

CHAPTER 2

Phase One: Preparing to Leave

This chapter focuses on the thoughts and feelings of students who are preparing to leave their home countries to study in the United States.

Next Stop: USA—A Student from Japan Prepares to Study Abroad

The first narrative shows how a Japanese student decides to do what Begley (2006) sees as being an important adaptation strategy, that of anticipating and preparing to meet the challenges of living abroad.

I studied English in Japan for many years, but I was so worried about coming to the United States! Could I understand American English in real communication? Could I understand lecture? I worried a lot. So, I decided to prepare.

First, I studied English intensively for one year in Japan. I took oral communication class and writing class at a language institute. My teachers—all American. That helped me a lot, I think, to understand Americans' natural speech.

On weekends I recorded and watched American TV dramas, movies, comedy shows, and news. I watched some of these programs with my older sister, who studied English in America, and my friend who wanted to go to America too. We watched programs without Japanese subtitles. Then we talked about the show. Then, we watched the show with subtitles to see if we understood. I also wrote down new vocabulary in my notebook and looked them up in my computer dictionary or asked my American teacher. This helped me to understand spoken English on television, and my vocabulary became larger.

I also used Internet chat room to have conversation with Americans and people from other countries. I asked American and Asian university students questions about their life in United States and their courses—for example, what they study and how hard it is. I had fun, too! Sometimes we talked about traveling to interesting places in the U.S. or about good movies.

Sometimes I used Google to search for information about American life. I sometimes, how do I say, searched without a reason. I just typed in something like *conversation eating dinner American home*. I learned a lot this way about American life. For example, I learned about American dinner invitations and conversation topics at a dinner table.

The hardest thing for me is writing papers in English. I was afraid about writing. So, I decided to keep diary. I used to keep diary in Japanese. So, I decided to write every day in my English diary. At first it was so hard. I only wrote few sentences, sometimes just words. But, after few months, I can write a lot. I can now think in English. Some of my Asian friends struggle to write and have to translate a lot.

I am very happy I prepared to come to United States. I have good grades, and I can communicate with Americans. But, it wasn't so easy at first. I had some problems. But, I have less problems maybe, I think, because I prepared. ■



Anticipating Paradise—A Student from Niger Has Lofty Expectations

The second narrative illustrates the kinds of expectations that some international students have about living in the United States. As this student's narrative illustrates, some students might have an overly idealistic perception about what life is going to be like.

Before I came to America I thought that everything would be easy for me. You know, I was thinking that life would be like paradise. I would have my government scholarship to pay my tuition and living expenses, and I thought it would be easy to get a job, to buy a car. My idea of paradise is that things like money would be available and that life would be good in general, just like you see in a movie, you know. When I saw American movies, I thought that these people are living in a paradise. It gave me the feeling that living in America is easy because it is easy to get a job, make money, and everything is cheaper and life is wonderful.

I thought that life would not be as tough as in my country. I thought the media I saw in Niger was representative of America. It makes life in Africa look harder comparatively.

But, in reality life is not easier. You simply have different problems. It is easier to make money. I got a job at the university cafeteria and another job at the African Studies library. I can save money and send it to my family in Africa. And, I bought a used car. But, the social aspect of life is missing and everything has become about money. Having riches is nothing if you are not happy.

Nobody told me that when I come here, I will be lonely and have hectic times. Nobody told me I will be depressed and miss Africa and miss my family so much. I call them often.

So, really, America is not a paradise like I thought. I had the paradise idea, but now I realize I was mistaken. ■

Sad Farewell—A Student from Indonesia Leaves His Extended Family



For some international students leaving home and family and friends is very difficult to do. The next narrative illustrates how sad it is for a student from Indonesia to say goodbye to his family. This student won a scholarship from the Fulbright Foundation to study for a master's degree in the United States, and he knew he would be away from Indonesia for two years.

I grew up in a big family in a small town in central Java. My family consists of eight children, and I am the third son. My father was an elementary school's teacher and my mother just a housewife. My family just a simple and humble family, but we really enjoy our brotherhood. We share everything together. When I was a little boy, I always slept in one bed with two or three of my brothers. We eat in one big plate together.

I never been lonely. But, when the time came and I must go to America to study, I can say that it was the worst moment in my life. I feel very lonely and sad. I wanted to stay in Java in my heart, but I cannot say anything.

The night before my departure, all people in my neighborhood gathered in my house to say goodbye to me and we eat together as a farewell party. Everyone had a good time. They laugh and eat. I also laugh, but in my heart I cry.

The next day, all my family, my aunt, my cousins, all of them 20 people came to the bus station to say goodbye to me. At that time I hoped the bus is late so I could spend the time longer with all my beloved family.

When the bus came, that's the time for me to leave my all-beloved family. I hugged each of them and they give me their last words to me. My father said, "This is the best way for you to lift up the name of our family and don't worry about your brothers. I still able to afford them." My mother just said, "Don't leave the God behind." I could not say anything. I just tried to be strong man and smile to everyone. I asked my two brothers to study hard and not worry about money. "I will send you money from America every month," I said, although I didn't know how will my life in America be. I just wanted them not to worry about me.

When the bus moved, I wave my hand to them, and I still saw my sister wipe her tears from her cheek. That time I didn't want to leave my family. I also feel that I run away from my responsibility to my brothers and family. I could only sit on the bus and try not to cry. ■