

Adrian Wallwork

English for Interacting on Campus

English for Academic Research

Series editor

Adrian Wallwork

Pisa

Italy

This series aims to help non-native, English-speaking researchers communicate in English. The books in this series are designed like manuals or user guides to help readers find relevant information quickly, and assimilate it rapidly and effectively. The author has divided each book into short subsections of short paragraphs with many bullet points.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/13913>

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Adrian Wallwork
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ISBN 978-3-319-28732-4 ISBN 978-3-319-28734-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-28734-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016934339

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London
© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface

Who is this book for?

This book is part of the *English for Research* series of guides for non-native English academics of all disciplines who work in an international field.

It is intended for non-native English speaking students who are spending some time studying outside their home country.

EAP trainers can use this book in conjunction with: *English for Academic Research: A Guide for Teachers*.

What does this book cover? How is it organized?

The chapters are not intended to be read sequentially and are not arranged in a specific order. This book is like a manual, to be dipped in to when needed. However, by reading the entire book you will be extremely well prepared for living and studying in a foreign country.

Chapter 1 answers the questions: What's like it to live in a foreign country? How will I feel?

Chapters 2-3 deal with face-to-face relations with other students and with professors.

Chapter 4 covers emails to professors.

Chapters 5 and 6 should help you to participate more effectively in lectures, meetings, workshops, study groups, seminars etc.

Chapter 7 outlines ways to have effective conversations and discussions both on and off campus, for instance at social events in conferences.

Chapter 8 offers guidelines to making telephone calls.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 cover understanding native speakers, pronunciation, listening skills, and translation. Versions of Chapters 8–12 appeared in the first edition (but not in subsequent editions) of *English for Academic Correspondence*.

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 are reference chapters on smileys and text messaging, useful phrases, and grammar (and vocabulary).

How are the chapters organized?

Each chapter has the following three-part format:

1) FACTOIDS / WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

In most cases, this section is a brief introduction to the topic of the chapter. These sections can also be used by EAP teachers as warm-ups for their lessons. All the statistics and quotations are genuine, though in some cases I have been unable to verify the original source.

2) WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

This is designed to get you thinking about the topic, through a variety of useful but entertaining exercises. These exercises can be done either by the reader alone, or in class with an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teacher / trainer. The final part of each *What's the buzz?* section is a brief outline of the contents of the chapter. The keys to some of the exercises are contained at the end of this section.

3) The rest of each chapter is divided up into short subsections discussing specific issues.

How should I read this book?

This book is designed to be like a manual or a user guide—you don't need to read it starting from page one. Like a manual it has lots of short subsections and is divided into short paragraphs with many bullet points. This is to help you find what you want quickly and also to assimilate the information as rapidly and as effectively as possible.

You can use the Table of Contents as a checklist of things to remember.

I am a trainer in EAP and EFL. Should I read this book?

If you are a teacher of English for Academic Purposes or English as a Foreign Language you will learn about all the typical problems that non-native students have when studying outside their home country. You will be able to give your students advice on how to communicate effectively with each other and with their professors, tutors etc. In addition, you will find opportunities for generating a lot of stimulating and fun discussions by using the factoids and quotations, along with the *What's the buzz?* exercises.

The teacher's book contains notes on how to exploit all the books: *English for Academic Research: A Guide for Teachers*.

How is the term 'Anglo' used in this book?

I use *Anglo* to distinguish native English speakers into two groups. *Anglos* refers only to those speakers who are native to the following countries: USA, UK, Republic of Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. It does not refer to speakers in countries such as India, Pakistan, Malaysia and the Philippines, where often instruction in schools is given in English, and huge numbers of the populations speak English on a daily basis, but whose cultures are not Anglo.

The distinction is necessary because if I simply wrote native-English speaking professors, that could be interpreted as covering not just, for example, North American professors but also those in several Asian countries. This would be very misleading as the teaching styles and relations with students may be very different between these two groups. Having said that, not all Anglos of course behave in the same way, but what I say is probably best termed as a stereotype that is more often true than not.

What I say about Anglo cultures is not exclusive to Anglo cultures, but is typical of, for example, Scandinavian countries.

I am not suggesting that Anglo culture or speakers are in any way better than any other culture, but I simply use Anglo as a useful device to avoid me having to continually list the seven countries mentioned above. I apologize to anyone who might find this distinction superficial, inappropriate or in some way racist.

What other books should I read?

This book is a part of series of books to help non-native English-speaking researchers to communicate in English. Other titles that you might like to read (or at least download chapters from) are:

English for Academic Correspondence - this will tell you more about how to communicate with professors and other researchers.

English for Presentations at International Conferences

English for Writing Research Papers

English for Academic Research: Grammar, Usage and Style

English for Academic Research: Grammar / Vocabulary / Writing Exercises

If, when you have completed your PhD, you are planning to get a job either in research or in industry, then you will find the following book very useful: *CVs, Resumes and LinkedIn*. The book is part of the Springer series “A Guide to Professional English”.

Other good books on the topic of being a student abroad are:

Academic Interactions - Communicating on Campus, Feak, Reinhart, Rohlck, Michigan Series in English for Academic & Professional Purposes

How to Survive your Doctorate, Matthiesen and Binder, McGraw Hill Open University Press

International Students' Survival Guide (HarperCollins)

Student blogs

To learn more about what life is like when studying abroad, student blogs are a great resource and fun to read (and will also help you improve your English). Here is one example: <https://manchesterontheroad.wordpress.com/tag/erasmus/>

The author

Since 1984 Adrian Wallwork has been editing and revising scientific papers, as well as teaching English as a foreign language. In 2000 he began specializing in training PhD students from all over the world in how to write and present their research in English. He is the author of over 30 textbooks for Springer Science+Business Media, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, the BBC, and many other publishers.

Pisa, Italy

Adrian Wallwork

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Chapter 1

Living in Another Country and Dealing with Cultural Differences

Factoids: Top 20 difficulties of attending university

- #1 Avoiding misunderstandings and embarrassments on Facebook, WhatsApp etc.
- #2 Balancing studying, coursework, friendships and family life.
- #3 Being far from your support network.
- #4 Coping with cultural misunderstandings.
- #5 Dealing with different teaching styles.
- #6 Dealing with selfish roommates.
- #7 Feeling like an outsider.
- #8 Finding somewhere to park on campus.
- #9 Finding the energy to complete the course, particularly when you are near the end.
- #10 Funding yourself.
- #11 Getting the required reading done.
- #12 Getting up early in the morning for lectures.
- #13 Getting used to currency differences.
- #14 Learning how to become independent and responsible for yourself.
- #15 Making friends.
- #16 Missing friends and family.
- #17 Motivating yourself to study when you could be going to a party.
- #18 Opening the fridge and finding there is nothing to eat.
- #19 Overcoming the language barrier.
- #20 Procrastinating.

1.1 What's the buzz?

- 1) The factoids on the previous page were taken from blogs and tweets written by A) native English speakers attending university in their own country, and B) by non-natives attending university in another country.
- Which ones do you think belong to Category A and which to Category B, and which to both A and B?
 - Which ones have you personally experienced or do you think you might experience in the future?
- 2) Discuss these questions.
1. How much previous experience have you had of living away from your home country / town?
 2. What difficulties do you think you might experience?
 3. How homesick will you be? How often do you intend to phone home to your family and friends?
 4. Apart from family and friends, what else do you think you will miss from home?
 5. How easily will it be to make friends? Are your new friends more likely to be from your host country or other foreigners like yourself?
 6. How easily do you think you adapt to new situations? How independent are you?
 7. How different do you think the organization of life on your new campus will be compared to your university/campus back home?
 8. Would you prefer to live with a) native-speaking students, b) people who speak the same language as you, c) other foreigners?

Living in another country is a wonderful opportunity to open your eyes and broaden your mind. Not only will you learn new ways of doing things, but you may well learn to see yourself and your home country in a different way.

Before you embarked on this new adventure, you may well have studied the websites of the university and of the town where you plan to go. Such websites tend to be written in a reasonably objective way and should give you some clear insights into your new home.

But when you arrive on campus in your new country and new university, it is advisable to reserve any pre-conceived ideas, and just concentrate on what you see with your own eyes and what you actually experience first hand.

The chapter is based on various interviews I have conducted with people who are not living in their home country. My aim is simply to give you an idea of

- what it is like to live in another country
- some of the cultural problems many students encounter
- how host students might interact with foreign students
- how important it is to try and let go of your own stereotypical views

Please note that I am only offering a few (often very personal and subjective) perspectives, other people might have had very different experiences.

KEY TO EX 1

The ones that were taken from blogs and tweets from non-native English speaking students attending university outside their own country were: 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 15 and 19

1.2 What is the difference between travelling around a country and actually living there?

There is a tendency to think that living in a place is just the logical extension of visiting a place and being a tourist. But everyday life in a foreign country entails dealing with the mundane: living permits, work permits, opening bank accounts, getting a mobile phone number, finding a flat etc. What you often suddenly realise, particularly if you don't speak the language, is how difficult it can be without the support of friends and family.

When travelling you make friends along the way, spend a night or a few days together, and then carry on your way. And the friends you make tend to be travellers like you - full of curiosity with fun stories to tell and advice on where to go next. But when you are living in a foreign country, you cannot rely on others who speak your language who happen to be passing through your town. Establishing relationships with the locals will help you develop a sense of belonging. But making such relationships is not that easy.

The cultural experience of living in a foreign country is also very different. When traveling, what impacts on you most is often the cultural heritage of a country and also its food. When you live in the country, you tend to be more affected by the social norms.

When you are communicating in a foreign language, your ability to judge people and their intentions becomes impaired. When you are dealing with a conational, you have a series of parameters for instantly making a judgement about someone - for example, you can get a good idea of their background just from the way they speak (their accent, their tone, the words they use). Within 30 seconds you probably have a fairly accurate, although superficial idea about a person. You have to start all over again to gain the same intuitive capacity in a foreign land.

But all this potential frustration is actually just the beginning of a fascinating voyage of discovery. Not only of the country and its culture. But of yourself.

1.3 I am not sure about whether I would like living in another country. Is there any way to simulate the experience?

Understandably many students are not sure whether they are ready to commit themselves to three years' (or more, or less) studying in a university in another country. You may be worried about not having your family and friends around, about eating very different food, living in a different climate, experiencing a very different teaching style etc.

One way to 'test out' both the country and the university is to apply to do a summer school there. Summer schools promote exchanges between students, researchers and professors from different institutes, regions and countries. By attending a school you will:

- see the different teaching styles and standards of professors in that country compared to your own
- meet many students who come from that country, and thus probably get an idea of actually how similar they are to you
- learn about the local culture, taste the food, visit a few places

By gaining insights into the pros and cons of living in another place, and discovering that the pros will almost inevitably heavily outweigh the cons, you should be well equipped to decide whether studying abroad would be a good thing for you.

And of course in addition to the interesting cultural experience, a summer school is a fun place to learn more about your particular field of research.

1.4 What typical difficulties do people encounter when living for a period abroad? How long does it take to get used to living in a new country?

A lot of students underestimate the initial difficulties of living in a new country. When you live in a foreign country, you do not spend your time in cafes or looking at the artistic or natural heritage. You have to make friends. And to do that you have to speak the language. If you don't, you find yourself dependent on others to do even the most mundane tasks - post a letter, make a bank transfer, get a work permit, pay a bill. It can be very frustrating and quite demeaning at times, especially when you have to express yourself in the most simple terms as you haven't yet mastered the language. It may be of some consolation however to know that everyone goes through this process and that your experience will improve, especially if you make the effort to get to know local people.

Remembering the feeling of nerves when you arrived and feeling completely out of your depth should fade away within a few weeks, but there are still challenges amongst many positive aspects.

Initially, you are often hit hard with all the differences (both positive and negative) from living in another country. Small things can often be the hardest! Asking for things in shops or restaurants can prove to be really challenging and overwhelming when you are so far away from the familiar. Another major challenge is making new friends and building relationships when you are not always sure of what is culturally appropriate.

Habits may be very different, for example, people's concepts of personal space and privacy vary massively from country to country.

However, when such cultural aspects become more familiar and relationships are formed, it becomes much easier to enjoy life and really see the richness of the local culture. Initially you have to get used to a new job, a new culture, new friendships, new languages and it is normal to want to pack your bags and go straight home! However if you can endure this, it will hopefully be a wonderful experience and one where you as a person will grow a lot and learn a lot about yourself and how you adapt to new and sometimes uncomfortable situations. There is definitely a feeling of pride that comes when you realize that you have stuck at something, even when initially it was very hard.

1.5 What do I do when the initial excitement of living in a foreign country wears off?

It can be hard when the initial excitement of being somewhere new fades and the reality of daily life takes over. It's important to keep up contact with people back home and if possible, schedule in trips to visit your home country in order to feel re-energized and ready to get stuck in to your new way of life again.

However, while it is initially worth staying in touch with people from home (i.e. to remind yourself that you do have good friends), it is also beneficial not to over do this. Too much time on the phone or computer might mean that you miss a lot of good opportunities to meet new people!

Sometimes having to push yourself into new situations can be a great way to grow from a personal perspective, enabling you to meet people you might normally never have met.

1.6 Will the teaching style of professors be different from that in my home country? Are student-professor relationships different?

This very much depends on where you come from.

In any case, some typical characteristics of universities in Anglo (see Introduction for a definition of 'Anglo') countries are:

- professors expect their students to interact during class and challenge their ideas. In your country you may be used to always accepting what your professor tells you and not to ask questions - see [3.4](#) and [5.2](#)
- professors expect their students to (learn how to) think critically and independently
- a whole topic is covered during a lecture, and this constitutes examinable material. In other countries much of the materials needed for an examination will only be provided in textbooks and thus accessible for independent learning
- exams are written (oral exams only for testing foreign language competency)
- more focus on practice than theory

- relationships with teaching staff tend to be more informal (but not less professional) - see 3.3
- emails with professors are common, but should be reserved for vital questions that require the professor's expertise - - see Chapter 4

For more on this important topic see Chapters 3 and 5.

1.7 What things will I have to do on arrival at my university?

There will be orientation events, which are welcome events when university departments provide information to the new students.

Can you tell me where I should go for the Freshman/Orientation events?
Where are the Freshman / Orientation events taking place?

You will have to register for the courses you wish to take.

Excuse me, can you tell me what documents I will need to register for the courses?
Which courses are compulsory? Which courses am I required to enroll on?
How many credits are there for the course on ...?
Are there any online courses that I should consider?

You will probably need to go and see the student support services.

Where is the student support office?
How do I get a doctor?
What documents do I need to get a bank account?
Am I insured to do laboratory work?
Is there any accommodation that I could have on campus while I look for a flat in the town?
I am not sure how to complete this rental application form. Can you help me?
Where is the local mosque?
Is there free Internet?
How do I get a travel card?
Can you recommend where I can buy a second-hand bicycle and a lock?

You may wish to join student associations.

I am interested in rock-climbing. Are there any clubs I can join?

I would like to get involved with decisions regarding university policies. Is this possible?

Are there any political groups on campus?

Is it possible to learn a martial art?

What are fraternities and sororities?

1.8 What student services are typically offered at universities?

Many universities offer support in the following areas, when you:

- are having difficulty keeping up with a particular course (there may be a tutoring service available or a peer-to-peer mentoring program)
- can't decide what extra courses you should be taking (an academic advisor should be able to help)
- need to write or revise a paper (in this case there may be courses available, but see the companion volume *English for Writing Research Papers*)
- have personal problems (there should be a counseling service available)
- have financial difficulties (go to the financial aid office)
- need ideas about what to do when you have finished your degree (go the career planning office)

In such cases you could say:

I am having a problem with ... [*mention the specific problem*].

The thing is ... [*introduce more details of the problem*]

Do you have any services available that might be able to help me?

Other services that are available are not just for offering support. Instead, they may be organizing events: music, dance, theater, sports etc. It is a good idea to get to know all the services your university offers, and whether they are free of charge or not. You can find this information from fellow students or from your department's / university's website.