

Tips for making your teaching more accessible to non-native English speakers in your classes

1. Monitor how you speak.

- Pause for a couple of extra beats between sentences.
- After using an idiomatic phrase, briefly rephrase it (e.g., after saying “he let the cat out of the bag,” add “he told someone the secret”) before continuing the narrative.
- Clarify cultural allusions that may be unfamiliar to people from another country.

2. Use visual aids.

- Writing key words on the board or otherwise providing visual cues helps students process meaning more readily.
- If you give a quiz question orally, also project or write a written version.
- Print legibly.
- Provide written information about homework assignments and exams.

3. Adjust questioning procedures.

- After posing a question, repeat it and allow some time (about 5 seconds) to pass before calling on someone for an answer.
- Pose a question to the whole class and tell students to share their answer with a person near them. After students have shared their answers with partners, ask for individual responses. (This engages all students to a higher degree and allows non-native English speakers a chance to process the question and rehearse an answer in a lower-stress interaction. It also breaks the ice and gives students a chance to interact with each other, which could help them make connections with potential study partners.)
- Vary your questioning process. Sometimes call for volunteers; sometimes call on people by name. Many non-native English speakers find it easier to answer when called upon individually rather than by volunteering.
- Don't just ask “Does everyone understand?” or “Do you have any questions?”. Instead, ask students content questions to elicit what their actual understanding is (“Tell me [or a partner] what you understand about X” or ask a specific question about a point you want to be sure the class has noticed. This may be orally or in writing—not as a quiz, but as feedback to you.)

4. Encourage cross-cultural peer collaboration.

- Encourage students to sit next to a student from a different culture rather than forming a cluster of students from the same culture.
- Depending on the purpose of the activity, distribute non-native speakers in groups with native English speakers.
- Devise small-group tasks that require the active participation and contribution of each group member. (Students may struggle to follow the conversation and get a word in edgewise unless the group is careful to include them.)
- Monitor groups and coach students on adjusting their speech, if necessary, to enable non-native English students to understand and participate.

- When appropriate, include small-group tasks that provide an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange, and follow up on insights that emerge.
- Encourage students to study together outside of class.

5. Establish and maintain clear standards and practices.

- When a student turns in work that is unsatisfactory or late, or fails to turn in an assignment, apply your usual policies and be sure to explain the reason for this to the student. Doing otherwise sets up the expectation that policies do not apply equally, and this is not in the best interest of the student.
- If you notice signs of plagiarism—sentences in a paper that show significantly different levels of academic English skills, for example—address them directly and consistently.
- For exams, we advise that you forbid use of electronic translators or other aids by non-native English speakers. Rather, encourage students to ask you questions if they do not understand words or questions on the exam.
- Provide testing contexts and formats that minimize the temptation and opportunity for cheating. (Most students do not cheat, but a small percentage may find ways to collaborate if the opportunity presents itself.)
- If you allow some students to use extra time to complete an in-class exam, offer this option to any student in the class.

6. Allow some time for adjustment.

- Often a student has some difficulty at the beginning of the semester but, upon becoming oriented to the class requirements, expectations, and procedures, is able to fulfill course requirements or even excel.
- When you become aware that a student may be struggling as a result of English language skills or cultural differences, meet with the student. Share your concerns, listen to the student's perspective, and clarify your expectations for student performance. Let the student know about available resources (see #7). Watch for improvement. Keep the student's advisor informed (see #8).

7. Encourage students to use available resources.

- Non-native English speaking students in their first semester have a faculty tutor that you should refer them to for assistance.
- Refer students to the Academic Resource Center for writing and other academic assistance.
- If there is a department lab and/or tutor, refer students to these.
- Encourage struggling students to record your lectures and to use resources that you have handed out or that are on line.
- Encourage struggling students to study with classmates outside of class.

8. Ask for help.

- Contact Martha Iancu (x2641, miancu@georgefox.edu) or Alex Pia (x2643, apia@georgefox.edu) if you would like more specific advice about how to work more effectively with one or more students whose native language is not English.

