

From Acceptance Letter to First Lecture: The Onboarding Journey at AELO Swiss Academy

There is a particular kind of silence right before an acceptance email lands. You have refreshed the inbox so many times that the page has practically memorized your face. Then the subject line appears, and for one strange second you cannot bring yourself to click it. When you finally do, the word "congratulations" does something odd to your knees.

I have watched this moment play out more times than I can count, and honestly, I never get tired of it. But here is what almost nobody tells you: the acceptance letter is not the finish line. It is the starting gun. Between that email and your first lecture at AELO Swiss Academy sits a stretch of paperwork, decisions, small victories, and a handful of genuinely wonderful days. This is that journey, mile by mile, described by someone who has walked it alongside hundreds of nervous, thrilled, occasionally chaotic students.

The Email That Changes Everything

The first message usually arrives with more inside it than students expect. Beyond the congratulations, you will find your program name, your start date, any conditions attached to your offer, and, critically, a deadline to confirm your place. Read every line twice. I mean it. The deadline is not decorative.



Within a few days, a second email follows: your welcome package with login details for the student portal. That portal becomes your home base for the entire onboarding period. It is where you upload documents, confirm your enrollment, track what the academy still needs from you, and message the onboarding team directly. Treat your first login like the first day of the semester itself, because in a very real sense, it is.

A quick confession from the trenches. Last year I watched a student skim her acceptance email, miss the confirmation deadline by two days, and send a panicked message at midnight. We sorted it out, and she is thriving now, but the gray hairs she gave herself were entirely avoidable. Put every date from that email into your calendar the moment you read it, with reminders set a week before each one.

Saying Yes Without the Panic

Confirming your place is deliberately simple. You reply through the portal, review and sign your enrollment agreement, and, in most cases, pay a deposit to secure your seat. The exact amount will be spelled out in your letter, so there are no surprises hiding in the fine print.

What separates a smooth confirmation from a stressful one is speed. Students who complete this step within the first week of receiving their offer almost always have a calmer run-up to the semester. Students who let it drift tend to compress three months of tasks into three frantic weeks. Guess which group enjoys their summer more.

And please, ask questions. The onboarding team exists precisely for this. I have fielded questions ranging from "can my parents attend orientation" to "is it true the tap water is drinkable" (it is, and it is excellent). There is no such thing as a dumb question during onboarding, only questions you sat on for too long.

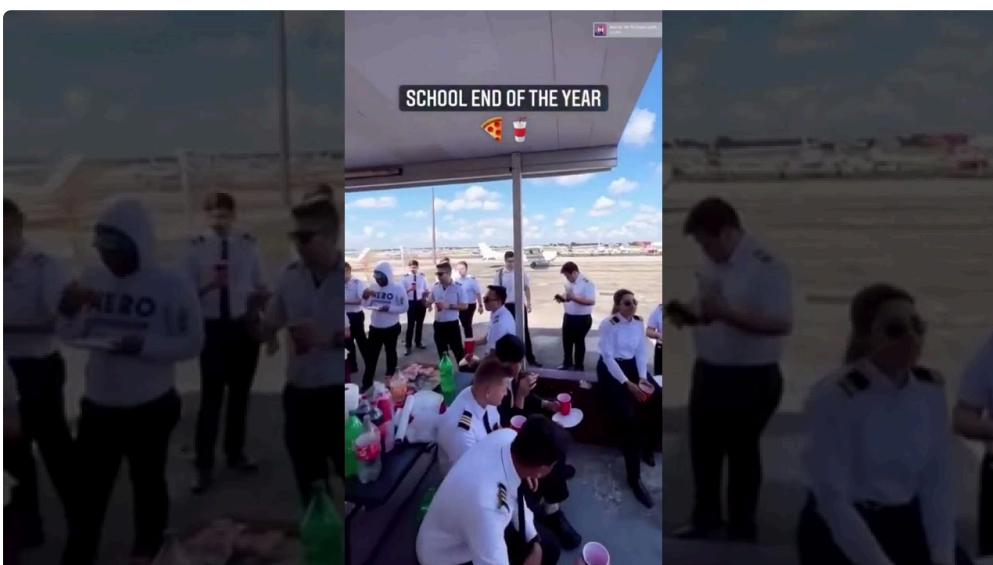
The Paperwork Sprint: Visas, Permits, and Proof You Can Fund Yourself

Here is where Switzerland shows its two faces. The country is warm, welcoming, and wonderful to live in, but its administrative machinery is precise and it does not bend for anyone's schedule.

Your route depends on your passport. If you are a citizen of an EU or EFTA country, the process is lighter. You can travel freely and complete your registration locally after arrival, usually within 14 days of settling in. If you come from anywhere else, you will need a student visa arranged through the Swiss embassy or consulate responsible for your region before you fly, and then a residence permit once you have arrived. Visa processing times are commonly quoted at eight to twelve weeks, and they can stretch longer during busy seasons. Start the moment you confirm your enrollment. Not next week. Now.

You will also need to show you can support yourself financially. The figure often quoted for students sits in the region of CHF 21,000 per year, but cantons set their own requirements, so confirm the current number for your situation rather than trusting a forum post from three years ago. Documents from abroad frequently need certified translations, and sometimes additional certification such as an apostille, which takes time to obtain.

Before you send anything to an embassy or an office, get one folder ready, physical or digital, with these core items:



- Your passport, valid well beyond your intended study period
- The acceptance letter from AELO Swiss Academy
- Proof of financial means, in the format the consulate actually accepts
- Prior diplomas and transcripts, with certified translations where required

- Recent passport-style photographs that meet official specifications

One story I tell every intake: a student submitted a bank statement printed in a format his consulate refused to process. He found out only after submission, which cost him nearly a month. The fix going forward was embarrassingly simple. Send drafts to the onboarding team before you send anything official. A five-minute review has saved students weeks of delay more times than I can count.

Money, Insurance, and the True Cost of a Swiss Semester

Let us talk numbers, because pretending Switzerland is cheap helps nobody. Depending on the city and your lifestyle, most students budget somewhere between CHF 1,500 and CHF 2,500 per month, with rent as the biggest variable by far. Food is manageable if you shop like the locals, alternating between Migros and Coop, cooking a few nights a week, and embracing the student menu wherever one exists. The students who struggle financially are rarely the ones with small budgets. They are the ones who never wrote the budget down.

Health insurance is mandatory in Switzerland, and you generally have about three months after arrival to arrange it. Here is the detail that saves real money: if you already have coverage from home that is considered equivalent, you can apply for an exemption. That application takes time to process, so start it early, and if you are unsure whether your policy qualifies, ask before you arrive rather than after.

Two small pieces of practical magic for daily life: open a Swiss bank account during your first weeks, and set up Twint, the payment app nearly everyone here uses for everything from groceries to splitting a dinner bill. Many programs also offer tuition payment in installments rather than one lump sum. If that would make your life easier, ask. The answer is more often yes than students expect.

Find Your Room Before You Find Your Classroom

Housing is the part of onboarding where I have seen the widest gap between preparation and improvisation.

The simplest path is a student residence: furnished, predictable, and full of people in exactly your situation, which makes the first friendships almost effortless. The alternative is the private market, where shared flats, known locally as WGs, are the norm. That market moves fast. A room posted on Monday can be gone by Thursday, and viewings happen quickly, so have your documents ready to hand over on the spot: your acceptance letter, identification, and proof of funds.

Do not panic if you cannot live next door to campus. Swiss public transport is so reliable it borders on the show-offish, and a 30 or 40 minute commute is genuinely painless. A room one train stop or two tram stops away is often cheaper and just as convenient.

Now, the cautionary tale. One student arrived with nothing booked, slept in a hostel for ten days, and eventually found a room through a classmate he had met at orientation. It worked out, and he tells the story with great relish, but I do not recommend the method. Begin your housing search weeks before you travel, and if a residence place is available, take it for your first year while you learn the local market at a civilized pace.

Arrival Week: The Campus Comes Alive

And then, suddenly, it is real. Bags come off the carousel, the air smells different, and somewhere between the airport and your new address it hits you: I live here now.

Orientation at AELO Swiss Academy is my favorite stretch of the entire academic year. The campus fills up over a few days with a hallway of accents, name tags worn slightly crooked, program coordinators shaking hands they

have been waiting months to shake, and that unmistakable first-week energy where every conversation starts with the same three questions and somehow never gets boring. You get the campus tour, your student email and IT access, an introduction to your program team, a walk through the city so you learn where the practical things are, and usually a welcome event with enough coffee and pastries to power a small national economy.

During your first week, five moves make everything afterward easier:

- Complete your registration with the local authorities, usually within 14 days of arrival
- Activate your student email and portal access, since nearly all communication flows through them
- Sort out your transport pass so the whole region opens up to you
- Attend the campus tour even if you think you know where everything is
- Introduce yourself to two people in your program before the first lecture ends

New students sometimes ask whether orientation is really necessary when they could explore on their own. My answer never changes. The information you get is useful, but the people you meet are the actual point. Friendships formed in week one have a durability that surprises everyone, including the people in them.

The First Lecture, Finally

The https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advice/ timetable said 09:00, so the lecture began at 09:00. Swiss punctuality is not a stereotype, it is a daily practice, and professors here apply it with affectionate strictness. Arrive ten minutes early and you will still find half the room already there, comparing schedules and pretending not to be nervous.

That first lecture is usually gentler than students fear. You get the syllabus, the expectations, the rhythm of the course, and a professor who wants to learn your name and, in the small classes typical of an academy like this, actually will within a couple of sessions. Participation is expected early. Speaking up in week one, even clumsily, is worth more than a month of silent perfection later.

Here is the moment I want you to picture, because it is the payoff for everything above. Three months ago you were refreshing an inbox. Today you have a seat, a schedule, a campus you can navigate without a map, and a classmate from another continent asking to borrow your pen before the professor has even finished writing on the board. That small, ordinary moment is the entire onboarding journey compressed into a single scene. I have witnessed it many times and it still gets me every single intake.

What I Wish Someone Had Told Me

A few pearls earned the hard way. Bring layers, because Swiss weather changes its mind hourly and a sunny morning promises nothing about the afternoon. Learn a handful of words in the local language of your region, even a simple greeting, because the smile you get in return is worth ten times the effort. Use your weekends ruthlessly. The trains turn the entire country into your campus, and the mountains are

