

Assisting ESL Writers



Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
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Workshop Goals

- Understand challenges ESL writers face
- Learn strategies to accommodate ESL writers in your classroom

Brainstorm

What issues have you encountered with ESL writers in your classroom?

- Limited class participation
 - Reluctance to use office hours
 - Saying they understand something when it's clear they don't
 - Writing that doesn't meet expectations (strangely organized, lacking expected elements, etc.)
 - Odd vocabulary usage
 - Grammatical errors (either minor or serious)
 - Potential plagiarism
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Exercise: Freewriting

Write about the most influential teacher in your life and how they were influential.

- All adjectives have to be followed by a verb.
- All prepositions must be placed at the beginning of the sentence.
- All pronouns must be placed at the end of the sentence.

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More than 12,000 students reported in Fall 2015 that their native language is not English.*

- This is more than 70% of the student body

*Data from the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research

Some things to consider

- Native-like writing should not be the goal
- Writing with an accent
- Valuing difference
- Cultural backgrounds

How can WAC help?

WAC Unmodified

- Scaffolding
- Detailed, written assignment prompts
- Models of good work
- One on one meetings about writing
- Writing-to-learn activities

WAC Modified

1. Assignment Design
2. Peer Review
3. Evaluation

1. Assignment Design

- Think about the role of cultural knowledge in written assignments
 - If the assignment asks students to reflect on an American cultural phenomenon, you may be turning a reflective paper into a research paper!
- Give options
 - Personal experience vs. cultural knowledge

Example Prompt

How does celebrating Thanksgiving demonstrate the concept of cognitive dissonance?

2. Peer Review

- Research suggests that some ESL writers don't trust peer feedback in general, and native English speaking writers don't trust ESL peer feedback (see Cox 2014).
 - Instructors should try to dispel these concerns by explaining the value of peer feedback in general, and feedback from ESL students specifically.
- Ask students to exchange papers before class, rather than during class
- Give instructions about how much attention should be paid to surface level issues
- Distribute a list of questions to guide the peer review process

3. Evaluation

- Low-Stakes
 - Treat ESL writers *the same* as native English speaking writers
 - Consider letting ESL students do low-stakes writing in their native language (Huh, Lee & Lee 2013)
- High-Stakes
 - **Remember writing a perfect essay is a more difficult task in your non-native language!**
 - Rubrics: learning outcomes vs. mechanics
 - Improvement rather than outcome

Group Activity

- Read the essay with your pen down.
- Discuss as a group how you would grade the essay according to the rubric.
- Discuss the rubric - does it capture aspects of the paper that you think are done well? How might it be revised?

Questions?

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tinyurl.com/CityTechWAC

References and Resources

Cox, Michelle. (2014). "In Response to Today's 'Felt Need': WAC, Faculty Development, and Second Language Writers." In *WAC and Second-Language Writers: Research Towards Linguistically and Culturally Inclusive Programs and Practices*, ed. Terry Myers Zawacki and Michelle Cox (The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press): 299-326.

Huh, M-H., Lee, Y-S., Lee, N. (2013). Mediation through the first language during the second language writing: A sociocultural approach. *English Teaching* (68): 69-84.

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/faculty-resources/tips-on-teaching-esl-students/tips-on-teaching-esl-students/>

<http://faculty.weber.edu/mtungmala/Hybrid4270/Articles/MeetNeeds.pdf>

<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/wac/resources/WorkingwithESLWriters.html>