

Supporting Writing with Multilingual Learners

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From Second Language Writing Studies: What has been shown to be helpful?

- Clear and detailed written explanation of assignments, unpacked orally in class
- Samples of successful student writing from same assignments
- Student-teacher conferences (and peer conferences in Writing Centers)
- Essay-level and sentence-level feedback (keeping them in balance)
- Peer review (note: L2 learners tend to be skeptical of peer review so it's important to frame the value of peer feedback and teach students how to do it well: guidelines, rubric, practice, debriefing, etc.)
- Writing to learn strategies (free-writing, focused writing, brainstorming, scaffolding)

Assignments

- Evaluate assignments. How linguistically and culturally inclusive is the assignment?
 - What kind of cultural knowledge base might the assignment be assuming?
 - What might you help the student unpack? Or where could you send them for help in learning this background knowledge if they don't already have it?

Feedback

- Background of how ESL/EFL is often taught in many contexts: strong emphasis on sentence-level grammatical accuracy. High stakes testing that rewards syntactical "correctness" rather than valuing grammar as a tool in making meaning and communicating arguments and ideas
- L2 learners may feel anxiety about English usage, which can draw attention away from questions of rhetorical context, genre, ideas
 - OR highly proficient L2 writers may be unaware of non-standard usage or patterns of error in their writing which persist and are noticeable and potentially distracting for some of their readers.
- How can we address concerns about correctness (whether the student's or the reader's/professor's), while also setting realistic goals and affirming the strength of multilingual writers' ideas?

Practical strategies for "reducing cognitive load on mental bandwidth"

- ***Give time to think.*** Particularly helpful before class discussions (not just for multilingual students but any who appreciate time to gather thoughts before joining conversation.) In one-on-one conversations, don't rush to fill silence (though pay attention to body language that the listener is overwhelmed or confused.)
- ***Put key words of feedback in writing.*** (Clear action steps, consider typing rather than hand writing?)

- Scaffold advice or suggestions by *explaining WHY it might be important*, explicitly addressing possible *cultural gaps, sharing strategies*, etc.

Shaping the Institutional Culture of Writing in Response to Multilingual Writers' "Accent" in Writing:

- Cultivating empathy for experience of L2 learners (see Exercises 1-4, especially pgs. 6-7, this packet)
- Teaching L2 language development to help institutions understand that holding L2 writers to L1 standards can be unethical.
- Raising question: Do students have a right to their own language use?

Exercise 1: What do we expect college students to be able to do?

Imagine you are studying in another country in a language different than the one you were raised in. *In what ways might these tasks present unique challenges for you compared to students who grew up in that educational culture?*

- Understanding an explicit assignment prompt (and implicit expectations the instructor may have which are not in the prompt)
- Listening to verbal instructions in class about an assignment
- Selecting and accessing appropriate research materials
- Reading sources to gain background knowledge, shape one's arguments, find and grapple with evidence, etc.
- Effectively use appropriate academic vocabulary and/or jargon for a given audience
- Clearly mark boundaries around one's own and others' ideas through careful use of citations and signal phrases
- Demonstrate critical thinking about a topic, skillfully using ideas and evidence from other sources, balanced with one's own arguments
- Comprehend material from class lectures and apply in writing assignments
- Make connections between course content, life experiences, broader cultural questions, current events...
- Structure writing in a way that is clear, compelling, and flows smoothly from one key point to the next (especially through the use of structural organizers like transition phrases or sentences)
- Write grammatically complex, sophisticated, accurate sentences.
- Skillfully control use of mechanics, such as punctuation, and capitalization
- Avoid "stigmatizing" (embarrassing) errors of grammar or word choice
- Write in ways that enact disciplinary norms for thinking, questioning, writing, responding to evidence...
- Proofread writing for errors and mistakes
- Revise writing (based on peer, Writing Center, or instructor feedback or on one's own)
- Ask for help with understanding an assignment, a text, or feedback that has been given
- Manage stress level and attend to assignments in the midst of life pressures

Exercise 2: Examining Assignment Prompts

Reflect on the prompts below (or consider one of your own prompts):

- What is the assignment asking students to do? What is likely to be challenging about this assignment?
- Now analyze the assignment through the lens of L2 writers: What kind of linguistic and cultural knowledge might the assignment be presuming?
- Where might gaps come from?
 - Lack of cultural background knowledge
 - Emerging awareness of content knowledge in the field of study (possibly slower to attain it due to challenges of listening and reading in an additional language)

Students' representations of assignment prompt from writing center appt data

- Decide which theorist, Marx or Weber, would make a better president and arguing your candidate based on their respective concepts, ideas, and theories.
- 10 page research paper on the racialization of Asian Americans in popular culture.
- It is a literature review for a mock trial we have been working on. Basically my role was to be a trial consultant, which is to advise the attorneys when they question the jurors to find out what they are looking for (i.e. are they bias in any way) and who they should eliminate. In order to discover this we made a jury questionnaire based off of psych trials we researched. The paper is basically an analysis of each of those trials and how they influenced our instruction to the attorneys.
- Close reading of Sharon Olds's "Poem to my first lover"
- Write an essay to examine Shostak's initial desire in light of Lévi-Strauss' and Geertz' ideas on the existence and importance of universal patterns among different cultures. Choose one passage from NISA that helped you learn something new and discuss in the essay the importance of cross-cultural studies for the understanding of human nature, in Geertz's and Levi-Strauss' sense.
- A 4 to 5 page long, typed, double spaced and carefully edited piece. The essay should be clear, organised and address the question provided, concerning a book based on the lives of women within an indigenous group in the Brazilian amazon.

Exercise 3: Samples of “Accented Writing”

Look through these examples of student writing from the 5Cs. Pick one or two that catch your eye.

1. Without writing on the text (you might want to make notes on a separate page), consider the following:
 - a. What drew you to read this example?
 - b. What do you find most interesting and promising in it?
 - c. What moments in the writing did you really enjoy (find pleasing, engaging)?
2. Imagine you were meeting with this writer in office hours about this draft:
 - a. What general feedback would you want to give? How could you word it in a way that would help the writer leave feeling encouraged about the ways they are successfully marshaling their language resources and strategies for further revisions?
 - b. What questions do you anticipate the writer might have for you?
 - c. What action points would you outline for the writer in revision? Why?
 - d. What resources might the writer be draw on in the process of revision you would like them to follow? What if they weren't sure how to do those things?

1. Demographic Profile Paper

When I was at Santa Fe spending my spring break, I was fascinated by the cultural environment of the city....During the nine days in Santa Fe, I walked all over the streets and lanes in the city and received a deeper sense of the artistic environment there. It appeals to me as a slow-paced life with enjoyments on arts and leisure. However, there are also a noticeable number of homeless people on the streets. What surprised me is that when I was recalling the scenes I saw there, the homeless people, the Shuttle drivers and workers I saw on the construction sites are mainly dark yellow skins. This makes me begin to think about the city: Is there anything hidden behind the artistic and relaxed environment in Santa Fe? ...Both the average income level and the median value of owner-occupied housing units in Santa Fe is much higher the average level in the United States. However, the standard deviation of the economic level in dramatically big. Then, who are those poor people who live in this high life-standard city? ... In 2015, the poverty rate of Hispanic population is more than twice of that of the white alone population that is not Hispanic or Latino. What's more, the unemployment rate of Hispanic or Latino population is also way higher than white people....Santa Fe provided outsiders an illusion of being very a relaxed, affluent and peaceful city. However, if you dig, it also exposes some unbalanced problems.

2. Shakespeare Paper Outline (King Lear)

Thesis: Edgar shows the demonstration of an appropriate leader.

- The last lines were attributed to different characters in two versions of the play: Albany in the Quarto version and Edgar in the Folio version. ... The person who speaks this line should have leadership and Edgar is the only person who fits into the content ...
- Edgar has the experience which gives evidence to the sentence “Shall never see so much, nor live so long”. Edgar not only saw the downfall of two old men but experienced similar things which make his words more convincing.

- Edgar shows the quality of a future leader as the play develops: He was reduced to one of the poorest people in the country and thus had a firsthand understanding towards the life of the base in the society... This shows his quality of a good king---to concern about the inequality in his country. He gained more knowledge, courage and determination through his tragic experience and turn into an Edgar who took actions towards the antagonists and not the weak son anymore.

3. Art History Paper

Recognizing inherent weakness of natural forms, Schlemmer resorts to artificial elements and technology as antidote, imposing upon his figures both machine-like, dehumanizing quality and protection from social chaos through element of costume design. Referring to costume as “the disguise,” Schlemmer uses transfiguration not only as artistic rendering or decoration of human body but also as significant transformation to cover up human vulnerability... In *Gesture Dance III* three actors wear masks on both front and back of their heads, standing in a row with their arms crossed and necks straight like soldiers. Their identical postures, generic background, and complete erasure of emotions refuses to deliver concrete messages of any kind; besides three stiff bodies there is only empty darkness.

4. Environmental Fiction Response Paper

Finally, three critics, Taylor, Timberg and Shalom, similar interpret the gender conditions in *Ecotopia*. They all agree with each other’s opinions. All the three says that women play the dominant roles in *Ecotopian* government. Taylor says that Callenbach emphasized the gender role of women in *Ecotopia*, as they control the Survivalist party and with a woman as president (p. 137) and women dominate the society. He also says, government policies are considered and determined by female. Timberg (2008) says that women in *Ecotopia* have the strong power that feminists in the 1970s attacked the violence and dominance in *Ecotopian* society. Finally, Shalom describes the society as socialist and feminist and points out that the “war games” in the book provide interesting discussions with his current students.

5. International Relations Paper

Today it has also become vital for every States to follow the neoliberal philosophy of International relations because no country today can sustain in itself without the mutual cooperation and help of each other no matter how powerful the State is or how close the State is with its resources because most of the most pressing global issues of our time, be it climate change, economic depression or terrorism, do not follow the particular territory of any country but in fact influence every nation of the planet. Say for example the terrorist attack of September 11 not only threatened America but the whole global system and every country felt the need to deal with terrorism more effectively by uniting against terrorism. Today if big corporate houses of America like Microsoft or Apple fail, then it not only affects America’s economy but also many people in China, Middle East Asia, India, Europe and many other parts of the world will be without a job, or face some sort of economic hindrance because these companies do business, not only in American markets, but also in the global market.

Exercise 4: Hearing the Voices of Multilingual Students

Excerpts from *WAC and Second-Language Writers: Research Towards Linguistically and Culturally Inclusive Programs and Practices*. Edited by Terry Myers Zawacki and Michelle Cox. Full text PDF available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/l2/>

Michelle Cox, Dartmouth College. CHAPTER 12. IN RESPONSE TO TODAY'S "FELT NEED": WAC, FACULTY DEVELOPMENT, AND SECOND LANGUAGE WRITERS. Direct link to chapter PDF: <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/l2/chapter12.pdf>

APPENDIX A: VOICES OF BSU ESL STUDENTS, FROM AN ENGL 101 SURVEY

In response to, "Please describe the writing instruction in English you've received."

- I have never taken a class that focuses only on writing. In my ESL classes we did very short writing assignments. The longest [sic] piece of writing I've written in English is one paragraph. In my ESL classes we read short paragraphs and answered basic questions. [...] It is easier for me to understand English when I hear it or read it. It is more difficult for me to speak and write because I have trouble choosing the correct words. — Mexican student, who took ESL courses at a college in California
- I haven't received any writing instruction in English. I studied reading for TOEFL Test, so the longest text I've read English is TOEFL text book. — Japanese student, who went to an English Language Institute in the US
- The writing basically has three parts: Introduction, body, and conclusion. Introduction has hook, background, thesis. Body has usually three paragraphs. Each paragraph's first sentence usually is the thesis of the paragraph. It's better has [sic] transition words for each of these three paragraphs. The last paragraph is conclusion. It is good for writer to repeat the thesis in another words. — Chinese student, attended an English Language Institute I attended high school in Cape Cod, 2 years.

In response to, "Please describe the reading instruction in English you've received," and "What kinds of reading have you done?"

- First, read the first and last sentences of each paragraph. Second, read the questions and then go back to the paragraph to find out the answers. Skip the new words if you haven't seen before or you can according to the context, try to guess the meaning of the words that you don't know. I have red [sic] short novel, SAT reading, TOEFL reading, and newspaper. — Chinese student, attended an English Language Institute
- I'm reading "Art History." There are so many technical words so at first, I need to check these vocabulary [sic] and after that, I need to read two times. It takes a lot of time but understanding the content of textbook is the most important. — Japanese student, attended an English Language Institute
- In response to, "What do you hope to learn in this course?" I hope I'll get more writing skill in draft that that [sic] I wrote before. In addition, I wanna [sic] express notion or an abstract [sic] concept because I'm poor at those expression on the draft.

- I hope I can speak English fluently and can write easily. I want to improve my writing skills so I could write properly in other classes. I hope I achieve English obstacles in my life as much as I can. I would like to learn writing as American. Sometimes I write dialy [sic]in English but I can't do well so I would like to practice.

APPENDIX B: L2 STUDENT VOICES FROM ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

These voices are from Terry Myers Zawacki and Anna Habib's (2010) research on the experiences of linguistically and culturally diverse students across the curriculum at George Mason University.

- In America, when I write totally different style of paper, the professor say, "Where are you from? How did you get into this college? Your writing is behind the line, so you can't really catch up to the class." So, I don't know how to figure that out. — Yoon, student from S. Korea
- I had my initial friction between the cultures here when I was told over and over again "you know you have to cut down, clean up your paragraphs." I was very offended because I came with a lot of confidence behind me and suddenly I find that it is totally different. But it didn't take me long to catch up though. I realized any nice language I use is wasted; no one is going to look at it in that way. —Kanishka, student from Sri Lanka
- "My strength in Spanish," Diana said, "is my personal style of how to write, and that's something that people like. And my grammar and vocabulary in Spanish are really good. In English, definitely, I would like to have more vocabulary, so I can do that [same thing]."
- I would really love to learn nice words, because I do have ideas, and I do want to put something down, but I am short of words. —Ayesha, student from Pakistan
- When you ultimately succeed in writing is when you have your own accent. When I speak, my accent reflects who I am and where I come from. Well, I want my writing to reflect me in that way. —Tonka, student from Bulgaria

Notes and Questions