

Storytelling Guide

What we look for:

First-person narratives that focus on a single experience or a set of closely related experiences. The experience(s) should reveal something about your host culture that is surprising or interesting.

Questions we ask and common mistakes:

Does the story ...

Adhere to a first-person narrative form?

Avoid:

- Essays or news reports about a culture
- Features that tell a story but that don't incorporate you, the author

Offer cultural insight?

Avoid:

- Travel oriented stories that talk only about destinations
- Personal-growth or adventure stories that have nothing to do with your host culture

Have a “narrative arc?” Build toward a climax?

Avoid:

- Blog-style stories that simply chronicle an experience without an “a-ha!” moment
- Summaries of your entire abroad experience

Include vivid sensory descriptions—sights, sounds, smells, tastes?

Avoid:

- Telling your thoughts and feelings. Show them!
- Broad, unfounded cultural generalizations

Start with a bang?

Avoid:

- Starting your story on the airplane!
- Leading with abstract background information

Incorporate contextual background information/research when necessary?

Avoid:

- Assuming your reader is familiar with the history of your host country
- Impeding the narrative flow
- Hasty conjectures: i.e., this people are this way because of that historical event

Have a satisfying ending?

Avoid:

- Clichés: i.e., ending your story at sunset
- Forcing a conclusion for tidiness' sake

Storytelling Worksheet

A memorable abroad experience that you think would make for a good story:

Cultural insight you gained from this experience:

Your "a-ha!" moment:

Sensory details about the setting of your story:

Details about the "characters":

Where/how you would start the story:

Where/how you would end the story:

Background research to include:
