

## WORKING WITH ESL STUDENTS (L&T):

The following is a list of “tips” for working with students whose native language is not English. I have tried to make it relevant to L&T students as much as possible although this information is useful in most ESL/EFL situations.

1. PREPARE VOCABULARY LISTS FROM THE READING PRIOR TO THE CLASS: ask students to lightly scan the reading ahead of time, underlining all the vocabulary words that are not familiar to them and have them prepare their meanings before the class/before they read it deeply. This way, they will enjoy the reading more and feel more able to delve into the deeper layers of the literature, not having to be halted every few words by unknown terms. It also helps them feel more like they are “blending in” to a group which includes American students. They do not have to reach for dictionaries, look confused in front of their peers and “lose face”.
2. READ OUT LOUD TO THE STUDENTS so that they can hear correct pronunciation and intonation/fluency of the piece as an example. I have observed that when students are read to, they are actually much more likely to be interested in the literature as it is read with emotion, timing, and tone of voice that gives so much extra information to a non-native speaker of English.....information they cannot grasp to the same degree when they read to themselves. As well, it draws them more into the piece of writing through aural appreciation of these aspects of language. Following this, they will be able to read the given piece again by themselves.
3. HAVE STUDENTS EXPLAIN THE BASIC NARRATIVE OF THE TEXTS TO EACH OTHER VERBALLY FIRST...BEFORE DOING DEEPER ANALYSIS. This helps them to be able to express the basic ideas in English, realize when they get the wrong idea about what is happening in the text or are not being clear enough (by getting peer feedback), and helps them improve their initial attempts by clarifying for others. The difference here between a native speaker and a non-native speaker is that the native speaker may be able to skip this step (the most basic details /bones of the events in the story) and move on to the analysis step immediately. For the non-native speaker, this saves a lot of misunderstanding and misinterpretation later.
4. EXPLAIN WHAT AN AMERICAN ACADEMIC STYLE ESSAY LOOKS LIKE. This seems very obvious, but is not always. Many non-native speakers are from cultures where essays are not used at all (many Russian schools use mainly oral exams) or the style may be very different in terms of how it looks and what it expresses (China, South America, Germany, etc.). Provide extensive practice in this writing style with example essays for them to use as models.
5. BREAK THE ESSAY TASK INTO VERY SMALL BABY STEP TASKS UNTIL THEY HAVE A STRONG UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT TO DO. (brainstorm, mindmap, introduction/thesis statement, body style, conclusion.....each of these parts on separate days...or even weeks!!)

6. HAVE THEM DO COOPERATIVE/TEAM ESSAYS THE FIRST FEW TIMES. At first, some students may find this unusual as they believe that their personal ideas/opinions/writing style is not to be shared and they may feel it wastes their time. However, from my experience, when they share the creation of the outline, thesis statement, introduction, etc. together, they get a lot of ideas from each other by talking it out. As well, in terms of language (vocabulary and grammar), one “teaches” the other what they know and vice-versa..! It is AMAZING what comes from this experience. It takes away a lot of anxiety too! Later, they can move to being independent and writing individually. The only rule is that they must discuss every word before anything is written so that one person does not “control” the essay more than the other.
  7. PROVIDE AS MANY VISUAL REFERENCES AS POSSIBLE TO ADD TO THEIR UNDERSTANDING. Because written texts, especially literature, can be so overwhelming visually to a non-native speaker in terms of the sheer amount of words on the page, and pages in the book, it is very helpful to fill in gaps in comprehension, pull in their interest and break up the overwhelming task by connecting the abstract writing to the picture/video clip/film/drawing on the blackboard, etc. Sometimes it makes all the difference! (\*\*It is also great to use audio media like music).
  8. HAVE STUDENTS DO AS MANY PRESENTATIONS/ ACTING EXERCISES/ DEBATES/SPEAKING ACTIVITIES, ETC. AS YOU CAN IN CONNECTION WITH THE TEXTS. Because non-native speakers learn so well from expressing their ideas out loud in English (practicing), give them ample opportunity to do it not only in writing. This will draw them more into the text and into the English language; it will also do amazing things for their writing!!!!
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