

Strategies for Building and Maintaining ELL Client Confidence

Like all students, English Language Learners can suffer from writing anxiety and low confidence about their writing abilities. Unlike many students, English Language Learners are operating in their second, and sometimes third, languages and face particular stressors and pressures.

Never make assumptions about what ELL clients know based on their vocabulary and phrasing. ELL clients often become frustrated because they cannot clearly express complex ideas in English. Your job is to help them express their ideas as clearly as possible.

1. Emphasize cultural differences in writing conventions.

ELL students, particularly international students, may not have experience writing in U.S. academic style. You might want to introduce the following concepts:

Argument. How does a paper capture an argument? Where do readers look for argument? How does a thesis statement capture argument? What about claim statements? The conclusion? (Appendix A)

Directness. U.S. academic writing style is more direct than many other countries' academic conventions. U.S. academics prioritize clear and concise language over poetic, flowery, or less-direct prose. Papers are organized to emphasize this directness. (Appendix B)

Relationship between paragraphs. What are some possible examples of relationships between paragraphs? Explain how to resist the five-paragraph essay structure. (Appendix C)

Use of evidence. Many international students have never used outside sources in the ways that U.S. academic essays require. Explaining plagiarism (what it is, why it's a problem, etc.) can help students understand how to more effectively integrate outside sources into their work.

2. Provide clients with templates, models, and other relevant handouts.

When tutoring an ELL student, your role might shift from that of a peer tutor to that of a coach or teacher. Use resources and models to help you teach concepts with which the client is unfamiliar (Appendix D).

- A. Session Resources binder
- B. Model Essays and Assignments binder
- C. College Writing Course Resources website (link from WC homepage)
- D. *They Say, I Say* – Template index beginning on p. 221
- E. Online resources like the Purdue OWL or UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center site (Appendix D)

3. Help clients choose language effectively.

As mentioned earlier, ELL clients often struggle to articulate their complex ideas using grammatically and stylistically correct prose. Though you might not know the all answers to your clients' grammatical queries, it is your job to guide clients through productive processes that help them state their meaning.

Check out "**Resisting 'Can You Hear it?': Helping ELL Clients Build Grammatical Awareness.**" The handout can help you work with clients to clarify their meaning and choose the best words and grammatical constructions to express their meaning.

4. NEVER mislead clients by building false confidence or by using judgmental language.

As a tutor, you should encourage your clients, but you should never mislead them. Remember these tips for communicating effectively with clients with low confidence:

Never use judgment language to describe their writing. You would never tell a client that his/her writing is "weak," so refrain from telling clients that their writing is "good."

- ✓ Have clients read new sentences aloud and celebrate their improvement. Show clients why sentences sound and look **better**.
- ✓ Give ELL clients plenty of quiet time to think and work through their ideas.
- ✓ Avoid asking questions that sound like quizzes. Instead of "How should we fix this?" ask "Now we have to fix this because . . . Let's think through different ways that we can do so."

Do not undermine professors. Strive to understand and translate professors' comments and assignment requirements. If you really do not understand what a professor expects, suggest that the client send the professor an email and include a note in your session report.

- ✓ Encourage your client to meet one-on-one with his/her professor.
- ✓ Work with client to develop appropriate questions and goals for professor meetings.
- ✓ Ask client about specific outcomes of past professor meetings. Encourage clients to take notes during meetings with professor.

Appendix A

Argument

Paper Component	How does it capture argument?	WC resources to help explain component to client
Introduction	• Gives background information about a problem or question underpinning your argument • Defines terms important to your argument • Briefly summarizes relevant arguments by other scholars, writers, or critics (in order to frame your different argument) • Presents your thesis statement – a focused, argumentative claim that governs the entire paper	✓ “The Problem with Introductions” ✓ Introduction and Conclusion Template ✓ “Discussing Essay Structure” Module
Thesis statement	• Expresses a unique and debatable claim (Ask yourself: Could someone argue against my thesis statement?) • Supportable by evidence from outside (academic or reputable) sources • Forecasts the argument for the entire paper	✓ “Developing the Thesis Statement” ✓ “10 ‘Moves’ Scholars Make to Find Meaningful Tension in a Text or Issue” ✓ “Revising and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements”
Paragraph	• Topic sentences should preview the argument that the paragraph is making. Topic sentences should never be facts or quotations. • Use evidence from outside resources to provide support for your argument • Analyze the evidence within the context of your topic sentence. Help your reader interpret the evidence and make the connections between your evidence and argument clear. • Help your readers by explaining the transition between this paragraph and the next paragraph. How are the arguments presented related? Tell your reader.	✓ “Creating a Paragraph: Framing Argument with Structure” ✓ “Planning Your Paper with Outlining” ✓ “Bridging the Gap: Transitions and Transitional Elements” ✓ “Using Academic Language”

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Conclusion	The conclusion should review the paper's argument and reflect on the argument's broader importance. • Restate your argument and explain why it is important • Address opposing viewpoints (the counterargument) and explain why readers should agree with your position • State a call for action or implications about your argument	✓ "Conclusion Template" ✓ "Constructing and Refuting the Counterargument"
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Appendix B

Directness

The following chart compares U.S. essay structure to Chinese essay structure. Consider the differences when working with East Asian students on both global and local concerns.

U.S. Essay Structure	Chinese Essay Structure
<u>Low-Context Culture</u> ✓ Arguments are linear ✓ Meaning is explicit ✓ Writers are responsible for articulating meaning	<u>High-Context Culture</u> ✓ Inference creates meaning ✓ Meaning is implicit ✓ Readers are responsible for interpreting (and, therefore, creating) meaning
<u>Goals of Communication</u> ✓ Analyze and categorize information in order to share information ✓ Originality is privileged	<u>Goals of Communication</u> ✓ Create harmonious relationships between pieces of information ✓ Tradition is privileged
<u>Figurative Language</u> ✓ Figurative language is ambiguous and inhibits meaning	<u>Figurative Language</u> ✓ Metaphors allow readers to create multiple meanings

Yang, Ling and David Cahill. "The Rhetorical Organization of Chinese and American students' Expository Essays: A Contrastive Rhetoric Study." *International Journal of English Studies*, vol. 8 (2). Pp. 113-132, 2008.

Appendix C

Relationship between paragraphs

Organizational options for a compare/contrast paper

When organizing a compare and contrast paper, you have two distinct organizational options: the block or the point-to-point style. Let's take a look at an example paper comparing two Southern U.S. presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton.

Block

- I. Introduction
- II. Carter
 - A. Foreign Policy
 - B. Military Spending
 - C. Personal Character
- III. Clinton
 - A. Foreign Policy
 - B. Military Spending
 - C. Personal Character
- IV. Conclusion

Point-to-Point

- I. Introduction
- II. Foreign Policy
 - A. Carter
 - B. Clinton
- III. Military Spending
 - A. Carter
 - B. Clinton
- IV. Personal Character
 - A. Carter
 - B. Clinton
- V. Conclusion

Organizational options for other argument papers

Many ELL clients (and some native English speakers, too) will not know how to logically move from one paragraph to the next. Showing students the following examples can help them conceptualize how to effectively order their paper's sections:

- ✓ Order your essay from cause to effect. Why is this strategy effective? Would ordering your essay from effect to cause be more effective? Why or why not?
- ✓ Order your essay chronologically, logically, or in a time sequence. A paper detailing a personal narrative or an account of an event would probably be organized effectively chronologically.
- ✓ Order your paper so that you present your strongest point last.

"Writing Tips: Essay Organization." UNLV Writing Center.
<http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/writing/organization.html>.

Appendix D

Use Templates, Models, and Handouts to Help Teach ELL Clients

Skill	Resource	Teaching Tips
Assessing assignment sheets	Assessing the Assignment Sheet Module	✓ Relate the language used in the assignment sheet to the language used in class ✓ Ensure that students identify and look up definitions for the terms they do not know
Composing an introduction	The Problem with Introductions	✓ Identify introduction as identifier as main point of the essay ✓ Emphasize background information/context that reader needs to understand argument or discussion
Writing a thesis statement	Developing the Thesis Statement Revising and Fixing Weak Thesis Statements	✓ Emphasize direct nature of thesis arguments ✓ Explain proper thesis placement
Understanding summary	Writing Effective Summaries	✓ Help client identify the author's argument, the premises and conclusion ✓ Put summary in terms of course, reading, or assignment
	Ten "Moves" Scholars Make to Find	✓ Explain evidence

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Understanding analysis	Meaningful Tension in a Text or Issue	while staying close to the text being analyzed. Avoid metaphor.
Understanding argument	Using Academic Language Constructing and Refuting the Counterargument	✓ Explain that argument must be explicit and clear
Drafting paragraphs	Creating a Paragraph: Framing Argument with Structure	✓ Define the concept of a topic sentence ✓ Highlight the relationship between the topic sentence and the evidence used to substantiate the topic sentence
Using source material without plagiarizing	Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism Module Three Ways to Use Evidence (Summarizing/Quoting/Paraphrasing)	✓ Explain difference between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing texts ✓ Reiterate <u>why</u> writers use evidence

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Works Consulted

"ESL Students." Purdue OWL. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/5/25/>.

Kirkpatrick, Andy and Zhichang Xu. *Chinese Rhetoric and Writing: An Introduction for Language Teachers*. Fort Collins: The WAC Clearinghouse, 2012.

Mattisson, Jane. "Chinese essay writing: A special challenge for universities in the West. A discussion of Chinese students' essay writing tradition and Western praxis." hkr.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:174515/FULLTEXT01.

"Ten Tips for ESL Tutorials." UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/faculty-resources/tips-on-teaching-esl-students/tips-for-writing-tutors/>.

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