Support for Multilingual Writers

Writing Studio conferences

The Writing Studio offers individual conferences facilitated by highly-educated consultants. Through collaborative discussion, consultants support writers in developing both their writing projects and their writing processes.

Our consultants welcome writers at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to drafting and revising a text.

Writers can visit our Writing Studio website to learn about the types of appointments offered, see the schedule, and make an appointment.

Faculty Resource handouts

The faculty resources section of the Thompson Writing Program website provides handouts on facilitating inclusivity of multilingual students. These handouts address designing course syllabi and assignments, responding to multilingual student texts, and enhancing student learning and participation.

DukeWrites Suite

Our DukeWrites Suite website provides video modules on academic writing, citation practices, intercultural norms, and academic integrity.

The suite also provides screencast tutorials that guide viewers on using digital resources for support in improving word choice and other aspects of language.

Writing Studio Locations

Bivins Building

Room 207

East Campus

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Perkins Library

Room 112

West Campus

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Lilly Library

Second Floor

East Campus

Visit Us Online

Thompson Writing Program (TWP)
https://twp.duke.edu/

TWP Writing Studio
https://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio

TWP Faculty Resources
https://twp.duke.edu/faculty-resources

DukeWrites Suite
https://dukewritessuite.com/

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Thompson Writing Program

Writing Studio

Teaching Multilingual Writers

Duke
UNIVERSITY

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITERS

Challenges with language

Just as your multilingual students might speak with an accent in English, they might write with one. A multilingual writer might follow preposition norms or subject-verb agreement rules appropriate for British English or another global variety of English. You might notice a use of syntax, articles, or word combinations (e.g., *serious majority* instead of *significant majority*) that sound unusual or poetic.

Challenges with structure, logic, and style

You might at times find the organization or logic of a text unusual in light of a U.S. academic writing perspective. And these students might find your views of what constitutes strong academic writing equally counterintuitive. Their cultures might emphasize producing texts in which the thesis emerges gradually, long sentences dominate, and concision is not highly valued.

Experience with writing

To complicate matters further, some multilingual international students arrive at Duke having never written anything longer than an SAT, GRE, or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) essay in any language. Other multilingual students taking your course might have extensive experience with writing in their primary languages, if not in English.

In either case, your students may not have previously written a critical analysis, policy memo, op-ed, or lab report. They would benefit from having your detailed guidance on the particular writing genres targeted in your assignments.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS IN PROVIDING FEEDBACK

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

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

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

Offering comments on word choice, syntax, or other language concerns has value when clarity is significantly impaired. You might also address a few prominent patterns of error. When a student uses an incorrect word for a key term in your discipline, offering the correct one could serve as a natural teaching moment.

MYTH: Pointing out an issue to 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 expert speakers realize, can be a lengthy process as well.

While usage rules for articles (a, an, the) might seem simplistic because the basics are easily explained, using articles correctly is complex and idiosyncratic. Encouraging students to focus on perfecting this aspect of their writing is likely counterproductive.

BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING MULTILINGUAL WRITERS

Commenting on student texts

When reading a student text, make an effort to prioritize content, clarity, and the genre features (e.g., thesis development, narrative arc) you teach.

Craft encouraging, text-specific comments that reflect your priorities and signal those to your students. Be selective about your feedback on language concerns.

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

Designing assignments

- Offer specific guidelines for the genre (policy memo, critical analysis, précis)
- Provide choices for your students within a particular assignment
- Consider if your students have sufficient cultural knowledge to successfully complete an assignment

Considering language

Aim to limit the use of idiomatic or metaphorical language in your assignment descriptions, syllabi, quizzes, exams, and feedback on drafts. Also consider limiting the use of cultural references there that have not been addressed in class.

Encouraging discussion

Encourage your students to discuss their writing concerns and your feedback with you.

Rene D. Caputo
Duke ESL Specialist