



**YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING**  
**Intercultural Exchange Programs**



**STUDY ABROAD INTERVIEW PACKET**





## **YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING** **Intercultural Exchange Programs**

Email completed interviews to:

**[sainterviews@yfu.org](mailto:sainterviews@yfu.org)**

Or mail them to the following address:

YFU USA

c/o Study Abroad

3995 Fashion Square Blvd. Suite 2

Saginaw, MI 48603

Questions? Call **1.800.833.6243** (1.800.TEENAGE)

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

YFU advances intercultural understanding, mutual respect and social responsibility through educational exchanges for youth, families and communities.

**Thank you for your time and effort!**

## INTERVIEWING THE STUDY ABROAD APPLICANT

Each interviewer's style and sequence of conversation can control how interview objectives are reached. Of course, different interviewers arrive at those objectives in different ways. Below are considerations to keep in mind as you prepare for your interview.

- **Call or email the applicant within 48 hours of receiving your interview assignment.** Even if you can't interview the student right away, it is vital that the student hear from you and be reminded of the importance of the interview. If you don't hear back from the student within a few days or have trouble reaching him or her, please contact Study Abroad Admissions (1.800.TEENAGE or admissions@yfu.org) and we'd be happy to help!
- **Set the stage.** Try to find a place where you can speak with the student uninterrupted. A coffee shop or a public library are great spots for an interview! Parents should NOT be present during the interview. While the parents are an integral part of the exchange experience, their presence often makes the student unwilling to communicate freely, particularly when it comes to answering questions about family life. Before the interview begins, invite the parents to complete the "Questions for Parents" form in another room. If the parents are present, chat with them prior to the interview and let them know that the best resource for any program-specific questions is the Study Abroad Admissions team.
- **Establish rapport.** Take time to chat informally (about weekend plans, the weather, etc.) with the student before beginning. This lets the student relax and provides you with more information about the applicant's personality.
- **Use follow-up questions.** Ask for clarification of vague or confusing answers. For example, if a student describes his/her relationship with the natural family as "close," ask what close means to him or her. Try not to accept short stock answers.
- **Write or type the answers clearly and accurately.** Record the interview in third person or quote the student. If you are completing the report by hand, please use dark ink, since pencil can fade with time. Keep in mind that the interview will be read by YFU staff and volunteers overseas who may speak English as a second language.
- **Stress the benefits of YFU.** Students and parents are interested in knowing what they will gain from this experience. Discuss language learning, increased independence and self-confidence, greater understanding of other points of view, tolerance of differences, greater appreciation of our own national assets, and possible college/career enhancement.
- **Complete the assessment section carefully.** Your comments are a crucial part of the Interview Report and count toward a percentage of the student's overall application score. If you have reservations about the selection of a particular student, call the Study Abroad team for guidance. It is our policy that a student may be interviewed a second time if the first interviewer does not recommend the student.
- **Make a copy.** Please retain an electronic or paper copy of the interview in case the original is lost.
- **What if the student wants to cancel?** If a student tells you he or she no longer wants to participate, try to determine WHY. The information you are given helps us as we continue to improve the programs and services we offer our participants. If there is anything you can do to dissuade the student from cancelling (e.g. calming normal fears about being an exchange student), please do! Please contact the Study Abroad team right away if a student indicates they are no longer interested.

## UNDERSTANDING THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions in the Study Abroad interview are designed to draw out certain kinds of information from students. They are based on research done by YFU to answer the following question:

### **“What personality characteristics should an adolescent possess to be effective in a cross-cultural exchange?”**

The research uncovered a number of characteristics that are critical to successful cross-cultural interaction. The top ten are listed and described on the following page. The characteristics are nearly identical to those used by other organizations (e.g. Peace Corps) in selecting their volunteers. They have also been shown to be culture-free; that is, these characteristics are relevant to the selection of adolescent exchange participants from any country.

*Read through the list of factors. Select two questions from the interview form and determine which of the factors could be elicited in the student’s response to those questions.*

Students’ responses to the questions not only produce evidence of these characteristics, but they also reveal much about the student’s maturity level and personal readiness for the exchange experience. In the interview process, therefore, the volunteer should be on the lookout for two things:

1. Evidence of the critical characteristics; and
2. The nature (e.g. hesitant, positive, uncertain, negative) of the student’s response

Students who tend to place responsibility (or blame) for situations on others, who express themselves with typical, expected responses, and who seem dependent on others for positive feelings about themselves may be less mature. Students who show genuine empathy and respect for others, who express an appreciation for the complexity of situations, and who value open communication tend to be more mature. Students who reflect this higher level of maturity are more likely to be able to handle the challenges and to learn from the exchange experience. Less mature students have more limited coping skills.

*Consider why the description of the less mature student could result in unsuccessful cross-cultural interaction. Then, think about why the more mature student could be more successful.*

From the information provided above, you can see that people reading the responses to the interview questions may make assumptions about the student with regard to maturity and readiness for the exchange. It is therefore very important that you use your best questioning skills to probe for answers by asking for clarification, amplification, and concrete examples.

## THE 10 MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

YFU USA has found that the ten factors listed below are important for successful intercultural adjustment. Please keep these factors in mind when interviewing the student. When possible, use specific examples to show how the student exhibits these factors.

1. **Open-Mindedness.** Open-mindedness is a willingness to try to understand and appreciate (though not necessarily to adopt) the values and beliefs of others and the fact that different points of view are equally valid.
2. **Sense of Humor.** A sense of humor is important because in another culture there are many things that lead one to cry, get angry, or be annoyed, embarrassed, or discouraged. The ability to laugh it off and not take one's self or the situation too seriously helps guard against sadness.
3. **Ability to Cope with Failure.** The ability to tolerate failure is critical because everyone fails at something overseas. Students who go overseas are often those who have been successful in their home environments and thus may have rarely experienced failure. Experience with failure is important in developing a range of coping behaviors.
4. **Communicativeness.** Many situations in other cultures are confusing and ambiguous, particularly when a foreign language is involved. A successful exchange student needs to be able to express his/her feelings and thoughts, as well as to be able to ask for help in interpreting unfamiliar behaviors and subtle cultural cues.
5. **Flexibility and Adaptability.** The ability to respond to or to tolerate the ambiguity of new situations is a crucial factor in cross-cultural adjustment. This may mean having to alter and/or give up familiar behavior patterns and become familiar with or take on new behaviors of the host family and culture.
6. **Curiosity.** Curiosity is the demonstrated desire to know about other people, places, ideas, etc. This is important for exchange students because they are constantly being confronted with new and different events and behaviors, and a genuine interest in those differences usually leads to a more positive experience.
7. **Positive and Realistic Expectations.** Students choose to spend time overseas for a variety of reasons, some publicly stated and many privately held. It is important to notice if the student understands that this experience will be difficult but worth the reward if he/she perseveres.
8. **Tolerance for Differences.** A student will need to be able to tolerate people who have different values, beliefs, and practices. This implies an inner strength to be able not only to learn about others, but also to feel secure within one's self while in the company of others who may feel, look, and act in a different manner.
9. **Positive Regard for Others.** This factor includes the ability to express warmth, empathy, respect, and positive regard for other people. Students are most effective when they are able to communicate this positive regard for others even when a situation or behavior may make them feel uncomfortable.
10. **Sense of Self.** A clear, secure feeling about oneself is usually present in individuals who are neither weak nor overbearing in their relationships with others. Students with this strong, secure sense of themselves stand up for what they believe but do not necessarily cling to those beliefs in the face of new information.

## WARNING INDICATORS FOR SELECTION OF STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

Please review the following list of considerations, which indicate that a student should probably not take part in a YFU exchange at this time. If you feel that any of the warning signs are present during a student's interview, please note them in your assessment.

- Parents unaware of application
- Socially isolated child or family
- Undue stress in parent/child relationship
- Overly involved or enmeshed parent/child relationship
- Overt stress in parents' marital relationship
- Severe financial troubles
- Rigid and/or extreme religious beliefs or practices
- Questionable motives for exchange (e.g. wants to escape home life situation, lonely and wants to have all new friends, etc.)
- Rigid and/or unrealistic expectations of self and others or of the exchange experience
- Evidence of excessive independence or dependence
- History of incomplete stays away from home (e.g. returning early from camp)
- Recent major traumatic events (e.g. death, parental divorce, move, abrupt change in academic achievement, serious illness in self or family member)
- History of substance abuse and/or emotional problems

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR YFU INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the interview is to assess the applicant's potential to succeed on an exchange program. Interviews should be scheduled and conducted in a professional manner. YFU USA and the international partners have agreed to certain standards (listed below) to adhere to during the interview process.

### **International Basic Standards for Educational Exchanges of YFU: Interview Procedure**

- All participants must be interviewed by at least one YFU volunteer or staff member with cross-cultural experience who is committed to the educational goals and adheres to the standards and principles of the YFU organization. She or he is responsible to the YFU National Organization. Here and henceforth in these standards, the term "YFU volunteer or staff member with cross-cultural experience" shall be understood to refer to a person with personal experience abroad and/or involvement with foreign students or other foreign nationals in one's own country.
- At the time of the interview, the potential benefits as well as the potential risks that the program could have for the student will be considered as part of the selection process.
- Student interviews will provide a view from the interviewers' perspective of the student's needs, interests, values, and potentials. These interviews are documented in a written report that is not a substitute for the student's self-description, but a complementary element.

*- Excerpts from YFU International Basic Standards  
November 5, 2005*

### **YFU USA: Additional Guidelines for the Interview Procedure**

- Interviews must be conducted, completed, and sent in to the YFU National Office no later than 30 days after the interview assignment.
- Parents should not be present during the interview, though they should be met before or after the individual interview in order to discuss the YFU program.
- In the event that no YFU volunteer is available to interview a student, a non-YFU volunteer can conduct the interview.
  - A non-YFU volunteer must be a school employee.
  - All non-YFU volunteers must read the Study Abroad Interview Packet before conducting interviews. All non-YFU volunteers should receive appropriate guidance from YFU staff or volunteers regarding this function.
  - Each interview conducted by a non-YFU volunteer must take place on school grounds or in another appropriate public setting.

**The Study Abroad team must approve any exceptions to the above procedure.**



Interview Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Please type or print answers legibly in black ink. These forms will be photocopied and used for placement purposes in countries where English is typically not the first language, so please write clearly and legibly. Review the accompanying instructions before beginning the interview. Throughout the interview, you are welcome to summarize the applicant's responses in third person or use direct quotes.

Students Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle

Address \_\_\_\_\_

YFU USA has found that the ten factors listed below are important for successful intercultural adjustment. Please keep these factors in mind during the interview. When possible, use specific examples to show how the student exhibits these factors when writing up the interview.

- Open-mindedness
- Sense of humor
- Ability to cope w/ failure
- Communicativeness
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Curiosity
- Realistic expectations
- Tolerance of differences
- Positive regard for others
- Sense of self

**Begin the interview with the following statement:** “The purpose of this interview is to learn more about you as a person and a prospective exchange student. There are no right or wrong answers, only answers that best describe who you are. The answers you provide will also help the YFU organization in your host country match you with a host family.”

### School and Extracurricular Activities

1. What activities or hobbies do you like to do in your spare time (e.g. sports, volunteer, religious, jobs)?

2. What do you enjoy about these activities? What benefits do they bring to yourself and others?

3. Apart from classes, which aspects of school do you like most? Why?



**Family and Friendships**

4. In what ways is family important or special to you?

5. Describe your relationship with each of your immediate family members.

6. What things do you do or not do which sometimes cause tension in your family?

a. When or how often does this happen? How does your family deal with this tension?

7. What rules have your parents set for you? How do you feel about these rules?

8. What decisions do you make for yourself (e.g. clothes, religion, friends, dates, money, school classes)?

9. How would your best friends describe you (e.g. personality, relationships with others, best qualities)?

10. Describe a time, if ever, that you were away from your home and parents for more than a few days.

a. How was it different from being at home?

b. How did you feel about these differences?

11. Tell me about a time when you were lonely. How did you deal with those feelings?

**Expectations**

12. What is it that appeals to you most about becoming an exchange student?

13. Describe a non-academic situation in the past year in which you did not do as well as you had hoped. What was your response to this situation?

14. Describe the relationship that you would like to have with your host family.

15. As an exchange student, what would you like your host family to learn from you?

16. What concerns do you have about living in another country? What could you do to overcome them?

17. (Note to interviewer: Please read this whole question to the student verbatim.) When matching you with a host family, YFU takes your personality and interests into consideration. However, YFU cannot guarantee any placement requests. In particular, remember that YFU students are typically not placed in large cities. Keeping this in mind, please tell me which of the following you prefer:

a. Family Size and Members

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No preference         | <input type="checkbox"/> Family with small children              | <input type="checkbox"/> Single host parent                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family with teenagers | <input type="checkbox"/> Couple with no children at home         | <input type="checkbox"/> Small family ( 4 or less family members) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childless couple      | <input type="checkbox"/> Large family (5 or more family members) |   |

b. Community Size

- |  |  |                                     |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No preference | <input type="checkbox"/> Small town      | <input type="checkbox"/> Farm/Ranch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suburb        | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural community | <input type="checkbox"/> City       |

Before we conclude, is there anything you would like to add about yourself, your family, or your interest in an international exchange experience? Remember that special requests are not guaranteed.

Thank you for answering these questions. Do you have any questions about the program that I can answer?

Following the interview, give students an approximate timeline for their acceptance decision. If students are applying for scholarships, they will be notified in mid March. If they are not applying for scholarships, they will be notified 3-4 weeks after the Study Abroad team has received the full application (online application, all supplemental forms, and interview report).

**Assessment by YFU Representative** (To be completed after interview)

1. Based on the interview, what are your overall impressions of the applicant? What impressed you about his or her personality, and how did he or she interact with you during the interview? Feel free to include your impressions of the applicant's family life, things that you feel the Study Abroad team should be made aware of, or any additional comments.

2. Please describe any particular interests, needs, or attitudes that might have an impact on this student's placement or adjustment in a homestay/school experience (e.g. health, climate, dietary, activity).

3. Please carefully rank the student on a scale from 1-10. Prior to ranking the student, please **read the description of the rankings** and think critically about the number number of factors that the student clearly displays. Remember that scores of 9 or 10 should be used very rarely, for students that "wow" the interviewer and are outstanding candidates for exchange.

(Check One): 1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

1- *Severely below average student*: This student is absolutely unacceptable for exchange. He/she lacks maturity and exhibits none of the ten factors.

2- *Considerably below average student*: This student is unacceptable for exchange at this time, but might be capable in the future. He/she weakly exhibits one or two of the ten factors but overall lacks a strong enough representation to be suitable for exchange.

3- *Below average student*: I have specific reservations about this student's ability to have a successful exchange. I would like an Admissions Counselor to call me.

4- *Slightly below average student*: This student exhibits some of the ten factors in a somewhat mature manner. I think this student should go on exchange, but it should be noted that he/she is a slightly weaker candidate.

5- *Average/solid student*: This student is thoroughly appropriate for exchange. He/she exhibits some factors in a mature manner.

6- *Somewhat above average student*: This student has the same qualities as an average student, but also exhibits a slightly stronger presentation of the ten factors.

7- *Above average student*: This student strongly and thoroughly exhibits five or six of the ten factors.

8- *Considerably above average student*: This student strongly and thoroughly exhibits seven or eight of the ten factors.

9- *Exceptional student*: This is an excellent example of a student who is appropriate for exchange in every way and exhibits eight or nine of the ten factors.

10- *Beyond exceptional student*: This is a flawless example of a student who is appropriate for exchange in every way. He/she exhibits all ten factors and "wows" me as an interviewer. A "10" score should be used very rarely, for students that are truly outstanding and strongly exhibit every one of the ten most important factors for intercultural adjustment.

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Your comments are crucial parts of the Interview Report and count toward a percentage of the student's overall application score. The Study Abroad team uses your findings along with information provided by the student to make admissions decision. **Please email the interview report to YFU Study Abroad at [sainterviews@yfu.org](mailto:sainterviews@yfu.org) or mail it to YFU USA, c/o Study Abroad, 3995 Fashion Square Blvd., Suite 2, Saginaw MI 48603.**

Name of YFU Representative/Interviewer

Daytime Phone Number

Date

Street Address

City

State

Zip



# Questions for Parents of Study Abroad Applicants

At YFU USA, we recognize that the exchange experience is an adventure for both students and parents. To this end, we would like to get your opinions on some aspects of your child's prospective participation in a YFU study abroad program. This form is optional and your responses will not influence the selection process. At the end of your child's interview, please take a few minutes with the interviewer to address your own questions regarding your child's exchange experience. For questions about specific programs, call **1.800.TEENAGE** or email [admissions@yfu.org](mailto:admissions@yfu.org) to speak with an Admissions Counselor.

1. How would you describe your child?

2. What does your child do or not do that causes tension in the family?

3. What rules or boundaries have you set for your child? How does your child feel about those rules?

4. What kind of relationship would you like your child to have with his or her host family?

5. Please tell us about a time when your child faced a challenge. How did he or she handle this challenge? What role did you have in addressing the challenge?

6. What most appeals to your family about the exchange experience?

7. When the exchange experience is over, what changes or results would you like to see in your child?

8. Do you have concerns about your child living in another country? What kinds of things can you do together as a family to overcome them?

9. Do you have any other concerns or expectations that we can address?