

School Year Abroad

Some tips on settling in

Taking a year or term in a UK school can be a **fantastic experience** for you and will help you improve your English massively, in order to help you settle in and make the most of your time in the UK, we've put together a few tips.

If you're going to a new school in a different country, you not only have the usual things to worry about – making friends, adjusting to a new timetable, workload, teachers, and so on – but you also have to get used to speaking a different language, living with a host family in a different culture. All of this can be a bit overwhelming so we've put together a few tips to help you settle as quickly as possible and to make the most of your UK experience.

1. Get your English as good as it can be before you go

Take any opportunity you get to practise your English before you travel. Although your English needs to be at a good level to be accepted onto our programme, if you are not confident in your English skills this might make you feel isolated when you come to England.

Take opportunities to speak (with a native speaker if possible) and listen to English whilst still at home.

Watch British television and films. Watching television and films produced and set in Britain is a good way to pick up on UK culture, customs, manners, humour as well as helping with your language skills including informal spoken English.

2. Read and understand as much as you can about UK culture and manners

As well as practising your English as much as possible, it would be good to read as much you can about the UK and its customs before you arrive. This will help you settle more quickly as you'll know what to expect.

The English take manners and polite behaviour very seriously – your host will expect this and although it might be a bit alien to you it's definitely worth trying to adapt to help with settling in.

Not having perfect English is not a problem (you're here to improve your English) but it's important to understand British etiquette and manners. You may sometimes unintentionally upset people by things that you (don't) say or do.

Here are a few helpful hints about British manners and expectations of behaviour:

a. Please, thank you and sorry

Being polite is always a good way to start. "Please", "thank you" and "sorry" are three words that British people use quite often.

b. Punctuality

Most people in the United Kingdom like to be on time. If you are meeting up with friends, it is never polite to be late. However, if you are going to be late, it's very important that you let the person know – eg let your host know that you are coming home late for dinner.

c. Queueing

British people like to queue. Never try to jump a queue because you might get yourself into an awkward situation. Ignoring the queue is something you will not get away with as usually someone will speak up!

d. Table manners

If you are eating a meal with a group of people, such as your host family or a groups of friends, it is considered polite to wait to start eating until everyone has their food. Do not put your elbows on the table. Do not use your mobile phone. Mealtimes are a social occasion for many families – a time to catch up on what they have done that day or what they plan to do tomorrow, or at the weekend. Don't rush away from the table if there is an opportunity to chat. An offer to help tidy up after a meal will always be welcomed.

e. Holding the door

Most people hold the door for you and they expect you to do the same for others.

3. Read and understand as much as you can about the town where you will be based before you arrive

It would be good to find out a bit about the town you are staying in. Your host family will be able to help you get your bearings when you arrive but if you have taken the time to do some research then you will feel settled more quickly.

It's good, if possible, to arrive a few days before you're due at school so that you explore the local area a bit before your term starts.

4. Pack sensibly

British weather can be very variable so you'll need to pack a variety of clothing.

Before you head to the UK, make sure that you're equipped with everything you need for life at your new school. In particular, this means packing sensible clothes for the UK climate, which may take some adjusting to if you're coming from a warmer climate.

5. Your first day at school

Your host family will either take you to school on your first day or they will show you how to get there in the days after you arrive before starting school. Having a school routine will give your days some structure and stability, as well as keeping you busy enough that you won't have time to miss home too much.

6. Talk to as many people as possible, not just international students

Once you arrive at your new school, try to talk to as many people as you can, both students and teachers. This will enable you to make friends quickly, which will immediately help you start to adjust to life in the UK and will help to alleviate any feelings of homesickness.

It may be tempting only to talk to the other international students, particularly those from your own country, as they are going through the same thing as you, and you have your country in common and can converse in your mother tongue. However, it's really good not to get yourself into an international student enclave if you can help it; do try to mix with students from the UK as much as you can, as this will enable your English skills to come on in leaps and bounds and make you feel more at home in the UK.

7. Keep busy

Keeping up with hobbies or sports that you do at home or taking up a new one whilst you are in the UK is a great way of making friends. All schools in the UK offer after school activities – in a range of activities – from sports to drama, music or other subject related clubs.

8. Get into the right mind-set

Think positive!

When you're in a foreign country, you'll naturally be comparing everything with how it's done at home, at least at first. This could be anything from food to public transport to television to the climate, and the temptation may be to compare it unfavourably with your own country.

Being positive is the key to adjusting to life in a new country. Try to keep an open mind and you might end up loving the way things are done in the UK!

9. Coping with homesickness

No matter how busy you keep yourself, no matter how many new friends you make, and no matter how much you enjoy your new environment, some feelings of homesickness are inevitable.

It's a good idea to have some coping mechanisms to stop these feelings having too much of an impact.

- Communicate regularly with your parents, family and friends back home.
- Take some things from home to comfort you, such as favourite books, photographs of friends and family.
- Communication is key - talk to your host family, your mentor or a tutor at school if you're feeling down or overwhelmed;
- It may also help to remind yourself that this is only temporary: Try to make the most of it and enjoy it, in the knowledge that this isn't forever.