

Coping with Culture shock and Corona

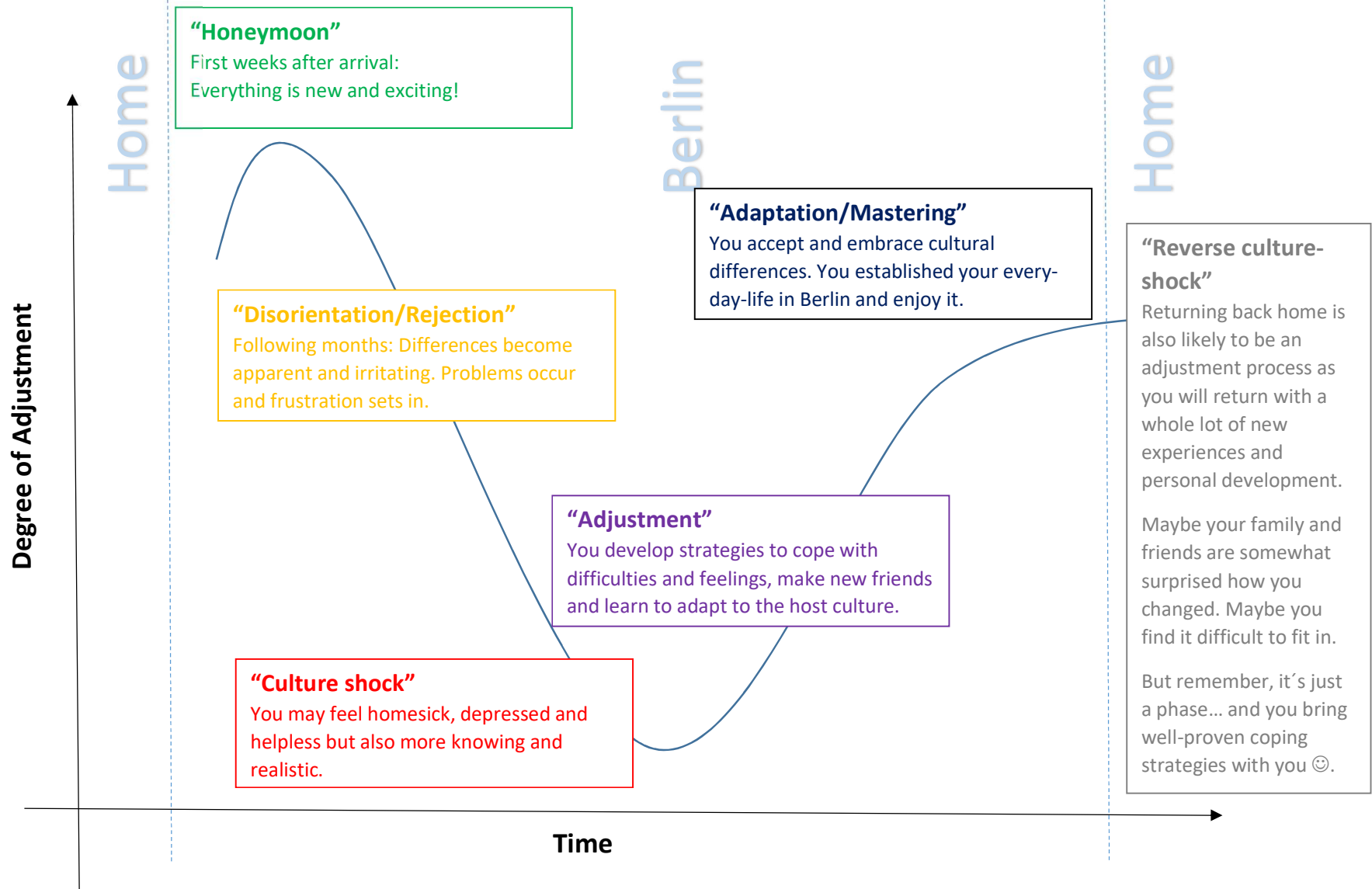
Challenges that you may face when studying in Berlin and how to manage them.

Certainly, you've worked hard to get into one of our study programs and have high expectations on/about your stay at HWR Berlin/our university. Maybe it's your first time abroad or you have travelled to Germany before as a tourist. But either way, it's very likely that you anticipate having a good time in Berlin with interesting new experiences and cultural insights, personal and academic progress and a booster for your career prospects.

However, as settling in a new cultural environment involves quite some challenges in almost all aspects of life, it is not so uncommon to experience difficult and sometimes overwhelming situations and feelings. This experience is normal and shared by most if not all people who have travelled and lived abroad. Additionally, the ongoing corona-pandemic can make adjustment to life in Berlin somewhat more puzzling.

The following information is supposed to give you orientation on typical "symptoms" of the adjustment process. It provides you with ideas for helpful coping strategies and information on where to turn to for support.

Understanding what happens – Culture shock is only one phase in the adjustment process



What are typical challenges?

Biological Challenges: Differences in climate conditions (weather, temperature, daylight, season change), time zone or food may have an impact on your physical and mental well-being. Don't be surprised to feel out of rhythm or less energetic the less sunlight you get.

Academic Challenges – Getting used to the academic culture in Germany and at our university may need adjustment. Communication with peers and professors, dynamics of class interaction, understanding the specific requirements for assignments, scientific writing or getting used to online-courses are just some aspects of academic life you may find different to what you are used to.

Mental/Social Challenges: The pace and rhythm of the Berlin way of life may be a challenge. A new daily routine and a new social network have to be established. This may be more stressful and tiring than expected. You may experience feelings of frustration and isolation, difficulties with communication in social situations, mental or emotional distress.

And what helps with coping?



Check your Attitude: See your time in Berlin as a cultural learning experience. Come with an open mind, an attitude of curiosity, bring a sense of humor and have fun to explore and discover your new place of life.

Make the first move: To make the transition easier, remember not to wait for people around you to make the first move, but start reaching out right away: buy a map of the city and become familiar with your own neighbourhood; find out where the closest bank, post office, supermarket, gym and park is. Get in touch with other students.

Improve your knowledge of German: Though Berlin is a city where you can get along with English most of the time, learning German will be helpful to get in touch with the “average” Berliner and gain more insight into everyday life in Germany. Start with some of the basic names and phrases that appear on signs, menus, etc. Engage in a German course and/or a language tandem (see <https://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/hwr-berlin/service-facilities/hwr-berlin-language-centre/>)

By the way: jobs and work placements can be found more easily with knowledge of German.

Be patient and take good care of yourself: Alongside with the time and effort you will spend on your study programme, the adjustment process that you are undergoing, costs quite some additional energy. Make sure that all your different needs and goals get their time in a balanced way. Getting enough sleep, eating good food, doing sports, relaxing, spending time outside (daylight ☺), socializing and discovering your new place of residence are no “nice-to-haves-if-there-is-some-spare-time-eventually”. They are essential for coping not only with the biological challenges (as described above), but will also stabilize your mood and mental condition. And be patient – the adjustment process may take several months.

A well-structured daily routine and a written plan for the weeks along the semester are helpful for most students. As does a tolerant and understanding attitude towards oneself if things don't always work out perfectly. You are a learner in this new environment and mistakes and unforeseeable obstacles are very likely to occur.

Reflect on your goals and experiences You've certainly come to Berlin with high ambitions. Maybe your family back home has even higher expectations as to your academic achievement. For some students this can sum up to very high pressure and subsequent stress symptoms, especially if the situation turns out to be different from what they expected. These stress symptoms (e.g. sleeping disturbances, concentration problems, test anxiety) can themselves impair academic performance. Reflecting your experiences on a regular basis (e.g. by writing a journal) can help to find out which of your plans and strategies work out, which should be changed and where it might be more realistic to adjust goals and expectations. Also, sharing experiences with other students or talking to a psychological counsellor may be helpful.

Get information and support and share it When you come to Berlin and start your study programme, you will be confronted with a lot of new impressions and information and a need to "filter" the most important ones for the start. As you know now, you're in the "honeymoon phase" and "problem talk" very likely seems rather irrelevant to you. This is all fine - just make sure, that you remember where to get information and support when needed. The following links are supposed to give you some ideas of useful resources. If you feel that one of your study mates is in need, give support yourself and share these information. And don't hesitate to ask.

HWR Berlin offers

- General Studies Programme: improve your study skills with the academic writing course and other extra-curricular seminars
Overview: <https://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/study/additional-study-options/general-studies/>
Courses: <https://www.hwr-berlin.de/studium/weitere-studienangebote/studium-generale/alle-kurse/>
- Counselling Services at HWR Berlin (e.g. Psychological Counselling, Counselling for students with disability):
<https://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/study/counselling-services/>

- Scholarships and awards for international students <https://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/study/studying-at-the-hwr-berlin/scholarships-and-awards/>
- <https://stellenticket.hwr-berlin.de/en/welcome/>

Berliner Studierendenwerk takes care of all aspects of student life and for all students in Berlin regardless from which university they come - from the basic needs (housing, dining, financing your studies/student jobs) to counselling (social, psychological, academic writing, studying with disability) and cultural/socializing:
<https://www.stw.berlin/en/international.html>

Corona-Regulations:

Keep yourself updated on <https://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/news/coronavirus/> and <https://www.stw.berlin/en/organisation/themen/corona-faq.html>

Enjoy, look back and be proud of what you have mastered so far: It's typically human to focus on problems and feel insecure or anxious especially when confronted with a new situation – that's how we survived since the stone age. But for our well-being it is as important (and so much more pleasant) to be aware of and enjoy good moments, as well as to celebrate our achievements. Take your time to do so before you tackle the next challenge!

We wish you a great time at HWR Berlin with a lot of cultural insights, academic and personal development!

Further information:

Culture

<https://www.dw.com/en/typically-german-a-cartoonists-perspective/a-46179528>

<https://www.study-in-germany.de/blog/our-bloggers/>

Culture shock & Coping

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-ef-xhC_bU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPfB6GijM9Q>

<https://studierendenwerkfreiburg.wordpress.com/2017/09/20/what-is-culture-shock-how-can-you-deal-with-it/>

<https://blogs.flinders.edu.au/student-health-and-well-being/2018/03/16/dealing-culture-shock/>

<https://studyworkabroad.ca/dealing-with-culture-shock/>