



TEACHING + LEARNING  
**commons**

# Facilitating the Academic Success of **International Graduate Students**

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**The Teaching + Learning Commons** promotes and advances student success

**How?** By approaching student success from two directions:

- ❖ Academic support services for **students**
- ❖ Teaching/course support for **faculty & TAs**



# OUR VISION

Create a thriving ecosystem for writing on campus,  
where successful writing is defined not only by the  
outcomes of the *products* (grades, publications, etc.),  
but also by the learning which occurs through the  
*process* of writing.

# HOW WE THINK

At the Writing Hub, we believe...

- ❖ **That writing is a skill, not a talent**
  - Meaning: it gets better with practice and support.
- ❖ **That writing is a thinking process, not just a method of communication.**
  - Meaning: it's about the process, not just the products.
- ❖ **That academic writing constraints are contextual and learned through participation.**
  - Meaning: it takes time and effort to learn how to do this.

# OUR PURPOSE TODAY

- ❖ Engage you in our thinking about international graduate student writers
- ❖ Reframe the academic performance and success of graduate students, including multilingual international students
- ❖ Leave you with some ideas for inclusive writing consultation and advising practices for working with English Language Learner (ELL) graduate students.
- ❖ Generally, move from a deficit-oriented mindset toward an asset-oriented mindset regarding ELL graduate students.

# **\*ALL\* Graduate Students Need Institutional Writing Support**

**Because writing at this level is unlike any writing they've produced before...**

- Long-term, complex, high-stakes projects
- Unfamiliar genres and constructions
- Disciplinary-specific, taken-for-granted rhetorical practices
- Scholarly identity formation

**... and it's unlikely that writing is being taught explicitly.**

**Writing at this level is challenging  
for ALL graduate students...**

**“The Paradox of Writing in Doctoral Education”**  
(Stark-Meyerring 2011)

Writing is a process of knowledge production,  
  
and the process is informed by discourse traditions/practices,  
  
that have become routine and taken for granted within research cultures.

But what seems “normal” is actually unique for each field,  
  
and therefore new to graduate students in that field,  
  
who are learning how to participate in the production of knowledge.



“In practicing academic writing, students are acquiring not only a skill, certain cognitive processes, or communicative competence, but also the set of preferred values, discourses, and knowledge content of the academic community”

(Canagarajah, 1993, p. 303)



# “INTERNATIONAL” GRADUATE STUDENTS

- ❖ The challenge of learning discipline-specific discourse practices is one that ALL graduate student writers experience.
- ❖ But we’re here to talk to you about supporting **international student** writers, in particular.
- ❖ What do we \*really\* mean by “international student”--at least at this Symposium?
- ❖ First things first - we need to stop using “international” as a euphemism and/or catch-all term for students who are in the process of acquiring advanced English language fluency.



## Consider your terms:

“International”

“ESL”

“EAL”

“ELL”

“L2”

“Multi-Lingual”

“Monolingual”

“Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)”



## Recognize and Disaggregate:

“**International**” - students with certain visa statuses (inc. students from Anglophone countries)

“**ESL**” - English as a Second Language

“**EAL**” - English as an Additional Language

“**ELL**” - English Language Learner

“**L2**” - Second Language User

“**Multi-Lingual**” - proficient and/or fluent in more than one language

“**Monolingual**” - only capable of speaking/writing in one language

“**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)**” - a student whose background entails language or norms different from that of dominant culture.



# Our Terms Reveal Our Assumptions

**“International”**

**“ESL”**

**“EAL”**

**“ELL”**

**“L2”**

**“Multi-Lingual”**

**“Monolingual”**

**“Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)”**

Each of these terms has strengths and weaknesses for describing students; all entail accuracies, inaccuracies, and assumptions.

No one term, or binary set of terms, will accurately capture the complexity of students' linguistic identities, regardless of their visa status.



# Our Terms Reveal Our Assumptions

“International”

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“Multi-Lingual”

“**Monolingual**”

“Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)”

**Try this:**

Add “Monolingual” to your lexicon.

Find and replace “native English speaker” with “monolingual”  
and notice how it disrupts yours/others’ assumptions.



## Decolonize Your Terminology

“Monolingual” is an especially important term to introduce into your thinking.

Using it will help you move past an ethnocentric ideology that suggests that monolingualism is the norm. Considered globally, it’s not. (It’s also not the norm in many, if not most, California communities.)

In a multicultural environment, monolingualism should not be the implicit standard against which all are judged.



**One takeaway for today's session:**

**International student ≠ English Language Learner**

A rich multiplicity of linguistic backgrounds and identities can be found in our international AND our domestic students--a multiplicity we should recognize and value.

# Supporting International Graduate Students

Recognizing hidden assumptions about “international” graduate students’ linguistic backgrounds and capabilities is a **necessary first step** in supporting multilingual international graduate students’ academic success.





To support **multilingual** international graduate students, we must consider both:

- 1) What is challenging for ALL graduate students, as apprentice writers and knowledge-makers in their disciplines; and
- 1) the ways language shapes students' experiences perceiving, practicing, and internalizing the academic writing conventions of their fields.

## Helpful Orientations for Supporting Multilingual Graduate Students

**1.**

Language ≠

Writing ≠

Academic Discourse

**2.**

Nearly all grad student writing challenges occur at the level of discourse, not language.

**3.**

Enculturation into discourse requires linguistic facility.



1.

Language ≠ Writing ≠ Academic Discourse

*“Academic language... is no one’s mother tongue”*

(Bourdieu and Passeron 1994: 8)

## Language is defined by, and in, context

- ❖ Situation defines whether language choices are proper, accurate, skilled, etc.

## It's not a question of whether students “know English.” It's “which Englishes” (i.e. for what purposes).

- ❖ The English required in the classroom as an instructor — is different from the English required in the classroom as a student — is different from the English required of a student in a conversation with an academic advisor — is different from the language of a student in conversation with peers — is different from...

## Academic research writing uses particular languages.

- ❖ Example: how social considerations determine whether particular word choices are “terminology” (necessary), “jargon” (pretentious), or “formality” (deference) (Casanave and Li 2008).
- ❖ Another example: stance taking--how writers assert themselves and gesture to others. Contexts determine the appropriate kind/quality of stance in a text (Hyland 2011).
- ❖ These considerations hinge upon the social context in which language is used.



2.

Most graduate-level writing challenges occur at the level of discourse, not language.

Most common writing challenges  
arise from discourse, not language.

## Mastering Discourse = controlling “Higher Order Concerns”

- ❖ What’s a clear, significant, and meaningful argument for my field?
- ❖ How do I organize information for an expert reader?
  - (e.g., moving from “what sources are relevant for my understanding of this point?” to “What sources are essential for this point for this *audience’s* understanding?”)
- ❖ What kinds of evidence will expert readers expect to support my claims?
- ❖ ...and many more!

## Working in Genres (Curry 2009)

- ❖ Genre = set of socially-defined expectations/purposes for a certain audience.
  - Not rules — more like boundaries under constant negotiation and redefinition
- ❖ Genre features and boundaries are typically left implied; it is assumed that students will “pick them up” as they go.
  - Example: dissertation prospectus vs. grant proposal vs. proposal to special issue of an academic journal



3.

Enculturation into discourse requires linguistic facility - **something ELL writers already have!**

Enculturation into discourse  
requires metalinguistic awareness.

## ELL graduate students often utilize several linguistic practices as they read, write, and revise texts (Cox 2018)

For Example:

Reading multiple artifacts from a genre to discern its features

Keeping a language journal of beautiful/effective sentences

Searching/working with linguistic databases and resources

Analyzing mentor texts to resolve linguistic questions/confusions

Explicit focus on word choice, subjects and verbs, sentence variety

ELL graduate students are able to engage these practices purposefully and flexibly. **They are expert language learners!**

Monolingual students, by contrast, are often less able to attend to language *as language* in their texts, because they do not have much practice with **metalinguistic awareness**.

Many assume ELL students need help with “grammar,” but these students often know more about English language grammar than most monolingual speakers. The struggle is that grammar “rules” don’t account for the wide flexibility of English *as it is used in context*.





## **Another takeaway:**

What may look to you like problems with a graduate student's written English may more likely be a feature of their still-developing entrance into the academic discourse conventions of their field.

**SO WHAT DOES  
ALL THIS MEAN?**

### **Our goal should \*NOT\* be to help these students “sound like native speakers”**

- ❖ **Because that’s not reasonable**

- It takes five to seven years of being immersed in the target language to become fluent in that language (Cummins, 1981).

- ❖ **Because written and spoken accent remains regardless**

- Fluency ≠ Native-like; L2 students will retain a “written accent” which may never disappear (Valdés, 1992).

- ❖ **Because it’s okay if they have an accent!**

### **Our goal: help graduate students develop knowledge of and facility with the academic discourses in their fields**

- ❖ Perceiving the linguistic + rhetorical moves authors make
- ❖ Noticing how moves are choreographed within genres
- ❖ Allowing the expression of an emerging scholarly identity
- ❖ Encouraging development of a disciplined, authorial voice

**Hoping to make students “sound like native English speakers” is also problematic in the larger contexts of language, power, and institutions.**

### International Englishes

Globally, “non-native” English speakers outnumber “native” speakers 3 to 1. (Crystal 2006). That means there is extremely wide variation in English language use throughout the world.

### Myth of Standard English

We often operate under the assumption that there is a singular “standard English,” the core from which all other kinds of English derive (Greenfield 2011).

### Standard Language Ideology

When we dig deeper, we see that “standard” language is an index for power in society (Villanueva 2011). The version of English that is considered “standard” is that of white, upper class, educated Americans/Britons.

**Let’s ask ourselves the central questions:**

Who has to adapt: the institution or the student? Why?

Who has the power to demand adaptation? Why?

**OKAY, WHAT  
SHOULD WE DO?**

Frameworks for understanding linguistic diversity in the institution:

**Differences as deficit**

**Differences accommodated**

**Differences as resource**

Do your practices reflect deficit assumptions?  
Are other perspectives possible?

What would accommodation look like?

How could you recognize and leverage  
multilingual students' linguistic resources?



**At the Commons** we promote and advance student success by approaching student success from two different directions: support for students and support for faculty/departments.

**To us, supporting international ELL students means:**

- ❖ Working with **students**, through evidence-based academic support services, to grow their confidence and skill as writers.
- ❖ Working with **faculty and departments**, providing expertise and resources to create and support institutional change.



THANKS!



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