APPENDIX
CONTINUING YOUR LEARNING

The exercises in this appendix are meant for you to do after you finish your training and go out to your site. Once there, you become immersed in the culture, living and working in it, puzzling everyday with some cultural enigma or other. These activities encourage you to step back for a moment and once more study the culture deliberately and systematically. They complement the workbook exercises and provide you with techniques for studying culture that can be repeated and referred to often during your service and when you return home.

Of the gladdest moments in human life, methinks, is the departure upon a distant journey into unkown lands. Shaking off with one mighty effort the fetters of Habit, the leaden weight of Routine, the cloak of many Cares, and the slavery of Home, man feels once more happy. The blood flows with the fast circulation of childhood. Afresh dawns the morn of life.

—Sir Richard Burton, The Devil Drives

1—USING CULTURAL INFORMANTS

One way to continue learning about your host culture is to identify people who understand it and can explain it to you. In general, you look for information of three kinds:

1. important facts or textbook information about the culture;
2. ways to behave and not behave in various situations; and
3. reasons for host country people's behavior or reactions.

You may need to approach different informants for these different kinds of information. In most Peace Corps posts, you have your choice of four types of potential informants:

1. host country nationals;
2. other Peace Corps Volunteers;
3. other Americans (not PCVs); and
4. third-country nationals.

You might assume that host country nationals will always be your best resources, but this may not necessarily be true. They may know the do's and don'ts of host country behavior, but not all may know many facts about their culture, nor *why* host country people behave the way they do. For this information, you may be better off asking foreigners or that handful of host country people who have studied their culture.

GUIDELINES

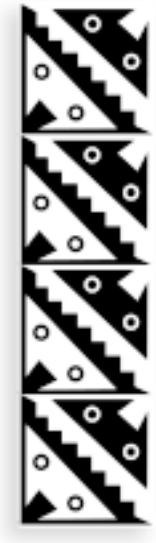
In dealing with informants, keep the following general guidelines in mind:

1. Critically evaluate the opinions of PCVs, other Americans, and third-country nationals who seem especially negative or bitter about the host culture.
2. Select people who have been in the country long enough to have successfully built relationships and have some perspective.

3. Select host country people who are somewhat representative of their country:
   - Avoid those who may be too Westernized, or at least consider their Western bias in evaluating their comments.
   - Remember that people who speak English may not be representative of the general population.
   - Your Peace Corps trainers or other HCN staff also may not be especially representative (though they may be knowledgeable and understand where you're coming from).
4. Talk to a variety of informants, a cross section, so you don't get the views of just one social class, one ethnic group, only men, the college educated, etc.
5. Try to corroborate what you've heard from one informant with the views of at least one other person.
6. Try to select informants who are objective, able to distinguish between their own personal experience and what is true of the culture in general. Otherwise, *you* have to do the distinguishing.

It may be interesting for you to see how the views of the four types of informants compare by asking each of them the same question. These are some suggestions:

1. Why do host country people _____ ?
2. How should I treat counterparts at work?
3. Someone asked me to lend them money. What should I do?
4. Is it okay in this culture to _____ ?



2—JOINING IN

Perhaps the most natural way of learning about the culture around you is to actively participate in it, to become involved in the life of your community and its people. Much of this involvement happens automatically as you go about living and working in your village or city, but you can also make a conscious effort to become involved in community activities outside your work and meet people you ordinarily would not. The easiest way to become involved is through a friend or host family member who is already engaged in an activity that might interest you. Below are some suggestions:

1. Donate your time and services as a volunteer to any organization, public service, or institution that accepts volunteers, such as any of these:
   - a hospital or clinic;
   - nursing home;
   - a local charity.
2. Offer to teach English in any venue where it seems appropriate.
3. Offer to teach any other skill you have that people might be interested in learning.
4. Become a member of the congregation of a local church.
5. Join a church group in that church.
6. Join or start a choir or some other singing group that meets regularly.
7. Join or start a group that plays music.
8. Offer to tutor students at the local school, or start a tutoring program.
9. Join an existing women or men's club, or start one

10. Join a local sports team.
11. Join any interest group that meets regularly—a sewing class, pottery class, poetry group, self-defense class, bird-watching club, video club—or help to start one.
12. Help to organize a special event such as these:
    - a fund raiser;
    - a craft fair;
    - a beautification project;
    - a painting project;
    - a construction project;
    - a local library cleanup;
    - an environmental cleanup.
13. Offer to help out with a local boys' or girls' club.
14. Join an organization affiliated with your workplace.
15. Help to organize field trips for school children, people in a nursing home, or a boys' or girls' club.

If you're at a loss about getting started, ask other people how they did it.

3—KEEPING A JOURNAL

Men and women confronting change are never fully prepared for the demands of the moment, but they are strengthened to meet uncertainty if they can claim a history of improvisation and a habit of reflection.

—Mary Catherine Bateson
Peripheral Visions

Many of the other techniques for continued learning presented in this module imply the regular use of a journal. Keeping a journal provides you the opportunity to reflect on your experience and to stay in tune with your emotions and feelings, and to refer back to when you decide to explain your experience to an audience back home. A journal illustrates the work-in-progress that is your Peace Corps experience, recording your deepening understanding of the culture around you and the changes that are taking place in you as you adjust to your host country. It is a record of your struggle to come to grips and make your peace with the strange, foreign reality that slowly becomes your home.

Most PCVs find they use journals for a number of different purposes:

- to make random notes;
- to think out loud (on paper);
- to record the events of the day;
- to record a conversation;
- to record observations, random or targeted;
- to record impressions and reactions;
- to relate events and experiences (to tell a story);
- to record thoughts and emotions;
- to record realizations and conclusions;
- to write poetry or fiction;
- to talk to themselves.

THREE COMMON MISTAKES

1. If you associate writing in your journal with an hour of serious thinking and literate prose, chances are you'll be too daunted to ever begin. Start simple, recording a few thoughts, ideas, questions in a 10-to-15-minute respite at the end of the day.

2. Don't think of your reader or your writing style. Write for yourself, not posterity; otherwise, you edit too much and stop the free flow of your thoughts and emotions while they're happening.

3. Don't delay your writing for more than a day. It's only when you haven't written for two weeks or so that you find yourself spending two hours, feeling exhausted and negative towards what has become a chore. It's also better to write when things are fresh in your mind, and you can recall details.

If you haven't started already, in a notebook where you write nothing else, begin writing. For the first few weeks, just describe what's been happening. It's automatic and customary to interpret and categorize, but that can come later as you reflect on what you've written in light of what you now know about the culture. By their very nature, frustrating experiences are only understood in retrospect, upon reflection and analysis—and cultural adjustment is full of just such experiences.

You may want to organize your journal in this way:

Observation/Description	**Opinion/Analysis/Judgement**
On this side of the journal, describe what you saw. Anything that strikes you as different, funny, weird, sad, etc. is appropriate. Feelings, emotions, judgments should not be expressed on this side. Just stick to the facts.	*On this side of the journal, describe your thoughts, feelings, etc. about the event. Then try to analyze why you feel this way. What in your cultural makeup may be affecting how you feel? How is it different from whatever values or assumptions may be at work in the new culture?*

4—LEARNING FROM THE MEDIA AND THE ARTS

In every country, a great deal about the culture is revealed by the media, which includes the following:

- **Books/Poetry;**
- **Newspapers;**
- **Magazines;**
- **Radio;**
- **Television;**
- **Movies/Theater;**
- **Songs and music.**

Your ability to use the media to learn about the culture depends on how well you speak and read the language, but even if your local language skills are minimal, you have some options.

I. BOOKS/POETRY

1. Try to find English translations of the most famous works of the best known authors in your country. You may be able to find a translation locally, or ask your family back home to look for one.

2. If no translations are available, ask an informant to tell you about some of the great works of literature in his or her country, including the plot and important themes of these works.

3. Go to the local bookstore (ideally with an informant) and look over the selection. What books are the most popular? Which subjects have the most books devoted to them? What subjects aren't covered or are barely covered?

II. NEWSPAPERS

1. Does the country have an English language paper? If so, read it regularly for insight into numerous aspects of the country and culture.

2. If no local English language paper exists, look with an informant at other newspapers and see which stories get the most space and what is relegated to the inside. What different sections does the newspaper have, and who is the intended audience for each one?

III. MAGAZINES

1. Read any local English language magazines you can find.
2. If none exist, sit down with an informant and "read" a host country magazine from time to time to find out what topics are discussed and what is said.
3. On your own, study the advertisements and pictures in magazines.
4. Go to the magazine section of your local newsstand or bookstore and see what kinds of magazines are there. Which topics or areas of interest have the most magazines devoted to them? What topics are missing?

IV. RADIO

1. Listen to any locally or regionally produced programs in English.
2. Listen to the radio with an informant. Select different types of programs—news broadcasts, public affairs programs, dramas, interviews, etc.—and ask your informant to relate the content. Ask him or her which are the most popular programs and why. Ask who listens to the radio and when they listen.

V. TELEVISION

1. Watch locally or regionally produced television, whether you understand the language or not. (It's an excellent way to improve your language skills.) What kind of shows are the most common? What kinds of stories, people, events are depicted?
2. Watch TV with an informant and ask questions about what you're seeing. In dramas, how can you tell who are the good guys and the bad guys?

3. If American shows are shown in country, watch them with host country people and notice their reactions. Ask them why they like these shows.

4. Notice who watches which shows. Does the family watch any shows together? Which do they never watch together? Who decides what to watch?

VI. MOVIES & THEATER PRODUCTION

1. Go to any locally or regionally made movies or theater production and notice the stories and themes. Notice audience reactions. Which scenes do they enjoy the most? Which scenes get the biggest reactions from them? What qualities do the heroes or the villains have? Who makes up the audience?

2. Go to American or other foreign-made films and notice audience reactions. Ask people why they come to these films. Ask them which films they like better: American / western-made or locally made. Why?

VII. SONGS & MUSIC

1. Listen to local or regionally produced songs with an informant and ask him or her to tell you what the lyrics are about. What kind of music and songs are the most popular?

2. Listen to American or foreign music with your informant and ask what he or she thinks of it. Who are the most popular local and foreign singers? Why? Is American music popular? Which artists?

5—CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Another way to learn about culture is through your own critical incidents, moments you remember because of their emotional intensity. You may have gotten furious at the post office, for example, because people kept cutting in line, or maybe you were shouted at on the bus for something you still don't understand. On their own, these incidents don't necessarily teach you anything about the country or culture, but if you reflect on and analyze them, you almost always learn something from them. Here is a four-step method for deconstructing a critical incident.

1. Recollect the incident after you have calmed down, but not so long afterwards that you forget the details.

2. Write down all you can remember about it: what you did and said; what others did and said.

3. Get more information. The easiest way is to relate the incident to anyone you think can help you understand it better, including, if possible, anyone else who was involved in it. Another way is to revisit the scene where the incident occurred, in an observer role, and see if you can find clues to explain what happened.

4. Review the incident from the perspective of this new knowledge and see if you now understand it. You may not understand it completely, but you may understand it better or understand parts of it. And record this entire process in your journal.

6—STUDYING AN INSTITUTION*

An excellent way to learn about a culture is to study a specific institution, whether a private, commercial, educational, charitable, or government enterprise. A sample of institutions in different fields are listed below; you may be able to identify still others in your community:

Agriculture—an animal farm; produce farm; banana, cocoa, or coffee plantation; ag extension office; a retailer or wholesaler of agricultural supplies; distributor of meat or produce.

Arts—a theater company; community theater; an art gallery; a museum of art; an orchestra or some other professional music ensemble; art or textile coop.

Communications—a radio or TV station; newspaper plant; magazine publisher; movie theater.

Educational—a day-care center; nursery; kindergarten; primary school; middle school; high school; vocational school; private academy.

Government—an agency or department; a court; the office of a legislator or government official; any part of the military; any public works department or branch.

Health and Welfare—a hospital; clinic; home for the aged; drug rehabilitation center; physician's office; health education center; an AIDS clinic.

Manufacturing—an assembly plant; a manufacturing plant or factory; food or mineral processing plant.

Public Services—a library; recreational center; police station; public park.

Religion—a church; mosque; temple; monastery; convent; seminary; church run orphanage, coop, or recreation center or school.

Retailing—a department store, pharmacy; bookstore; newsstand; grocery store; restaurant; cafe; corner store; shoestore; office supply store; furniture store; etc.

It's best to choose an institution with which someone you know is connected. You need the institution's cooperation for a study that may take several weeks. Once you begin, try to be as systematic as possible, recording your results in a notebook set up for this purpose. Expect to do both interviewing and observing. The topics and sample questions on the next page may help get you started.

Purpose— Why was the institution begun? What purposes does it serve?

Ownership— Who owns the institution? How did they get to be owners? Why do they want to own such an institution? What impact does their ownership have on the product or service?

Clients— Who are the clients? How does the institution get clients? Does it have enough, too many, too few?

Management— Who runs the institution? How did this person get this position? How is the institution organized for management purposes? Who reports to whom (request or draw an organizational chart)?

Capital Resources— How much money does the institution have? What are its annual expenses? What reserves, debts does it have? What is its annual revenue, profit or loss?

Raw Materials— What raw materials does it need? Where does it get them? How does it get them to the facility, store, or plant? What do they cost? What does transportation cost? Does it keep a large inventory? Where? How does the institution select its suppliers?

Building/ Plant Office— Where is the institution housed? How much does this place cost to lease, or what did it cost to buy? Who maintains it? What does it cost for upkeep, for insurance? How was the location chosen?

Equipment— What equipment does the institution have? How was it obtained? How much did it cost? How is it kept in working order? How much does it cost to maintain?

Supplies— What supplies does the institution need to operate? What do these cost? What's the source? Do other suppliers exist? How is the decision made as to whom to buy from?

Workers—	How many people work here? What qualifications do they need? How big is the payroll (weekly, monthly)? How did most of these people get their jobs? What benefits do they get? What do these benefits cost the institution per employee?
Procedures—	How do people learn what they have to do? Are procedures many or few? Who sets the procedures?
Distributors—	How does the institution handle distribution? What are the costs? How does it select a distributor?
Licenses & Permits—	Does this institution need official approval to operate? How is it obtained? How much do these permits, etc. cost? How often do they have to be renewed? Who decides whether an institution gets one and on what basis is this decision made?
Competitors—	Who are the competitors? What does the institution do to stay competitive or be ahead of the competition?

** J. Daniel Hess. The Whole World Guide to Cultural Learning, reprinted with permission of Intercultural Press, Inc., Yarmouth, ME. Copyright, 1994.*