

Working with International & Multilingual Students: Considerations and Inclusive Practices

Norms and expectations for communication and interaction vary greatly across cultures. In an academic setting, these differences will likely be most apparent in classroom interactions and course assignments. Help international and multilingual students at Brown feel supported by incorporating these inclusive practices into your course.

Address language directly. Acknowledging cultural and linguistic diversity in classroom can help make international and multilingual students feel included. Consider adding the following syllabus statement:

“Brown welcomes students from around the country and the world, and their unique perspectives enrich our learning community. To empower students whose first language is not English, an array of support is available on campus including language and culture workshops and individual appointments. For more information, contact the English Language Specialists at ellwriting@brown.edu.”

Set clear expectations. The roles and the responsibilities of teachers and learners differ across cultures. To make international students more comfortable in your classroom at Brown, set clear expectations. Tell students exactly what is expected of them in your class, i.e. if participation is part of the grade, explain and provide examples of what good participation looks like in your classroom.

Provide visual support. Many multilingual students learned English in their home countries as a foreign language. In this context, students learn more with their eyes than with their ears, so their reading skills are likely to be relatively stronger than their listening skills. Providing visuals, such as handouts or projections, can help support multilingual students' comprehension during a lecture or a discussion.

Create communities of learners. Language is social. Providing opportunities for students to interact and collaborate is a best practice not only pedagogically, but also linguistically, as it requires participants to use language to accomplish a task. When appropriate, assign group projects and encourage students to form study groups.

Share optional readings. The more language learners read, the more they are exposed to new vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical styles. Recommend newspapers, journals, or magazines that relate to your field, and when relevant share interesting news items that relate to your course content. Encouraging the students to look for thematically relevant articles will also serve to foster a learning community.

Give specific, formative feedback on written work. Writing is much more than usage and mechanics. Receiving feedback on content, organization, and use of evidence, in addition to linguistic accuracy, will help a language learner understanding the purpose of academic writing, rather than reinforce insecurities about having imperfect grammar. When commenting on linguistic accuracy, try to focus feedback on errors that interfere with comprehensibility, i.e. incomplete or unclear sentence structure, rather than those that are merely distracting, i.e. incorrect or missing articles.

For questions about this and other English language resources at Brown, contact ellwriting@brown.edu



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