Addressing and Assessing Multilingual Student Writing

With small changes to your teaching, you can take advantage of the benefits that multilingual students bring to your class. Nearly half of Mason students are multilingual, and they have different levels of fluency. However, the strategies below are designed to help you support both multilingual and other students.

Faculty FAQ: How can I better assess ML/Int'l students' writing?[1]

The kind of writing students produce in the college context is typically "academic writing." Unlike other kinds of writing, academic writing is dense due to longer phrases within sentences (Biber & Gray, 2010), and rigid rules regarding tone, formatting, structure, and citation style.[2] Multilingual and international students, like other students, are still learning how to produce "academic writing"; therefore, instructors who are experienced in this kind of writing play an important role in helping students understand it too.

1. Explain your expectations as a reader.

As an experienced reader and writer of academic writing, you have internalized certain rules of academic writing in your field. Unlike your students, you know how to start, organize, phrase, and format your writing following those rules. Reflect on your knowledge, share a few key expectations. For instance, do you expect a purpose statement (or thesis statement) at the beginning of their writing?

2. Focus on higher-order issues versus lower-order issues.

Grammar errors can be distracting; however, it is easier to begin addressing them if the **purpose** of a text, the **organization/structure**, and the **development of ideas** are clear. The latter are considered "higher-order" issues since they require more critical thinking. Consider addressing these issues first.

> "When assessing International students' writing, it is helpful to have realistic expectations about what a student is capable of achieving in the course of a semester. One University of California study found that, even in the best of circumstances, it takes Limited English Proficient students 4-7 years to develop academic English proficiency. This does not mean that you should feel like you have to lower your standards of what constitutes acceptable work. Nonetheless, when a teacher focuses intensely on linguistic accuracy, they often accidentally pay less attention to the quality of ideas and critical thinking that a student has shown."
> – Skipper, *Helping Multilingual/International Students Succeed: Frequently Asked Questions*

3. Remember that writing is a process.

Use this process to your students' advantage. If you have multiple writing assignments, you can focus on one issue per assignment and ask your students to address that issue in that

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[1] This question is part of a collection of questions shared by Mason faculty and compiled by K.Skipper. For more information, visit stearns.gmu.edu and read the "Helping Multilingual Students Succeed" handout.
[2] Biber, D. & Gray, B. (2010). "Challenging stereotypes about academic writing: Complexity, elaboration, explicitness." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9,* 2-20.

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assignment. In the next assignment, you can point out a new issue while reminding them about the previous issue.

FAQ: How can I provide more useful feedback on multilingual/international students' writing?[3]

Research also indicates that feedback emphasizing grammar errors can be overwhelming for the student and time-consuming for the instructor (Hartshon et al, 2010; Bitchener, 2008). Here are some strategies you could use to provide effective feedback in an efficient manner.[4]

Do Less	What are the most important learning outcomes you would like your students to demonstrate in this assignment?
Praise in Detail	What are your students doing well in a given assignment? What would you like them to keep doing?
Look Past Accuracy	If you have to comment, what is one grammar issue you would like all your students to notice in their writing? How will you address that issue in class?
Require Revision	Before writing comments, do you require your students to revise this assignment?
Be Regular and Be Frequent	If you require a revision, how fast do you want that? If you expect your students to apply the feedback, how soon will you send it so that they can have time to react to it?

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[4] Hartshon, K.J., Evans, N.W., Merrill, P.F., Sudweeks, R.R., Strong-Krause, D. , Anderson, N.J. (2010). Effects of Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback on ESL Writing Accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44, 84-109.

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Other Recommendations and Teaching Resources

Apply Today	Doetsch-Kidder, S., Miller, L., Weinstein, A. (2018). "Structuring reading/writing assignments to improve critical thinking skills" [PowerPoint]. *Innovations in teaching and learning,* (10). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.13021/G8itlcp.10.2018.2153 GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "Discussing prompts." [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Sample-Activities-1_Part2.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "Low-stakes writing." [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Low-Stakes-Writing-1.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "From writing intensive to writing integrated" [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Integrating-Writing.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum. "Dealing with student error" [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Dealing-with-Student-Error-1.pdf Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d). "Reframing Students' Roles in Collaborative Learning". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/collaborative-learning/ Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d). "Grading: providing effective feedback to students". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/course-and-curriculum-redesign/grading/
Listen Today	Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. "Collaborative learning" Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/collaborative-learning/ Perez, A. & Stachowiak, B. (2016, September 22). "Bridging the culture gap." *Teacing in Higher Ed Podcast.* Retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/bridging-culture-gap/ Haras, C. & Stachowiak, B. (2018, June 28). "Reflecting on our teaching." *Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast.* Podcast retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/reflecting-on-our-teaching/ Teaching in higher ed. (n.d). Cultural competence. Retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast-category/cultural-competence/

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Read Today	Writing Across the Curriculum. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/learning-modules-resources/ Writing Across the Currilum, GMU. "From writing intensive to writing integrated." (n.d). Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Integrating-Writing.pdf Online Writing Lab, Purdue University: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d). "Developing critical thinkers.". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/course-and-curriculum-redesign/developing-critical-thinkers/ Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d.) "Using writing to learn in your classes". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/writing-and-research/ The Writing Center, GMU. "Writing center quick guides." Retrieved from https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/writing-resources/wc-quick-guides Zawacki, T. (n.d). "Managing the paper load and responding effectively to student writing" [PDF File]. Retrieved from http://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Managing-the-Paper-Load-and-Responding-Effectively-to-Student-Writing.pdf

Additional Scholarship

Biber, D. & Gray, B. (2010). "Challenging stereotypes about academic writing: Complexity, elaboration, explicitness." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9,* 2-20.

Bitchener, B. & Knoch, U. (2008). The value of written corrective feedback for migrant and international students. *Language Teaching Research 12*(3), 409 – 431.

Hartshon, K.J., Evans, N.W., Merrill, P.F., Sudweeks, R.R., Strong-Krause, D. , Anderson, N.J. (2010). Effects of Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback on ESL Writing Accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly, 44,* 84-109.

Jamieson, S. (2013). Reading and engaging sources: What students' use of sources reveals about advance reading skills. *Across the Disciplines, 10*(4). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/reading/jamieson.pdf

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Lockhart, T. & Soliday, M. (2016). The critical place of reading in writing transfer (and beyond): A report of student experiences. *Pedagogy 16* (1), 23-37.

Do you have other resources to share? Send them to <u>stearns@gmu.edu</u>