

SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL/ESL STUDENTS

Writing Studio Conferences

At the Writing Studio, your students can meet with trained writing consultants to discuss their writing concerns. By discussing their work-in-progress with a consultant, students will develop skills that will help them to improve as writers.

Our consultants can assist at any stage of the writing process—from brainstorming and researching to drafting, revising, and polishing a final draft. Duke undergraduates may schedule a maximum of one appointment per day and two appointments per week, depending on availability. Each writing conference lasts for 50 minutes.

The Writing Studio offers students a choice of face-to-face and synchronous chat appointments. We recommend starting with a face-to-face appointment, as this allows a student to talk directly with a writing consultant.

Writing Studio

MAIN STUDIO
BIVINS 107
EAST CAMPUS

PERKINS LIBRARY
ROOM 112
WEST CAMPUS

LILLY LIBRARY
SECOND FLOOR
EAST CAMPUS

LOCATIONS AND HOURS:

<http://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>

VISIT US ONLINE

Thompson Writing Program

<http://twp.duke.edu/undergraduate>

The Writing Studio

<http://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>

Writing Studio Faculty Resources

<http://twp.duke.edu/faculty>

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Thompson Writing Program Writing Studio

Teaching Undergraduate International/ESL Writers



Duke
UNIVERSITY

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR ESL STUDENT WRITERS

Struggles with grammar and word choice

Just as your international/ESL students might often speak with an accent in English, they might write with one. These student texts might reflect preposition norms or subject-verb agreement rules appropriate for British English or another global English. You might, therefore, notice instances of article usage, syntax, or word combinations (e.g., serious majority Instead of significant majority) that sound poetic or discordant.

Struggles with structure and style

You might at times find the logic or organization of their texts unusual in light of a U.S. academic perspective. Equally as important, these students might find your views of what constitutes strong academic writing counterintuitive. Their cultures might emphasize creating texts in which the thesis emerges gradually, long sentences are the norm, and concision is not highly valued.

Limited writing experience

To complicate matters further, some international/ESL undergraduates arrive at Duke without having ever written anything longer than an SAT or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) essay in any language.

Some of these students may have never created a lab report or research paper before. As such, they would benefit from your guidance.

Other international/ESL students in your course, contrastingly, might have extensive experience with writing texts in their own language as well as in English.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS IN TEACHING ESL STUDENTS

MYTH: Marking every weakness you see in a student text is effective

If students see their drafts covered in marks and comments, they might find it difficult to understand what your priorities are and what theirs should be. In attempting to incorporate such feedback to improve their drafts, your students might feel overwhelmed or confused about where to begin.

MYTH: Making no comments on sentence-level issues is the best policy

When word choice, syntax, or other such concerns significantly impact clarity, offering comments on the most confusing of those is appropriate. You might also address a few prominent patterns of error. And when your student uses an incorrect word for a key term in your field, offering the correct one could serve as a natural teaching moment.

MYTH: Pointing out an issue to such writers will enable them to quickly master it

Mastering the major aspects of a new genre or rhetorical style is a process that could take your students considerable time. And fully understanding particular grammar rules, which are often more complex than native speakers realize, could be a lengthy process as well.

Although article (a, an, the) usage might seem simplistic because the basic rules are easy to explain, for instance, using articles correctly is complex and idiosyncratic. Encouraging international students to focus on perfecting articles could be counterproductive.

BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING ESL STUDENTS

Commenting on student texts

When reading a student text, make an effort to focus on global issues such as content, clarity, and coherence.

Craft encouraging, text-specific comments that reflect your priorities and signal those to your students. Be selective about your feedback on the word choice and grammar level.

Consider framing your comments with cultural context: For U.S. academic/anthropology/engineering writing, the organization of this text...

Encourage your students to talk with you about their drafts and your accompanying feedback.

Designing assignments

Consider:

- Offering specific guidelines for the genre (policy memo, lab report, précis)
- Giving your students choices within a particular assignment
- Assessing if your students have sufficient cultural background to successfully complete an assignment

Considering language

Try to limit the use of idiomatic or metaphorical language in your assignment descriptions, comments on drafts, and exams.

Encouraging Writing Studio visits

Suggest your students consider making some appointments for Writing Studio conferences.