

Considering Cultural Differences in Academic Writing Conventions

The following chart compares the directness inherent in U.S. essay structure to the relatively less direct Chinese essay structure. The chart can help you better understand the structural and lingual differences between different cultures' academic writing systems, as well as shed light on recurring errors in international student writing.

When you conference with international students, do not hesitate to ask about essay structure in their home countries. Gathering more information about students' educational backgrounds can help you find common ground.

U.S. Essay Structure	Chinese Essay Structure
<p><u>Low-Context Culture</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Arguments are linear ✓ Meaning is explicit ✓ Writers are responsible for articulating meaning 	<p><u>High-Context Culture</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inference creates meaning ✓ Meaning is implicit ✓ Readers are responsible for interpreting (and, therefore, creating) meaning
<p><u>Goals of Communication</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Analyze and categorize information in order to share information ✓ Originality is privileged 	<p><u>Goals of Communication</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create harmonious relationships between pieces of information ✓ Tradition is privileged
<p><u>Figurative Language</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Figurative language is ambiguous and inhibits meaning 	<p><u>Figurative Language</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Metaphors allow readers to create multiple meanings