

Working With ELL Students

A lot of the people that come into the Writing Lab are ELL (English Language Learner) students. With these students, you may encounter problems that other students don't run into as often. When working with ELL students, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Common problems:

- **Awkward wording** of sentences.
- **Spelling.** Sometimes English language learners are called “ear learners,” which means that they learn a lot of English through hearing others speak it. This can lead to problems in their spelling because some words are spelled differently than how they are pronounced.
- **Verb usage/tense.** ELL students often use the wrong tense. For example, they might use the past tense during the story when the appropriate tense is present.
- **Plural words.** This is something that is small but a very common problem. ELL students sometimes forget the “s” at the end of words because their language doesn't make words plural in the same way that English does.
- **Abstract language.** They may not know certain idioms and other things that are commonplace in our society. For example, they may be confused by “piece of cake.”
 - “*Me cae gordo*” in Spanish means “I don't like that person.” In English, it means “that person falls fat.”
 - “*¡Que padre!*” in Spanish means “that's cool.” In English, it means “what father.”

Things to keep in mind:

- They may not be very comfortable coming to you for advice. It's a nerve-wracking experience for anyone, especially for someone that may not be confident in their English.
- These students may not have ever been fully immersed in an English-speaking environment if they just recently moved here from another country
- Using examples is very important when tutoring ELL students. Often, if a concept is taught or explained to them, it has no meaning unless it's accompanied by a relevant example.
- Remember to go slow. Don't speak at Twista-like speeds because ELL students sometimes have trouble following what you're saying if you go too fast.
- Make sure that they follow what you're saying. Students will sometimes just smile and nod their head and have no idea what you just said.
- Be patient. Sometimes these sessions take longer but the student is coming to you for help and it's important that you are able to help them to the best of your ability.
- The most important part is not the grammar, but the paper overall. It's important to keep this in



ELL STUDENTS AND THE WRITING LAB

EL Learners vs. Native Speakers

How are the mistakes they make
different?

Collocation

Words that go together just because!!

QUIZ

1. She smokes a lot. She is a _____ smoker.
2. He was so sad that he _____ into tears.
3. Are you _____ aware of the implications of your behavior?
4. It's your birthday. _____ a wish.

Articles, Prepositions and Phrasal Verbs!!

Articles

1. I saw **a** bus. **The** bus was going to **(x)** school.
2. In **the** United States, **the** Mississippi River flows into **the** Gulf of Mexico. **The** biggest lake in **(x)** Europe is **(x)** Lake Ladoga in **(x)** Russia.

Phrasal Verbs

go out, stay in, pick up, burn down, wake up, turn in, blow up, break in,.....!!

Ex.

The arsonist **burned** the house **down**. The arsonist **burned down** the house.

I **picked** him **up** at the airport. I **picked up** him at the airport.

SYNTAX (word order)

English => S + V + O Not flexible!!!!

I was at the store yesterday.

1. He goes sometimes to the store.
2. She always is late.
3. I have been two times to France.

Present Perfect vs. Past Simple

1. I have been to Mexico. **vs.** I went to Mexico.
2. I have lived in Minneapolis for 5 years. **vs.** I lived in Minneapolis for 5 years.
3. I've been playing volleyball since I was ten. **vs.** I have played volleyball since I was ten.
4. I haven't called him yet. **vs.** I didn't call him yet.

Error Correction

Some points to consider...

- 1. Why are they making this error? (slip, L1 interference...?)
- 2. What kind of error is it? (lexical, syntactical, grammatical?)
- 3. Is it repeated throughout the composition or is it one isolated incident?
- 4. Does it impede comprehension?

How to Correct

- 1. Focus on a maximum of 2-3 problem areas. (or less)
- 2. Have them self-correct when possible.
- 3. Don't just edit, take the time to TEACH them why it's wrong.

Working with ELL Students

Things you should know:

- *ELL*, or *English Language Learning* is the new politically correct term for *ESL*.
- Don't misinterpret difficulty with English as a sign of laziness or stupidity. We should never make judgments about the intelligence of tutees. Also, many ELL students are often very capable writers, but they have difficulty communicating those ideas into English.
- It's okay to use grammatical terms to explain what errors have been made. Students often know and are able to identify the parts of speech. For example, I learned a lot about English when I took a Spanish class.
- Although it's often okay to use grammatical terms, make sure that students understand what you're explaining. Sometimes they will just nod and smile to be polite. Have students explain to you what they have learned from your instruction or otherwise demonstrate their understanding to you.
- Identify recurrent errors. If you identify a few errors that commonly occur in their paper, they can go away from the tutoring session to make corrections and return later with further questions or to see if they're on the right track.
- Be specific. Don't just say that you're going to work on "the wording" or "the grammar." Say that you're going to work on the use of adjectives or articles.
- Explain idioms to students when applicable, but help them to avoid using clichés:
<http://www.1-language.com/eslidioms/>
http://home.t-online.de/home/toni.goeller/idiom_wm/
Examples: I have marriage. I get married.

Common Errors

- The word order is confused:

The pony fast won the race.

→ Explain that the adjective *fast* should be in front of the noun *pony*. Remember, it's okay to use grammatical terminology.

- The form of the word is incorrect:

The girl entered the creep house.

→ Identify the word used incorrectly. Direct the student to a dictionary and explain to him or her how to identify the different forms of words. In this case, differentiate *creep*, *creepy*, *creepily*, etc.

- The wrong verb tense is used:

I bike to school yesterday.

→ Help the student to identify the verb tense used in the rest of his or her paper. (Note: If there is not a consistent verb tense, address that issue as well). Explain different verb endings for each tense (or conjugations for "irregular" verbs).

➤ Articles are missing or misused:

I went to zoo.

I ate hot dog.

I don't want to go to the work today.

I played with a children.

→ Explain that articles tell how much or how many, and they specify or generalize.

Identify within their own papers where they used articles correctly.

➤ Plural forms of words are missing the s:

I have two pair of blue shoe.

→ Ask students if they mean more than just one. Explain the difference.

*This "tip sheet" borrows liberally from the wonderful presentation delivered by the great Anna Warnes (Fall 2004).

References (FYI):

http://yu.edu/stern/writingcenter/new_page_17.htm

<http://slc.berkeley.edu/nns/12writing/tutoring/esltutoring.htm#role>

Working with English Language Learners

- Ask questions. Try to keep a conversation going. ELL's often speak better than they write.
- Prioritize. You may not have the time to discuss everything you would like to mention. Focus on a few things and don't overwhelm the writer.
- Simplify, illustrate, and repeat.
- Read aloud and let the student follow along.
- Build and utilize background knowledge.
- Write down what you discuss.
- Have the writer speak through what (s)he is trying to write.
- Ask the writer to show you different aspects of his/her writing: thesis statement, supporting details, and conclusion.
- Ask questions like "What are you trying to say here?" or tell the writer what your interpretation is and ask for confirmation.
- When you can, try to use the proper grammatical name for concepts. Many ELL's know what they are theoretically supposed to do, but struggle with real life application.
- Explain the differences between what the writer meant to say, and what (s)he actually wrote.
- Make sure the writer understands what you are trying to communicate. You may have to explain the same concept in several different ways - think of it as a test of your creativity and vocabulary.

- Speaking louder to an ELL will not increase his/her comprehension. During conferences, speak without using jargon and at a pace that is respectable without being patronizing. Depending on the student's level of fluency, you may need to stick to concrete meanings and avoid the use of expressions/idioms.
- Be redundant and repeat what you say.

**** What's good for ELL's is good for all students.**

College Life: As a quarter begins, students are busy to choose the right classes for themselves. Right classes are which they can get a good grade from by the end of the quarter. The most concern issue of a college student is how he can do well on the examinations and receive a good transcript.

Articles	Arabic	Chinese	Farsi	Japanese	Korean	Russian	Spanish	Thai	Vietnamese	Sample Transfers in English
No articles		x	x	x		x		x		Book is on table. Sun is hot.
No indefinite article with profession	x	x		x	x	x			x	He is student. She doctor.
Definite article with days, months, places, idioms	x									She is at the home. They will come in the July.
Definite article used for generalization							x			The little children always like the ice cream. The swimming is good exercise.
No article for generalization with singular noun		x		x		x				Bird can fly.
Definite article used with proper noun							x			My dentist is the Doctor Smith.
No definite article		x		x		x				Store on corner is closed.
No indefinite article	x	x		x	x	x				He found one book.