The High School Happiness Book
MAKING THE MEMORIES GREAT!

includes
Sophie’s Tips
Sophia....

Grew up in Germany and went to a ‘normal’ primary school. She changed to a private school, then completed 3 years at a tough German grammar school. She came to England for Year 10 and completed GCSEs. She moved to South England for 6th form and took A Levels. Sophia now studies International Law in the Netherlands.

Juliet....

Grew up in England and lived in Europe and Asia for 25 years. She has been a high school teacher in Germany, head of an international school and a boarding school teacher. She has managed several of the most well know exchange organisations in Europe. This year, she took some time out to learn Chinese and teach in China.

Happy to share the experience!
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Many exchange students are happy, some are unhappy, some aren't as happy as they could be.

We want you to be as happy as you possibly can.
Happiness is something you do...

...it doesn't just come to you and it doesn't depend on luck!
What does happiness mean to you?

Try filling in the mind map.

Is it easy for you to fill in?
Are you satisfied with your result?

If you answered yes to both of those questions, you are among about 3% of people your age who feel this way.

Most people find it very difficult to define happiness. So how do you know when you are happy?
Here are some popular thoughts about happiness:

Would you agree with any of those statements?
What would you add?
Why is all this so important?

If you are not so happy in your home country, that is just your life, so it is easier to accept. You probably tend not to question it...you just make the best of things and keep going.

If you do not feel happy in England, it is harder to accept and that can make you feel even unhappier. If you are not happy here, you could question whether it was right to come. You may find the reasons for your unhappiness in the family or school you got. Because it is not your ‘real’ life, you see alternatives and could spend the whole year considering going home or just hanging on and counting the days. You may even decide to go home and regret it afterwards.

You can be sure that, consciously or subconsciously, you will compare life in your country to life here. This is a particular challenge if you spend time with other people from your home country and you compare together.

If you think about your happiness and compare consciously, the result will certainly be more constructive and positive. We created this book to help you think about happiness alone as well as with your host family or your area manager.
How happy were you in your home country?

1. Extremely Unhappy
2. Very Unhappy
3. Quite Unhappy
4. A Little Unhappy
5. OK
6. A Little Happy
7. Quite Happy
8. Very Happy
9. Extremely Happy
10. Happy Enough to Burst
What was it that made you this happy or unhappy in your home country?
How happy do you expect to be in this country?

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Happiness Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extremely Unhappy</td>
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<td>Extremely Happy</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Happy Enough to Burst</td>
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Place a sticker at your expected happiness level.
If you answered that you will be happier here, why do you expect that?

If you answered that you will be equally happy, why is that?

If you answered that you will be less happy, why will that be?

Try to find at least 5 reasons!
Factors you think affect your happiness could be ‘internal’ or ‘external’.

For example, If you think you will be happier because you will try harder in school, that is internal, it comes from inside you. If you think you will be as happy because you are a generally positive person, that is internal too.

If you think you will be happier because school will be easier, that is external, it comes from outside you. If you believe you will be unhappier because your family lives a long way from town, that is external too.

If you think you will be happier because you will have more friends, you would have to ask yourself if it is because of something you will do or because of something other people will do.

Get it?
Are the factors you named internal or external?

Look back at your list of 5 reasons on page 16. You wrote why you will be happier, as happy or unhappier here.

Sort the reasons into internal and external.

Internal  OR  External
External factors don’t matter....
at least not as much as we expect them to.
Don’t believe us?

Would a) winning the lottery or b) having a car accident and suffering life changing injuries make you happier?

Of course, most people assume the answer is a).

Careful, scientific research shows that 3 months to a year after the win/accident, the happiness rating of the accident victims is generally higher!

If you want to find out more about the result and the scientific explanations, just google it. The results could amaze you.

Human beings are surprisingly bad at predicting what will make them happy.

We can’t cover all the research in this small book, but we can without a doubt say that internal factors matter most and recommend that you do some research of your own.
The reaction matters more than the conditions

External factors matter less than the way we react to them. Let’s look at a simple example we all know. Most of us are less happy when it rains......
Some people know how to dance in the rain!

However, some people don’t mind the rain at all and some people even prefer it to sunshine (ok, that is pretty unusual).
Children usually have fun jumping in puddles and only develop a dislike of rain as they get older. The interesting part is that we can choose how we react to weather conditions, just as we influence how we react to other aspects of life.

Some people are instinctively better at understanding that their reaction is much more important than the situation. Other people spend a lot of time moaning that bad things happen to them. For example, you could be angry that you can’t take a particular subject in school or you could see it as an opportunity to take something you have never tried before. You could be sad that you are away from home for your birthday or realise that it will definitely be a birthday you never forget. You can feel isolated as the only exchange student in your school or town or be glad that you won’t be tempted to speak your own language.

An exchange year is the perfect time to learn to dance in the rain!
...and why was that all important?

Because, if you know you can choose to be happy, you then just have to know what you need.
Scientists have found the answer!

For a long time, science concentrated on what goes wrong in people’s heads. The famous psychologists and philosophers such as Freud and Nietzsche looked at disorders, illnesses and tragedies. More scientists are now turning to what is happening when things are going right. The field of Positive Psychology, first defined by Martin Seligman at Penn State University is rapidly growing. You might want to see a TED Talk or read one of the books by this scientist and practitioner who was president of the American Psychological Association.

We have borrowed from the research of positive psychologists and added our in depth knowledge of exchange programmes around the world to create the High School Happiness Formula.
The High School Happiness Formula

Structure + Social Connection + Success = Happiness
In the following chapters, we will apply the

**STRUCTURE**  
**SOCIAL CONNECTION**  
**SUCCESS**

formula (SSS) to all aspects of your time here.  
You will find that you already know a lot of some chapters because you have completed online training.  
In particular, we expect you can already quote the chapter on **STRUCTURE** by heart.
Structure

FREEDOM NEEDS BOUNDARIES.

This might seem like a contradiction, but it is very true in some situations. We can travel around the world, but we all need to go through airport security.

Structure is essential for your exchange organisations for two reasons. Firstly, we need to look after you and secondly, we need to look after the programme. If you could do exactly what you liked, we might not have many families and schools the next year!

Structure is essential for you too. You need to know exactly what you can and can’t do, so that you can concentrate on your opportunities, rather than worrying that you might do something wrong or wasting time finding out how it all works.

Luckily, you already know the contents of this chapter and can skip it at the moment. However, you might need to refer back to it during the year.
The structure is what it is. Don’t fight it, make use of it!
Area Managers

The SEE Head Office is in Oxfordshire. Of course, we can’t look after all our students from there, so we have Area Managers (AMs).

Myths

Your AM is your host family’s best friend.
No, you will find that she (your area manager might be a man, so he, but it would be too complicated to keep writing that) is friendly with your host parents, but she is there for both you and them. Her role is to be neutral.

Your AM comes to your home once a month
No, it is not practical for your AM to come to your home regularly. If you had a problem with your family, it might also not be suitable. Of course, there is always the possibility for her to sit down with you and your family together, if you, they or we think it will be helpful. Area managers hold group or individual meetings once a month. This is generally in a neutral place such as school, a coffee shop or her home.
It is up to you to go to that meeting. You might feel you can miss it because everything is going well. We recommend you go anyway because it is important she gets to know you when everything is fine. That way she can work out more quickly how to help you if something goes wrong. At a group meeting, you can always request an individual meeting at the end.

**You should wait for your AM to contact you.**

No, text her, call her, email her whenever you have a question. The company policy is that emails are answered within 12 hours. Your first answer might just say that it will take a little longer to get the information you need. Of course, she will arrange to see you very quickly, if there is something urgent. We are often in meetings but we always read email, so that is the most reliable way to get a quick response. If you do not see an answer within 12 hours, there may be a technical problem. There is no point contacting the agency in your home country because they don’t have contact with your AM. You can always contact Head Office on info@southenglandexchange.org. It is essential that you read your emails regularly.
INTERNAL/EXTERNAL REMINDER

You can’t choose your AM or the way she is, those are external factors. SEE staff are caring, qualified and experienced, but people don’t always get on with each other. Your AM doesn’t have to be your friend, she is there to listen, help you solve problems and support you in being happy within the structure. She needs your constructive thoughts and actions to find solutions, those are the internal factors. Understanding this is the key to creating the best relationship with your AM.
SCHOOL STRUCTURE

(see also School Social Connections and Success))

The external factors here are the choice of school, the size, location, school year, teachers, subjects available, number of subjects etc. You generally can’t change those elements. Trying to change them or concentrating on what you don’t like would use energy for activity which has no result apart from making you and those around you unhappy.

HELPFUL TO KNOW:

The GCSE, A Level or BTEC curriculum for each subject is more or less the same in every school. All schools have excellent and not so good teachers. All schools can and do send students to the top UK universities. Some schools offer more activities. Students in schools which offer fewer clubs, take part in town activities instead.

Lower school is probably quite similar to in your home country. Year 12 is sure to be very different.
We find Year 11 the most academically challenging because you do all subjects and take GCSEs after just one year. Year 12 is considered the easiest because you can choose the subjects you are good at (this doesn’t guarantee good results….see School Success).

**Uniform and Appearance**

If you are in Year 12, there is no uniform. Your school has a dress code for year 12 and 13, which probably tells you to wear smart casual.....that can be difficult to interpret. Many schools specifically say no ripped jeans, no shorts, no crop tops, no underwear showing. Piercings and unnaturally coloured hair are nearly always forbidden. Some schools are more formal than others, You might find that boys all wear blazers for example. The best thing to do is dress fairly formally for the first day, when you will probably meet the head of school, and then decide what to wear the next day.
Please remember you, as an exchange student,

• Have two lists of rules: The school rules and the programme rules.
• Must follow school rules, even if English students don’t

Here are two examples:
• Schools all forbid students to dye their hair blue, but maybe you have a place in a college here and that college allows coloured hair. It is still forbidden for you to change your hair colour because of the programme rules.

• Your school forbids students to wear shorts, but you see English students do it anyway, so they break the rule. As an exchange student, you may not break the rule, even if others do.

This could seem unfair, but the reality is that we are obliged to write a warning or cancel your programme if you break rules.
I went to an alternative boarding school for a couple of years….I learned to get on with different types of people. Some of them were pretty weird, I must admit.

Next I was in an all girls’ Catholic grammar school in South Germany, talk about contrast! Then I came to a really ‘normal’ high school in England. Looking back, I would say that each situation had advantages. There is no way that one was better than another.

My first day in my English school was confusing. They asked me where my “PE kit” was. I had no clue what this was at that point so I kind of got into trouble when I said I didn’t have one. It turns out I did have what I would have just called my “sports clothes” but by that point it was too late:) Mistakes like these happen and you may feel stupid or just plain annoyed at the time but it’s the stories like these that now always make me laugh when I think about them.
I was thrown in a Drama Class, something I’d never had in Germany so I had no idea what to do when the teacher told us to suddenly pair up and try to resemble the shape of any fruit of our choice with our bodies.

It is particularly recommended that you don’t fall into the trap of thinking that school in your country is ‘better’. It might help to remember that England has top universities and makes considerable contributions to Science and the Arts. This would not be possible if the standards were low.

Ironically, we often find that students who feel school here is easy are often the ones who start to struggle when the first grades come out. If it seems easy, you might want to check. That said, there are a couple of subjects like foreign languages and Mathematics, in which students of your age at home could be further ahead the British teenagers. If that is the case, just make sure you are only getting A grades and enjoy it!
When I first came to England during lower school I was personally over the moon that I’d be getting a school uniform. I already started imagining my pleated tartan skirt and my beautifully fitted blazer with a really fancy school logo. However, reality kicked in and I found out that’s just what they show in the media. My school’s uniform seemed very disappointing compared to that: A grey skirt with a navy polyester jumper that constantly made my hair frizzy. There was no use crying about it because it’s just what everyone has to wear, like it or not. There was one issue I could solve: the hair. I started learning lots of ways to plait my hair, as well as wearing my hair up with Hair bows that I made myself to match the school colours. Soon I started getting so many compliments on my hair and how clever the bow thing was I was happy the uniform “forced me” to change my ways a little bit. One random girl even asked to buy some of my special “PE bows” off me! I ended up giving them to her for free and for about two years we always had matching hair in PE lessons. This is how we started talking and she ended up becoming one of my best friends.
The classes kept changing for every subject, so I felt there was no real class community like I’d had in my class in Germany. It felt very confusing at first but once you work out the reason for this it all makes perfect sense. In English lower schools, we have different “sets” for every subject so in subjects that you are good at, you are encouraged to keep learning the subject in more depth, whilst in your weaker subjects you get to learn more slowly, making sure you’ve completely understood. At first, I didn’t like this because I didn’t like being categorised as “Good at French” but “Bad at science”. However, I soon realised that I did need to take it slow and study harder in physics. I later moved up to top set and ended up getting As in all my sciences at GCSE. It was the struggle that made me want to “prove” my abilities. If I had started in a higher set, maybe I would have been discouraged and settled for Bs. On top of that, it was the moving to different classes that enabled me to meet many different people, rather than just one class.
In England, it is quite normal to take a bus to school. Your bus travel can take up to one hour. The cost of bus travel is not included in your programme price, so you have to buy a bus pass. It can cost up to £100 a month. If your programme is financed by the Italian state, it is possible that bus travel is included in the price.

This is another one of those internal/external things. Most people would prefer to live really close to school, but life just isn’t like that here. Some students travel and some don’t. If you can walk to school, you are very lucky!

I got the bus to school during, both, lower school and sixth form. In the beginning, I hated it because I felt it wasted 2 whole hours every day. I was wrong, it was all a case of what I chose to do on this bus journey. I started reading books and my study materials on the bus, which ended up being very beneficial. The hour that I had to sit on the bus every morning and every afternoon was just the time I needed to focus on work, so I could have more fun when I got home.
Social Services

(only relevant for under 16s)

If you are under 16, Social Services has to visit you regularly to check you are ok. We understand that this may seem double because we are looking after you, but it is their legal obligation, just as it would be for a UK teenager staying in someone else’s home. Your social worker cares about you and wants to help.

Your social worker may have worked with other exchange students for years and understand your programme well. If she hasn’t, she might think you came here because you have problems in your home country. If she thinks you are not coping well here, she might recommend you go back home. It is important that you explain why you came and how you prepared. A social worker can’t find you a new family or change programme rules.

In other situations, you might find that people even believe that your natural parents have sent you away because of issues at home. If this happens, please relax about it and explain that this programme is really popular in your country. British students don’t do high school exchange, so it is not well known here.
Lunch in the week is not usually included in the programme. You will buy lunch in a school canteen or from a shop on the way to school. Some schools allow students to leave the school and go to town at lunch time. If you would like to take a packed lunch from home, please ask your host family to help you buy and packs things. The family is not obliged to pay for your school lunch. If they offer to make you lunch, you are lucky. The exception to this rule is if you are on a programme financed by the Italian state, if so, we will make special lunch arrangements with your family or school.

Bringing this to school could make you popular!
I’ve had an interesting lunch journey during my school time. Well, as interesting as lunch can be. In lower school I used to buy lunch at school. Some days were good, some really weren’t. The thing about school food is that, in my experience, it’s just quite bland. I couldn’t change that. It’s not like I can tell the school to start spicing up their macaroni cheese just because I like that extra kick.

What I did do (and, believe me, this wasn’t normal for students at my school) was to bring a pepper grinder to school every day so I could actually enjoy said macaroni cheese and it became one of my favourite meals in school.

If this doesn’t work for you, there are other ways to improve your lunch experience.
During sixth form, I started bringing packed lunch to school. Easy right? Not if, like me you are not a fan of Tupperware, or sandwiches for that matter. I had to get a little creative. This thought came to me one morning, making pasta for school, when I couldn’t find a lunch box. I had just added the sauce and was standing in the kitchen with an empty jar in my hand looking for an ugly plastic box. I thought, wouldn’t it be clever to just put the pasta back in the jar after cooking? So I did. Not only that, but while I was at it I put a little ribbon around the jar to add that extra “me” factor. Since this day, I never went back to plastic again. I started using jars for everything. Salads, Fruit, Smoothies- you name it, always with a little ribbon to match the colour of the lid. Everyday, it would actually make me happy getting out my lunch and seeing how cute it looks. Everyday, I would get someone commenting on how “instagrammable” my food was. I’m not telling you to do exactly what I did. I’m just saying that, with a little creativity you can make your lunch work for you, you know, if it doesn’t already.
You must love travel or you wouldn’t be here, right? We like you to see the UK and we are happy to give you ideas or advice. If you are at least 16, you can see a lot of the country. You just have to leave and get back at a reasonable time of day and make sure you have a charged mobile phone with you. Of course, you would always check with your host family that they are happy for you to travel and respect their decision without arguing. You or they will usually talk with the AM too. You will find that day travel is only refused if you have a habit of not charging your phone or there has been another problem such as low school attendance, bad grades or a warning letter. We have sometimes put a travel ban on certain cities due to security alerts. If this happens again, you and your host family will be informed by email.

If you are under 16, you may not travel to other cities for a day alone. A day trip may be possible with an older student. Just ask your AM.
OVERNIGHT TRAVEL

Unfortunately you can only take an overnight trip with SEE, your school, your parents or other close relatives. You can’t travel overnight with a friend or a relative under 25.

If you want to travel anywhere overnight, you have to fill in the online travel release form. You can find the link to this form on the website or ask us to send it by email. You have to fill it in the over-night travel request 2 weeks before you travel. If you ask too late, the travel will probably be refused. If you travel without a release, you will probably have to leave the programme.

Of course, we understand that you can’t see everything within a day, so we organise trips during the year. See the calendar at the end of this book and make a note of the deadlines. Trips are first come first served, so make sure you reserve a space. The trips on the calendar can be booked on our website and paid for online.
We do not make a profit on these trips, we organise them because we know travel is important to you. Your sending organisation doesn’t have details of our trips. Your AM organises extra trips spontaneously such as Harry Potter, Cadbury’s World, Paintball or London events. These trips have to be paid for in cash and they are not booked through the website or Head Office. There is no guarantee that they will take place. If your AM asks you about one, you have to respond quickly or the places will be gone. If there is something you really want to do, it is always worth asking us on info@southenglandexchange.org.

National express is your friend! This is the national coach service that can get you pretty much anywhere for very little money compared to trains. Almost every town will have at least one National express connection to London Victoria Coach Station. (Fun fact, there’s an amazing Taco place at Victoria train station called “Tortilla”. I take all my friends there when we go to London)
The most important tip on travelling with friends is to be the one who knows stuff. By this I mean to inform yourself about things like good places to eat, things to do, ways of travelling—Anything really that you can invite your (soon to be) English friends to do with you. You may think that they already know all this but, in my experience, they really don’t. Within the first few months I was the one who would always update my friends on what’s on at the local theater, where to do dance classes or how to travel to and around London. I’m saying this, not so you become a walking Siri who knows everything but so you can say to people “Hey I know you like Green Day and there’s a flash sale on West End tickets to the American Idiot Musical tomorrow. Would you like to go?” Kind of random right? Well, I’ve said exactly this to a friend once and we had a great time in London. It might not be Green Day for you but if you listen to your friends’ interests you will most certainly find something you can do together. Of course, it’s not all about their interests but it’s a good start. I happen to love all musical theater, so this example worked well for me.
VALID ONLY WITH TICKET 63506

Class: STD
Ticket type: STD
Date of issue: 13.7.17

From: PAR
To: TAUNTON

Passenger's Number: ONE 63508 247

Valid at: 11:08 HOURS ON 13.7.17

Mandatory Reservation Coupon 2 of 2

AY555344
To DCTR LHR64XK/6175

Printed 09:53 on 13.7.17
Going home for holidays

Your decisions on travel home can really affect your stay. It is important that you make these decisions for yourself. Please do not be influenced by friends, natural family or host family. You can always talk confidentially to your AM if there is a conflict.

Myths

You may not go home.

YES, you can go home but you may never miss school. You must fill in the travel request from the website at least 2 weeks in advance. You may not go home in the October break as this is too close to arrival.

Your host family or SEE has to take you to the airport for holidays.

NO, SEE only has to organise two transfers, your arrival transfer in September (or January) and your departure transfer in May/June (or January, for 1 semester students). In November, we will check who is going home for Christmas. If there is a large number of students, there will be minibuses leaving Bournemouth, Salisbury, Bedford and Peterborough at 9 AM 21st December and returning from Heathrow 2nd January at 3 PM. The cost will be approximately £10 per person each way, depending on numbers. For other dates, times, airports, it is essential that you can get yourself to the airport and back, so remember not to book a flight really early in the morning or late at night.
You must go home for holidays

NO!! It is possible that your host family has to go away on one of the holidays or has other plans. You are never obliged to go home. If you host family is away, we arrange a different family and make sure you are comfortable.

Visits from home

Your parents should not visit you in the UK. If they do decide to come, they should meet you in London or similar. Your parents may not go to the host family home during the year. Your parents coming to the host family home means the end of your programme. It is essential that you communicate with us. Tell us if your parents are planning a visit to the UK. If we do not know they are coming and there is a problem, we may not be able to continue your programme. The form to tell us about this is on the website.

Friends from home may never visit the family home.
Smoking, drinking and drugs are not allowed on the programme. If it becomes known that you have broken this rule, your programme will be cancelled immediately. If your programme is cancelled, you will usually fly home within 24 hours. There will be no discussion.

You can legally smoke cigarettes from age 16 in the UK. It is illegal to buy them before 18. The programme rules do not depend on the law. The programme forbids smoking and yes, you can be sent home for smoking, so please don’t.

You can legally drink beer or wine at 16 with a meal, if it is bought by an accompanying adult. You can legally buy and drink alcohol at 18. It is against the law to buy alcohol for anyone under 18 to drink in a pub or public place.

The programme rules do not depend on the law. The programme forbids alcohol. Yes, we will send you home for drinking.

It may seem strange, but some drugs are actually legal in the UK. They are called ‘legal highs’. The programme rules do not depend on the law. The programme forbids all drugs. Of course, we would send you home for taking drugs.
**HEALTH**

You should register with a doctor soon after you arrive. You go to a General Practitioner (GP). If you have any problems, please let us know. We can write a letter explaining your programme and why you need to register.

If you are sick, please take the advice of your host family and AM. In England, especially in Year 12, it is not normal to stay home for a small illness such as a cold. If you miss too much school due to illness, we may have to ask you to get a medical check up. It is possible that you are not healthy enough for the programme. We would hate to cancel a programme for health reasons, but it can become necessary.

**EXAMS A**

Students in **year 10** may go home 15th June or choose to extend until July at an extra charge. We will discuss this with you in January. Only year 10 students can extend. Students in **year 11** must stay until their last external exam and they go home 15th June. They may not extend. If they have a later exam, they extend at no cost.
Students in year 12 might have external exams. They must take all exams the school chooses to enter them for. They go home 15th June.

**Grades**

Below are just the formal rules about grades, it is really important that you also look at the information about grades on the Success pages. Students who have D grades will receive a Positive Action Plan and study suggestions. Students who have E grades will receive a warning, and of course support. Students whose work is U (ungradeable) unfortunately have to leave the programme. Don’t worry too much though, you can only get a U grade by not making an effort or not completing the work and you would know what was happening. If something goes wrong and you get a U because you were ill or had a problem, just let us know as soon as possible.
CERTIFICATES

Certificates are very important for students from some countries, especially state scholarships. Your school or education authority at home might need a certificate from your UK school. It is essential that you read your emails and fill in the certificate request form before the deadline. If you miss the deadline, we can't help you get a certificate. We will only ask for a certificate once, so please fill the form in carefully.

If you need specific subjects (usually only Spanish students), it is essential that you know this and communicate with your AM in September at the latest.

DEPARTURES

There will be group airport transfers to Heathrow at 9 AM on 15th June. If you book a later flight, you will have to wait at the airport as there will not be a later transfer.

The return transfer is usually by coach or train. You might have arrived by taxi, but you will not have one on return. It is important to send excess baggage home in advance. You can only take one suitcase and hand luggage.
SOCIAL CONNECTION

Phew, that was a lot of rules and formalities. Now for some more interesting stuff!

You absolutely have to add Social Connection to your mix to create happiness. It is essential for the formula.

All the Structure and Success in the world will not be enough to make up if this component is missing. You need to connect at home, at school and in the community.

SO, HOW DO YOU DO THAT?
Connection
noun

A relationship in which a person or thing is linked or associated with something else.
Connecting with your host family

Students come with different expectations. Some are more excited about the family than anything else, others haven’t really thought about the family so much because they are concentrating on schools and friends. Whatever the expectations now is reality time. Let’s start with the most important reality:

**Yes, you do need to connect with your family**

It is completely obvious to many students, but there are a few who tend to see the family a little like a hotel, somewhere they have paid to eat and sleep. If you ever catch yourself thinking like that, please realise that it is completely unacceptable. Of course, that idea of a host family would be terrible manners anyway and everyone connected with the programme would be completely shocked if they knew you thought that way, but it would also stop you being happy in the home.

It can be fun to stay in a hotel for a few weeks, but living in a hotel for a long time would be extremely lonely!
Nearly all our students realise they need and want a connection with their family. Many families and students become friends for life. Connecting is easier for some people than for others. A lot of people coming on an exchange programme are extroverts. They are likely to be fairly confident, or they would not have taken this step. If you are one of those people, who come to a new environment and can immediately start chatting and making connections, the next pages will be slightly less relevant to you. If that is not you, read on….

Is personality an internal or an external factor? Hmmnn…personality traits like introvert/extrovert come from inside, so they are an internal factors, right?

But….confidence and social skills depend on the life you have experienced so far. So external factors play a role too, don’t they? Personality is actually a bit of a mix. Let’s just assume you are born with some of it and you learn some of it.
Can you be expected to change your personality?

This page is about connection in the family, but it is the same for other situations. If you are sitting at the meal table with your host family and everyone else is talking and laughing whilst you look miserable,

**YES, SOMETHING HAS TO CHANGE.**
This would not make you happy and please don’t underestimate the effect it would have on your family. There is a cultural difference between countries on this one. It may be ok to do this at home. In England, it is not acceptable to bring the mood down in this way. If you are doing it, we need to get to work. Of course, you have a right to be you, but that right stops, when it affects others in this way.

**CAN YOU CHANGE YOUR PERSONALITY?**

If that is you on page 61, we are sure you are not doing it to annoy people. It could be happening for several reasons. You don’t know what to say, you expect adults to ask questions and you, as a child just respond (a bit like a language lesson), or maybe just you are shy. Well here is the good news:

**You can change**

and it will probably be the most valuable skill you learn during your exchange time. To get there, only one thing is necessary. You have to believe you can change!
Research shows that characteristics such as shyness are not fixed. The obstacle is the belief. If you can be open to the possibility of change, you can start work.

If you don’t know what to say, admit it to your AM and she will help you find common topics. You probably don’t even need her though: What are the others talking about? You might not be able to think of contributions quickly enough today, but they might come back to the same conversation the next day. If they don’t, you can because we are in England and no, it is not up to adults to make conversation while children sit quietly. The first step is to be interested in what is going on around you.

You can do this!
Taking part in the family meal starts before the dinner goes on the table. There is no better way to become part of the family meal than being involved in preparing it. It doesn’t matter if you can’t cook, just offer to chop vegetables and make sure you say that you really would like to help.

If you are waiting in your room until you are called for dinner, you are making it harder than it needs to be. It is easier to have a conversation whilst doing something together than whilst sitting opposite each other. If you start talking before you sit down, it flows naturally into dinner talk. Of course, you could always offer to cook a whole meal yourself.

Even if you are not helping, it would be great to be in the kitchen whilst dinner is being made. Make sure you leave your phone upstairs!
WAYS OF CONNECTING WITH YOUR FAMILY

We used mealtimes as the first example, but what if your family doesn’t even eat dinner together? Families are busy and they may not always eat together. We ask them to sit with their student at dinner, but sometimes that just isn’t possible.

By the end of the first week, you will probably know what your host mother and father are interested in. If you don’t know this, it is time to find out. Imagine you wanted to describe a host family member to someone who doesn’t know them. Can you do this? Not just what they look like or do as a job, but what they like and dislike, some life experiences, maybe even some dreams for the future.

When you interviewed for this programme, you probably said something like you want to get to know different people and cultures. It starts here and it usually starts with questions.
Find out as much as you can about each family member and get interested. You may find that your host family members have hobbies you love yourself, great! You may find they like something you have never heard of, even better because you could develop a new interest!

What if they are interested in something you find boring? Fly fishing, cricket, a TV series….this is the absolute best, although it might not seem like it. Learning to talk to people about something you know nothing about is a learning opportunity. Popular employers, great politicians, successful entrepreneurs often have one thing in common: They listen, show interest and learn. That skill is invaluable and you get to learn it earlier than all your friends at home.

Find out more about their interests!
Finding it hard to make conversation?

You are not alone. For many people, it is difficult. The first few days of small talk are usually ok, you are talking about yourself, the area, the school etc. If the conversation starts to dry up after that, it could be time to start developing your conversation skills. If you were on a desert island, it would probably happen automatically. However, you are in a technologically advanced world, which offers you alternatives. When the conversation runs out, people often turn to Skype, Netflix, WhatsApp and co. They know it would be rude to do that downstairs, so they end up in their room. Once they are in their room, it gets harder to come out and a circle starts.
This is not what you came here for!
Of course you can’t integrate if you are in your room. If you are not integrated, going to your room to be in contact with your home country can seem like the only choice. The fact is that is just doesn’t make you happier and it can so quickly cause the relationship in the family to break down. It can get really awkward for everyone. This situation causes more family breakdowns than any other and it can even lead to the end of the programme. You didn’t come here to sit in your room and it certainly isn’t what your parents paid for.

If someone tells you to get out of your room, you might think they just don’t understand. This is what teenagers do, right? Of course it is. Nobody can argue with that. You may have spent most of your time at home in your room and teenagers in the UK are no different. Nobody should judge you for what you are doing when it is a normal reaction.

However, you are special. You have chosen to come on an exchange!
If you can’t break the habit alone, ask for help. You can choose where to get help on the ‘get out of my room’ mission. Above all, it is useful to name and own that mission and share it with others. Good friends at home would help you limit your contact with them, but they would need to know that you want them to.

Your parents will always be available for you to chat with them, it might be up to you to recognise and communicate that it is making integration harder. Your parents could be stuck in the same trap as you: They think you are lonely, so they call you. They keep calling you, which makes you stay lonely longer.

Your AM and family will help, if you can openly say you need support.
We have just suggested you go offline, but of course, the internet is also extremely helpful. There are some really good Ted Talks on Youtube about making small talk, creating deeper relationships and getting on well in social situations. If you are not one of the natural extroverts mentioned before, this is an amazing chance to pick up some new skills and become a more confident person. This one is just a starter.

Watch it now!
Remember those extroverts we talked about at the beginning of the chapter? The ones who got to skip these pages because they just land on their feet in any social situation. The lucky ones?

Let’s talk about luck a little. If you did really well at a test in school, what would be your explanation? The test was easy or or I studied hard?

Either or both could be correct. One gives you power and one takes it away from you. We are back to the internal and external factors. You can’t control whether a test is easy, but you can control how you prepare and what you learn from your result. It is the other end of we can’t control the weather, but we can influence the way we react to it.

Here’s the thing. What is more likely to encourage you to prepare well next time? Believing the teacher who sets the test is in control of the result or that you are in control yourself?

It is the same with families and schools. If you believe someone else was luckier and got a better family or school, you are closing yourself to the possibility that you make your own happiness. Do you really want to give up control of that?
Coming back to the test thing, I can completely relate to that. In my Biology GCSE, I remember learning the whole circulatory system (I made up a song and everything) and it didn’t even come up in the test. What we were asked about was the anatomy of the eye, something I hadn’t revised as much. For days, I was annoyed and felt my friend Thalia was lucky because she had revised the eye, not the circulatory system. The truth is, I should have learned both. They were both in the syllabus and they were both in the book. It wasn’t unfair. If I had studied both as much as I could have, maybe I would have an A*, not an A. In this case, it’s not the end of the world but I know for next time. I will never just learn some parts of the course and hope that’s what comes up.

S.
Take a couple of minutes to think about the difference between luck and happiness? Is there a difference? Are both the same word in your language?
International friends

In the online training, most of you wrote that you would prefer British friends to being friends with other international students. Yet every year, we experience some students sticking together like glue and speaking their own language. The problem with this is of course, that it totally stops you making friends with British students. Being together all the time effectively works as a barrier to integration. Rationally they know, it, but it happens anyway.

Interestingly, we have observed for years that it makes no difference whether there are two students of the same nationality in the same school or 10. In the end, it comes down to each individual student’s choice on whether to stay international or mix with the home students. Both choices are valid as long as they are not upsetting anyone else or making you unhappy.

We could just try and make sure that there are never two students from the same country in one school, but it simply doesn’t work. We find that other organisations then place students there or they find a native speaker who lives here permanently. Again, the internal rather than the external element makes the difference.
Make sure people see you, not just the language you are speaking!

Speaking your language blocks other people out!
Making friends in year 10 felt hard at the time because, in England, everyone seems to live so far away from school so no one meets up after school to spend time together, instead they just go home. I had to adapt to this change. Instead of after school, I focused on spending time with people during breaks and lunch.
Joining clubs

The best way to make friends is to get active. We wrote this to you all before you came and many of you asked us to find a club in advance, so you are already taking part in something outside of school. Over the years, we have had students doing every activity you can think of. The more involved they are, the better they integrate.

It can be surprisingly difficult to work out what your school offers and when it is. If there doesn’t seem to be anything, it is probably just that you haven’t found it yet. Please ask your AM if you have not joined a school club within the first weeks of arrival.

When you find something, you might have to make the tough choice on if you are brave enough to go alone. Please don’t stay away because you are afraid to go alone. It is amazingly easy for us to find out who goes and to make sure somebody takes you. This works better than you might think, especially if you get to work on it in the first days of school. That way we can just get someone to show you the room.

It is so much better than dragging along your new friend of the same nationality.
FROM ROUNDERS TO BOXING

I’ve never had a “thing” in sport. I was never “The gymnast”, “The tennis-player” or “The dancer” of my class or friends. I like all these sports but I’ve never had a gift or the determination to succeed in any of them. Whilst this means that I will probably never become a gold medalist at the Olympics, it also lead to me being generally open to any sport.

So, when in my first PE lesson in England, I was excited to be learning this sport I’d never heard of called “Rounders”. I didn’t really understand the rules at first but I enjoyed it a lot. So much in fact, that when I overheard someone afterwards talking about the after school club, I decided to join as well, despite having only learnt the sport that day and knowing I would be the worst one there. I went so I could improve and make friends while doing something I enjoy.

I actually even ended up playing one game for the B Team before the season ended and I met some of my best friends on that team.
Then the season changed and it was time for other sports. Some I liked, some I didn’t and that’s okay. You don’t have to love every sport but it is important that you do try all of them, especially in lessons because no one likes that team member that causes the team to lose because they don’t like the sport. If you try and fail, no one blames you and it speaks more for your character than looking miserable.

When we had a change of teacher in year 11, we also changed from team sports to fitness. That’s when we did Boxing for one lesson and everyone hated it except me and two friends. We actually went up to the teacher and asked if there is a boxing club. There wasn’t but she started one just for the three of us. Later, a couple of other girls joined. I must admit, the main reason I was interested was so I could buy pink boxing gloves but I that doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy the sport too.
Making friends in school

Joining clubs is the easy part. How about those moments in tutor time, at lunch or in the Sixth Form common room? That is tougher. There is no formula, but we can give you some tips on what you shouldn’t do and what could help. The first one is so obvious, but we are going to say it anyway.

Get off your phone...

or you will miss out!
That is so easy to say, but so hard to do. If you are sitting with nothing to do, you go on your phone. If you are on your phone, nobody is going to talk to you. It is that simple. So what are you going to do? Let’s look at why you are on your phone. Partly, it is the habit we all have, it could just be boredom or fear of missing a text or mail. Often it is more than that. We seem to have developed a fear of looking lonely and we cover it with the phone. Nobody wants to look like a loser and looking busy does indeed look stronger. However, do you want to look strong or do you want to have friends?
You may also have a quirky interest yourself that you want to invite friends to try out. That’s great! Just make sure that whatever you share to do with this interest doesn’t seem like showing-off. What do I mean by that? Basically, if you love stand-up poetry it’s cool to invite people to a stand-up poetry event but it seem a bit arrogant if you invite them to an open-mic night so they can listen you perform. This is just a tip, you can of course do that if it feels right.

The point of this is just to tell you to do some research, sign up to newsletters of theaters, music venues and so on. Another thing worth noting is that, when you invite friend’s to something in another city, you might get some reluctance and responses like “But that’s so far”, “I don’t know how to get there” or “I have to ask my mum”. At this point, it’s best if you already know the best way of travelling there.
Be interested or interesting

There is a general message when it comes to making friends as an exchange student, or as a home student. It doesn’t really make a difference.

Waiting for people to come and talk to you doesn’t work

That is not totally true: People might approach you if you are interesting in some way. These days it is not likely that people will find you interesting just because you come from another country. They probably will in lower school, but in Sixth Form, they often don’t care about it that much. Accepting this is a big step forward

You may have been told in the preparation seminar in your home country that people will come and ask you where you are from etc. and that does indeed happen in the USA or Australia. In the UK, you could wait all year for it and then go home saying English students are unfriendly. You may complain that they are not interested in you because there are too many exchange students, because they are a closed group, because they are only interested in parties and TV.
Once again, you would be blaming it on external factors. This is sad because you may be missing an opportunity to change it. If you think it isn’t you, there is nothing you can do about it and the only small comfort is being able to moan about the situation with your friends of the same nationality. Only that isn’t what you dreamed of and certainly not what your parents paid for.

You can make more friends in TWO MONTHS by becoming interested in OTHER PEOPLE than you can in TWO YEARS by trying to get other people interested in YOU.

- Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People
Everybody loves a compliment

You could create a new habit, which will be useful in later life. Every time you look at someone, think of something you like about them. When you have it, use it immediately or save it up. You might have an opportunity to say in a couple of days’ time ‘I loved the jacket you were wearing last week. The brown one. Where did you get it’? Now, this has a triple effect:

1. It makes someone feel good about themselves, especially as that jacket must be so nice that you remembered it days later.
2. It makes you feel better to be thinking about someone else
3. They will tell you where they got the jacket and you learn something.

The three effects above are great. Plus coming out of your shell makes you a little bit braver and this person might just become your friend. One of the best ways to get someone interested in you is to show interest in them. Obviously, we are not suggesting you go up to someone and say, I like your eyes. That’s a little creepy. Bags, jackets, shoes etc. are safe options.

Try it…you will be surprised!
What’s in my school bag

I’m not about to give you a long list of school supplies you’ll need in school. You probably know that you won’t get very far without a pen so it doesn’t really need saying. The point of this page is more to give you an idea of the kind of things that you take to school (or anywhere really). Some of these are just useful, some may actually help you be more social and make friends more easily during the first weeks of school.

1. Gum or mints
It is very likely that your school doesn’t allow gum. However, during breaks and lunches, the contraband gum can help you make friends.

2. My Polaroid/ Instant Camera
If you’re going to ask for anything for Christmas, make it one of these. I find them a much nicer way of taking pictures than on your phone as the picture is instantly printed in perfect purse or wallet size so you can have them with you all the time rather than just forgetting about them amongst the hundreds of photos in your phone. Plus, if you are taking pictures with your friends, you can actually give one to them and they will treasure it forever. I sometimes get my polaroid out at parties and everyone gets so excited about how “Hipster” that is.

3. Lip balm
Well, you know, chapped lips.
...apart from school stuff

4. Hand sanitizer
This doesn’t need much explaining but, apart from keeping your hands free from bacteria, it’s also something you can offer to other people that you are sitting with. Try to get an interesting scent. That might sound weird but the one I usually carry around is pink and sparkly and somewhat “Paris themed”. Believe it or not, this sometimes starts conversations about how Paris is my favourite city, leading on to other people’s favourite places. So, hand sanitizer can be a good way to get to know people.

5. Playing cards
Especially for sixth form, this might be the most important thing you could bring to school in the first week. Imagine this: you are sitting in your school’s common area with people you’ve only just met and don’t know what to talk about apart from school. Everyone feels like they have too much free time. Someone suggests you play a card game. Phew, awkwardness avoided. Be that person who has the cards. You will seem like you know the sixth form life. When I started year 12, I thought the boy who brought cards on the first day was a genius.
Connection in the community

Hopefully, you are getting on with your family and have friends in school. Time to get involved in the community! You probably already told us before you arrived, if you want to join something like a dance class or a drama group and hopefully that is already set up. Ideally, each student has at least one activity in town per week. If you don’t have one, we should start looking quickly. Remember, it can be something you have never tried before. You don’t have to be good at it, just be prepared to show a little courage. If possible, it is better to choose something you can go to alone. Of course, it would be easier to take an international friend, but it makes it a little more difficult to find local friends. Every year we see students nervous to go to an activity alone for the first time but being so happy afterwards that they did.
Getting a job

You may also be wondering if you are allowed to work. Yes, our students get part time jobs, but usually only if they are at least 16. English Sixth Formers are often working themselves, so it is natural for our over 16s to want to work too. **Of course, you would have to check with your host family, your AM and your natural family.**

People have worked places like Starbucks and Waitrose before, generally only on a Saturday. If you are nervous to try for that sort of job, you could start with a charity shop or a museum. Volunteering is much easier to get into and can be very rewarding.

If you are under 16, you have fewer possibilities to work, but you will also find that people from school have more time at the weekends. What you could try is helping out at a gymnastics club or a local Scout group. We would love to arrange that sort of activity for you, just tell us you want it.
Culture shock could make you negative towards your community.

At your pre-departure seminar, the leaders spoke to you about culture shock. Everyone should know what it is, but the funny thing is that nobody expects it to happen to them. It is really hard to recognize what is culture shock when you are actually suffering from it.

Please remember what a massive step you have taken. The decision to leave family and friends behind is incredibly brave. Your parents have also given you the invaluable gift of the freedom to do this. The experience will be very valuable to you for the rest of your life. A sixty year old may well tell you of how the decision to study abroad changed his life. The understanding he gained may well have touched the lives of others. A exchange year is extremely rewarding, but it is also highly challenging. When you packed your suitcase to come here, you didn’t only pack your belongings, you also put life as you have known it so far in there i.e, your cultural expectations, what you consider normal, how you expect people to react. When you say goodbye at the airport, you aren’t just leaving people, you are leaving your world. That would already be tough, but you are additionally entering an unknown world which can seem deceptively similar.
Will I get culture shock?

You probably will have an element of culture shock, almost everyone does, but it could be very mild or quite severe. You may well not notice, which is fine because it will pass anyway. You do need to be aware of the symptoms because it can really affect integration in the community, if you get an extreme case.

Typical symptoms are boredom, withdrawal (e.g. spending excessive amounts of time reading; avoiding contact with host nationals), feeling isolated or helpless, sleeping a lot or tiring easily, irritation over delays and other minor frustrations, suffering from various body pains and aches, longing to be back home, unduly criticizing local customs or ways of doing things.

The good news about culture shock is that it will pass. The key phrase to remember is NUT. Culture shock is NORMAL, UNDERSTANDABLE and TEMPORARY. Even in extreme cases, we can crack that nut. Knowing the stages can help:

1. The Honeymoon Stage - You are very positive, curious, and anticipate new exciting experiences. You even idealize the host culture.
2. **Irritability & Hostility** - You may start to feel that what is different is actually inferior. The host culture is confusing or the systems are frustrating. It is a small step from saying that they do things in a different way to saying that they do things in a stupid way.

3. **Gradual Adjustment** - You feel more relaxed and develop a more balanced, objective view of your experience.

4. **Adaptation of Biculturalism** - There is a new sense of belonging and sensitivity to the host culture.
SUCCESS

The third component in our mix for high school happiness is success. This was long underestimated in student exchange. Students were told it was all about the experience and results did not matter so much. The fact is that this year is not only about cultural learning. You are probably used to doing well in your home country, you need to feel achievement here too or you can get frustrated and maybe not even really know why. Particularly going into 6th Form, students often start amazed at how easy everything seems. You are suddenly only taking subjects you like, there are few lessons and it all seems so relaxed. After a while, this can start to feel a little aimless and empty.

HUMAN BEINGS NEED TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL AND USE THEIR STRENGTHS!
What do you want to achieve?
How will you do that?
How will you know when you are successful?
What do you want to achieve here?

An aim like ‘I want to learn good English’ doesn’t work well because it is vague. Aims have to be very specific, so you can keep track of them. Be as precise as you can.

AIM 1

AIM 2

AIM 3
Aim 1

How will you achieve that aim?

How will you know you have been successful?
Aim 2

How will you achieve that aim?

How will you know you have been successful?
Aim 3

How will you achieve that aim?

How will you know you have been successful?
SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

You probably don’t question this much at home. You want good grades and your parents want that. It would be natural to assume that exchange students here get good grades too. That is not always the case and the reasons why are interesting.

If you get lower grades here, we could think it is because you are learning in a foreign language. There’s the catch….we have a reason for not doing so well, which makes that result more likely to happen.

The language barrier usually only plays a role in the first couple of months. After that, you need to work quite hard to catch up, but around month 4, students can be working on the level they were on at home. This is why your English was tested before you came. An interviewer looked at your language potential and worked out that you can do it. Unless they made a mistake (they usually don’t), there must be another reason if students don’t do as well as they could.

In reality, it is often a combination of reasons: Believing they are doing ok until it is too late, not believing it is worth trying because they don’t need the subject at home, believing the language is in the way, believing they have a bad teacher. Notice anything? The reasons are all connected to belief in some way!
Do you need to succeed in school?

**YES!**

and it is not because you will get in trouble if you don’t succeed. It is because it will make you **Happier!**

Living without reaching potential makes people unhappy. This is not all about the grades themselves. You know you have to leave the programme if you get a U and that we will already be talking with you if you have Ds and Es. Why are we so interested? The grades are a sign of how you are feeling about a subject as well as how successful you are. We care about how you are doing. If you were a good student in your home country and you become a weak student here, it is important to find out why and how you feel about it. A U grade is almost always a sign that a student is not engaging. Disconnecting with a class is already a shame in any situation, as an exchange student, it sets off alarm bells because you need motivation and engagement to be happy here.
Sixth form is hard. You may not think it’s as hard as school in your own country. In the beginning, English students think it’s easy because you only have 3 or 4 subjects that you’ve chosen. Many people (myself included) severely underestimate the amount of work you have to put into your studies. In lower years, your day was structured and, if you work hard in lessons, do all your homework and ask when you don’t understand something, you will usually succeed. In year 12, you will suddenly have much more freedom, with only about 12 hours of lessons per week. What people don’t realise is that, for every hour of lesson you need to do at least one hour of private study. This might seem unnecessary, especially in the beginning, but you really do have to do it in order to keep up and make sure you’ve understood absolutely everything. Most people don’t understand this until the end of year 12 when A students become D and E students. Then they realise they have to work harder in year 13. You won’t have the opportunity to pick your grade back up the year after so you have to make year 12 count. Do you really want to leave England with Ds?
What I like to do for my revision, is to go to my lesson and, in the next free period I have, I write out all my notes from the lesson and a summary of the chapter from the book in my neatest possible hand writing. A week later, I highlight the important bits in my notes, forcing me to re-read them, and I re-write them on note cards. Another week later, I find all the past exam questions and do at least an hour’s worth of that, using my note cards if I have to.
Learning to ask

We find that some students suddenly have an E grade and really don’t know why. This is much more relevant for Year 12. Our students in Year 10 and 11 almost never have grade problems. A student in Year 12 may tell us she has been to all the lessons and done the homework, but it just isn’t working out. She knows she is as intelligent as other students, who are getting higher grades, but she thinks it must be to do with them having taken the same subject in Year 11. If we hear this in time, we can look at the reasons, but you need to be aware of a couple of traps yourself as things can happen fast.

1. If you are taking Year 12 History or English Literature, you really need to look at the GCSE work first, but we can help you with this. It doesn’t matter so much for most other subjects.

2. For each hour of teaching in Year 12, you need to do an hour of private study.

3. Teachers do not always give you course books, but this doesn’t mean you don’t need them. They might give you different handouts each time and you lose track of what you have done and what is coming next. We always recommend you buy a book.
Year 12 is a little strange. British students have to adjust to it too. It often takes them about 6 months to realise that they are not doing enough. Some don’t see this until mock exams in January of Year 13. If you look more closely, you will see that some students get it earlier and they are quietly working away from the beginning. This doesn’t mean they are nerdy or not partying too, it just means they worked the system out earlier. Make sure you are taking orientation from people who get it.

If you get an E on a paper, you probably know about it before we do. The solution is so simple, it seems wrong. You need to talk to the teacher. The key is in the question. Not why did you get an E, but what do you need to do to get a better grade next time. If a teacher hears that someone wants to do better, he is happy. Make a teacher happy!
Success in the school community

Of course, success is not all about grades. That is just the part which is easy to measure. Truly happy people are usually part of something bigger than themselves. They value the group they are in and they feel valued. That is a success which is much harder to measure, but you know when you have it and belong. The first step towards being successful in the community could be to think about why the school is hosting you. Why does a school host exchange students? If you were the head of a school, would you do it? What would you want them to do?

Schools tend to have a surprisingly vague idea of why they host students. The school heads tell us they do it for the international contribution and the inspiration our students bring. Luckily, they remember the amazing ones who helped out in the lower school, gave presentations on their culture, were the stars on the sports team or did something really helpful for the school musical even though they left before the performance. Individual teachers remember particular students enriching a class by bringing a different point of view or showing general enthusiasm for everything they did.
Societies thrive on variety, so there is no one answer on how to be successful in the school community. The common link between all the students who were especially happy during the exchange year is that they were very active in their school or town community, often in both. They tend to be ones who additionally do something for other people like coaching a younger group or helping with something.

South Pacific – the greatest musical ever to be produced! I am just kidding: Not my favourite. That didn’t stop me from auditioning and playing Nurse Rosie, a character the department had clearly made up. I had no lines, but treasured the moment when I got to walk across the back of the stage holding a kidney dish:) It was hardly a starring role, but it didn’t matter. In the end, what I remember is sitting backstage quoting song lyrics.
Language success

The best way to learn the language is by speaking it. Hopefully, you will be doing that all day, every day. If you are speaking your own language, of course you will stop yourself learning English as well as you could.

Even if you are speaking all day, you may feel that you are not learning fast enough. The first tip is to relax a little. You probably are learning, but sometimes you need time to absorb. Your passive vocabulary will usually develop more quickly than your active vocabulary, so you are recognising words when other people say them, but you still can’t think of them quickly enough to use them in conversation. At the latet, when you get back to your country, you will realise what amazing progress you made.

You might find you keep using the same basic words, so your active vocabulary is limited. In this case, it can be a good idea to do some more formal study of the language. The Cambridge exams can really help you focus on this as your main task on the preparation course is to expand your vocabulary.

If you don’t want to take Cambridge, you could read a newspaper or magazine once a week. It is easier if you set aside a specific time, maybe Saturday morning. This helps for many school subjects too!
Happy mixing!

If you take time to balance your life here, you are sure to find a great mix of structure, social connection and success. This is the chance of a lifetime, so take every opportunity!
Time

A year or even a semester can seem endless, but it can fly by without you noticing. Take a little time to plan, so you make the most of everything.

Time flies. Make sure you are the pilot.
1. CAE refers to the Cambridge exam in April. Many students choose to take this...of course, you don't have to. This is just the deadline to apply for the course, you won't start studying yet.
2. Make sure you book a place on the Wales or London trip!

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2. Make sure you are not sitting around....make plans!
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2. Transfers for semester students going home are at 9 AM.
3. The tickets for Oxford are limited.
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*Note: Your school holidays vary.*

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1. Most students taking CAE will overnight in London.
### May

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1. Schools do not automatically certificates at the end of year. You must request by 6th May.
2. You have probably collected a lot. If you can't carry it all, you need to send some home.
1. AS (only some schools) and GCSE Exams are in May and June. Remember that Year 10 students may extend at an extra charge. Year 11 students may not extend under any circumstances. Year 12 students might be able to extend at an extra charge.

2. The standard return date is June 15th.

3. It is not possible to make private arrangements with your host family. You leave the family on 15th.

4. The airport transfer to Heathrow is at 9:00 on 15th. If you take a different airport or time, you will need to arrange your transfer.

5. The transfers are often by coach. You have to send any extra baggage home in advance.
Notes