

The exchange experience can be one of the most wonderful and rewarding experiences of your lifetime. In order to take maximum advantage of this opportunity, however, you will need to stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone. In many cases, you'll need to try to overcome shyness and the fear of making mistakes. You will need to master self-discipline and become more independent at the same time you learn to be dependent upon others – so there will be times of confusion. You will probably find that your goals and ideas change as you go. The purpose of this section is to make you aware of what's out there.

While it is very important to have goals, it is just as important to have a plan on how to get there. Please plan to seek out and listen to agency advice, teachers and host parents; we know how to get you where you want to be. Needlessly dwelling and worrying will not get you there. Instead, put your efforts into your studies and seek out the help you need. Probably, it is better to become “well rounded” rather than simply achieve the highest grades. This means that if your goal is to attend a prestigious American university, you need to get involved with other activities, too. Play a sport, attend a youth group or join the choir. These activities will also help you assimilate into your new environment and make friends. Do not skip the friends – conversations with them will broaden your horizons and help you to master the English language.

Is student exchange right for me?

Student exchange is not for everyone – you need to consider carefully beforehand whether or not you can succeed as an international student, otherwise you set yourself up for difficulty and even potential failure. Please consider the following statements and your reaction to them:

Student exchange is not “the easy way out”. Yes, it's true that American students have shorter school days. And, it's also the case that nearly everyone who wants to attend college in the U.S. can do that. However, education in a different language is very challenging – many of our students find it more difficult, in fact.

You will need to spend some of your extra time learning English – maybe in a special class, or independently. The best way to do this is to cultivate friendships with your American peers. This means choosing to stretch yourself and try to communicate in English. It might mean not sitting with others of your own culture at lunch, for example.

Student exchange is not “freedom from parental supervision”. There are lots of rules that apply to our program – some of which wouldn't apply in your home country. In most cases, your American school will also have moral expectations of your behavior. The agency is responsible to ensure your continued qualification to attend school and remain in compliance with the laws and customs of America.

Life with a host family can be very fulfilling. Hosts are interested in relationship with you – that's why they are inviting you into their home. Friendly relationships between adults and children are expected in the United States. Are you capable of relating with adults as a friend?

If you have a problem limiting your computer use at home – you will likely fail as an international student if you bring your computer.

Proceed only if you can agree with these statements.

Application to the USAX program

Application paperwork for all of our programs is available by email upon request to info@usax.us. Also, our partnering agents have all of our required paperwork and are able to assist with the application process. To learn about an agent near you, please email us and request the names of nearby agents.

While there are no hard and fast deadlines, application for either the USAX school-Age or college-Age program should be made as far in advance as possible to ensure the best choice of schools and that USAX will be able to locate an appropriate host family. Applications for the fall semester (classes beginning in August or September) should be made by July 1. Applications for the spring semester (classes beginning in January) should be made by December 1.

Practicing for a Skype interview with a school

It is becoming increasingly common for our partnering schools to request Skype interviews with prospective students before accepting the student. This can be a nerve-racking experience for students, especially when they aren't sure how to prepare. To attempt to stem this fear, the agency offers to help prospective students practice. Just knowing what you will say is the key to successful public speaking – why wouldn't that apply to interviews too? So, we have developed several open-ended questions, which have no right or wrong answers, which you are possibly going to be asked in a

Skype interview and are making some basic suggestions regarding potential answers – look over these questions and consider how you would answer them. If you want practice – find me on Skype at usaxperience.

First – always prepare for the interview. Look good, not like you just rolled out of bed – hair combed.

Second – always look the interviewer in the eyes, be relaxed and remember to smile.

1. Interviewer: "Tell us about yourself."

- "My name is _____."
- "I am ___ years old (American years) and I am in/completed the ___ grade."
- "I tend to be shy at first, but a really exciting friend."
- "I love school; I get excited by _____ class."

2. Interviewer: "Tell us about your interests."

- "In my free-time I like to play soccer."
- "I enjoy listening to music."
- "I like ping pong."
- "I play the piano."

3. Interviewer: "Tell us about your family."

- "My family consists of my mom and dad and younger brother."
- "My father is a businessman, my mother teaches music."
- "We have a pet dog; he is a poodle."
- "My grandparents live nearby and I see them often."

4. Interviewer: "Tell us about your hometown."

- "I live in _____, which is in _____."
- "_____ is a big/medium/small city near _____."
- "My hometown is known for _____."

5. Interviewer: "Tell us about your future goals."

- "I plan to attend high school and college in the United States."
- "I have always dreamed about attending _____ college/university."
- "After school, I am hoping to become a/an _____ (career)."
- "I am interested in that career because _____."

6. Interviewer: "How did you hear about _____ School?"

- "USAX/my agent recommended _____ School."
- "I went to the school's website and learned more about the school there."

7. Interviewer: "Why did you select _____ School?"

- "When I was reading about the school I learned that many graduates go to good colleges."
- "My agent says that the school is very friendly and that there are good opportunities there for international students."

8. Interviewer: "Are you Christian – tell us about what you believe?"

- "Yes, my family belongs to the _____ Church. Faith is very important to me personally."
- "No, Christianity isn't very common where I live – my family is not Christian."
- "Although I do not really know much about Christianity, I believe that Christians are interested in being good people."

9. Interviewer: "Do you have any questions for us?"

- "Is it possible for international students to play soccer at _____ School?"
- "Are music lessons available at _____ School?"

The I-20 and Obtaining a Student Visa

The I-20 is a U.S. Department of State document generated by the school or college or other institution indicating that the prospective student is eligible to attend on an F-1 visa. Schools will not generate an I-20 without completion of their application process and acceptance into their program, which requires all necessary completed paperwork. Once the school accepts you, the I-20 must be approved by the Department of Homeland Security and can then be generated. Once generated, this document will be sent to the student, his/her parents or their agent so that they can acquire a U.S. visa from the American Embassy in their home country.

Since the original document needs to be mailed to the student, it could take several days from the time of acceptance until the student has his/her I-20 in hand. There are no copies of the I-20; only the original, so it is vitally important to safeguard and protect this document. It is not a good idea to schedule the visa interview until the I-20 has arrived. A few notes on the I-20: Visas will not be issued more than 120 days prior to the start of the academic program. Also, students may not arrive in the United States on their F-1 visa more than 30 days prior to the start of their academic program.

You must safeguard his/her I-20, passport and other important documents. The application fee includes the delivery of one original copy of your I-20. If you lose your I-20, forget to update the endorsement or for some other reason require a new I-20 to be processed and mailed to you in your home country, additional fees will apply. Always remember to take your I-20 along with you whenever you leave the United States. The I-20 requires a current endorsement in order to allow the student to re-enter the U.S. This endorsement needs to be updated on an annual basis.

Preparing for your interview with the U.S. Consulate

Once you have your I-20 you will need to schedule a visa interview with the U.S. Consulate in your home country. It is important to be well-prepared for this interview. Remember:

- Look clean and neat
- Smile and maintain a pleasant attitude
- Make eye-contact with the interviewer
- Shake hands firmly, if offered a handshake

The interviewer might ask some of the same questions that the school interviewer asked. You should be prepared for questions about the school and, if the school is a Christian school, you should be prepared to answer questions about your beliefs. For example, if you aren't Christian, you might be asked why you want to attend a Christian school. It might also be a good idea to recognize the denomination of the school as well – for example, if you are planning to attend Lancaster Mennonite School, the interviewer might ask you what a Mennonite is – or Why a Mennonite school?

Please don't hesitate to practice for your interviews with the agency so that you are better prepared and can enter the interview process with confidence and comfort.

Preparing to travel



Flight arrangements need to be made to conform to the dates of the program. The student cannot arrive in the United States for participation in the USAX program earlier than their program begins or remain in the United States following participation in the USAX program later than their program ends without prior arrangements and agency authorization. It is vitally important to communicate with USAX regarding arrival and departure from the program to ensure that the agency has all necessary arrangements in place and is able to pick you up upon arrival.