

Working with ESL Writers

A Workshop for Writing Center Consultants

General Strategies

- Be aware of student expectations of your role as a writing consultant.
- Make sure the student understands his/her assignment.
- Don't ask ESL students to read aloud to "hear" their errors --most don't have the oral language base to do this.
- Encourage the student to take responsibility for his/her own language learning.
- Work with the student to find the best way to express what she/he wants to say. Offer advice and suggestions, but don't write for the students (*even when they really want you to*).
- Congratulate the student on what he/she does well.
- Give key points from the session to the student in writing.

ESL Writing

- READ THE WHOLE PAPER.
- Focus on organization, coherence, and presentation of material. Students' experiences with formats of academic prose may be limited--they cannot "discover" form.
 - Visually represent the relationship among different paragraphs and sentences by using diagrams.
 - Work the student's main ideas around US academic prose structures. For example, if you've identified a claim in a paragraph, but can't find support for that claim (in that paragraph or the rest of the paper), you might ask the student why she is claiming what she is and on what grounds. Then, let her know that that justification needs to be in the essay, near the claim.
 - Assist in development of ideas encourage in-depth example and evidence selection
- Indicate places in the text that "don't sound right" or are difficult to understand. Work with student to discover the source of confusion.
 - Clarify the meaning of confusing or ambiguous language through negotiation with the student. Sometimes it is helpful to suggest several alternatives to the word that the student has chosen. Try to explain the differences between the words, and the talk with the student about the one that would be best for the meaning they are trying to get at.
 - Be explicit about the correct way to use idiomatic phrases; there's no "logical" way to figure them out.
- Grammar and Usage

- Address grammar in the final editing phase, after rhetorical organization and content have been dealt with. When grammatical errors are addressed, attention should be drawn to those errors that form a pattern or are more severe than others.
- Work within the context of the student essay. When dealing with grammar and usage issues, keep a writing handbook handy.
- Work systematically over the semester to point out consistent sentence-level errors and help students identify them in their own work (error log / sentence level work).
 - Sentence combining
 - Sentence Shortening
 - Sentence Modeling
 - The following models, for example, are especially useful as topic sentences or as concluding sentences:
 - If...(if..., if...), then Subject Verb. *If I had free time, I would read lots of poetry.*
 - Because..., (because..., because...,) Subject Verb *Because sentence modeling has been proven to help students write more complex sentences, I will use it in my consulting sessions..*
 - When..., (when..., when...,) Subject Verb

Intellectual Property

- Examine quoted and paraphrased passages with the student and ask him or her to explain why they see that particular piece of information from a secondary source as important to what he or she is trying to say
- Tell students to surround any quotes (or paraphrases) she or he uses with a minimum of one paragraph of explanation about how and why the quote:
 - informed their research
 - connects their ideas to a wider writing or academic community
 - adds meaning or context for the ideas they have been presenting in the essay
- Handbook, Handbook, Handbook – show them how to find appropriate documentation style and make sure they are aware of the information needed for both in-text and works cited citation

ESL Reading & Vocabulary

- Don't forget the important connection between reading and writing.
- Awareness of text structure plays an important role in comprehension.
- Encourage students to combine global reading strategies and dictionary use for decoding text
- At a minimum, L2 readers need a vocabulary of approximately 5,000 words for basic reading comprehension at the college level.
- Ask students to work actively to build vocabulary (vocabulary log).
- Check student comprehension of texts - incomprehension and misapprehension.

References

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