? For men? For children?
 - What foods are associated with particular festivals/holidays and why?



7. Read an entire newspaper (print or online)

Organization – compare with US paper

Tone

Level of difficulty following

One news story - describe and evaluate

One human interest story - describe and evaluate

8. In a recent *Forbes* essay on cultivating true empathy as a leader, one CEO says silence, space, and introspection are her three favorite ways to periodically unplug from her daily rigors and gift valuable time to herself: "I think silence is the most under-appreciated resource, especially in a time when we're so busy," she says. "There's constant pressure to consume and stay on top of information. We need to be aware of the power of attending to our inner experience with greater intimacy and precision."

9. Reflect on forms of happiness or contentment. Look at the following links:

<http://www.danielbaylis.ca/essays/poor-but-happy/>

<http://wonderlustblog.com/the-poor-but-happy-myth/>

Is that happiness you're seeing or something different?

What assumptions are you hearing if a person says, "Oh, they are poor but seem so happy!"

10. Today's subject is eyes and smiling

Dress – a cultural issue, not a morality issue

Eye contact and smiling or not smiling for photos

11. From Anu Taranath's *Beyond Guilt Trips*:

TIPS letter = Things, Ideas, People and Self. You may write a letter to any object or idea today. Writing a letter provides a focused and almost meditative way to explore something that has caught your eye or is happening to you. Examples:

- Dear Plastic Water Bottles,
- Dear Generosity,
- Dear girl I read about in the paper who was bitten by a snake and died,
- Dear Myself Before I came to ____,
- Dear Poop,

12. Inspired by Adiche's "Danger of a Single Story" TED talk

- What are assumptions or stories I have about ____?
- What are assumptions or stories that the people we will work with in ____ might have about me?
- Who has the power to tell stories?



13. From Anu Taranath's *Beyond Guilt Trips*:

Word of the day: Draw your understanding of the word I am going to give you and feel free to sketch out its many dimensions. Do not worry about being an artist or showing artistic talent. Instead, engage in this way as a form of engagement without repeating the academy's emphasis on words/one kind of knowledge processing. Words to use:

- Racism
- Casteism
- Colonialism
- Resistance
- Gendered power

Note: You may change the words based on your context.

14. How are aspects of a study abroad trip a performance?

To keep us from falling into the easy roles of tourist-voyeur-consumer or helper-rescuer, the language of performance patterns our thinking before and during the trip. Performing allows for fluidity and redirects students who may unknowingly be seeking for people to embody the real ____, an elusive and illusory authenticity. Students are actors and the people they meet are too. All of us are imprinted by and embedded in prior power structures; we have to work extra hard to move beyond the lines of a script we did not write and create new dialogue.

15. Warm up: one compliment you give yourself from this trip
What could you use more of in ____?

16. Body language may suggest as much as 60% of any given communication act. It consists of gestures, facial expressions, postures and movement. Yesterday and today you've observed people in various socio-economic positions move through space. Choose two people or moments and replay them in your mind without sound. One at a time, describe the body language you saw. Think about what it may have taught you or revealed to you.

17. During/after art museum visit (from Kit White's *101 Things to Learn in Art School*)

- Choose a room, wall or two objects near each other. All media are delivery systems for content. What is the content in this room/on this wall/in these two objects?
- In your time in the museum, find a way to elaborate on this more specifically owing to what you see in one particular room or object of your choosing:

Art cannot feed us, shelter us, or cure physical illness, but it is critical to our sense of our own humanity. It embodies our ideas and sensibilities. Art...investigates the culture that produces it and examines it in relation to other cultures and other histories. Art is the means by which a culture describes itself to itself.

- Choose a room, wall or two objects near each other.

Each generation gets to reinvent art in its own image. Because art is an act of description, it is inevitable that what it describes will reflect every generation's bias of the moment. It is not a strict reflection of a time but an interpretation. If you had to translate what you see on one wall into graffiti or slogans or memes, what might they look like or say? Feel free to use pictures and words to answer. Don't fear I'm asking

you to demonstrate artistic talent. (Your artistry/artistic gifts are not necessary to engage well with this task; that would simply be icing on an already filling and inviting cake.)

- d. Choose a painting or sculpture.

All marks, smudges, pictures take on a life of their own and accrue meaning under the gaze of a viewer. Viewers activate the thing perceived. The makers of this work cannot control our reaction to it. How might the reaction differ according to the nationality, sexual orientation, and age of three different viewers. First, describe the background of three different viewers. Then, for each, guess at what they might see in the painting.

- e. Art can be anything. It is not defined by medium or the means of its production, but by a collective sense that it belongs to a category of experience we have come to know as “art.” Use this abstract idea in a page long entry about walking around this museum. (This instruction is a bit vague and open-ended so you can see what bubbles up for you).