

Supporting international students in the classroom: A guide for lecturers

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Objective of this guide

This guide has been developed for lecturers and provides tips for supporting international student learning, the main focus is classroom teaching but the principles can be applied across other contexts (laboratory; field work or practice). For the purposes of this guide we will define international students as those students whose first language is not English (as opposed to students who pay international student fees).

The guide has been developed in conjunction with members of staff across faculties within the University of Southampton and is underpinned by information gathered from literature and other resources. It presents some of the more common issues which international students face when studying in the UK.



The issues do vary depending on where the student comes from and their previous educational experiences so what is an issue for one student may not affect another.

Ideas on how you can support your international students in the classroom and help them to fully engage with their studies are presented. Rather than trying to cover every problem and potential solution we have provided an overview of some common issues and given links to further information and reading on the subject.

Background



Sawir (2005) and Arenas (2009) state that the focus of most research and pedagogy to date has been on what the student needs to do in order to succeed in their studies in the UK. They maintain that teachers can make a substantial contribution to helping with the process of adaptation for international students.

Hellsten & Prescott (2005) assert that international students may only understand between 10% and 50% of spoken language when they first start their studies in the UK. This has obvious implications for their performance, at least in the early stages of their course.



Students' problems present in different ways. They may appear as lack of linguistic proficiency, eg lack of appropriate vocabulary; grammatical errors; or problems using subject specific terminology (Grabe 2003). Language and academic proficiency therefore need to be developed together and require repeated practice over time.

Grabe (2003) and Lin (2001) suggest that students need to reach a critical threshold in their English language proficiency before they are able to successfully transfer their existing study skills into working in English.



Also, because the international student is studying in English it takes them a while to make connections between their existing knowledge base and new learning (Cole 1996). The result is that some international students may spend up to 10 times longer on their studies, compared to their UK colleagues (Carroll 2008a and 2008b). This can lead to fatigue and additional stress for the students.

Sharing best practice



This guide provides information on where to find out more through web links; references and the bibliography. In addition the resources available for international students within the University of Southampton will be highlighted

Not every problem will be relevant to you, so we have tried to present the issues in sections to make it easier for you to find the information you need in order to help your international (and home) students to get the most out of their studies.



Important information for all staff working with international students:

Many international students are sponsored to undertake their studies by their government or organisations within their home country. These sponsors have expectations in terms of:

- A) Regular & timely reports on students' progress
- B) Our responsibilities to ensure the success of the student
(hence the need for this guide).



Sponsors become very disgruntled when they have paid for a student to undertake 3-4 years of study and in the end the student fails and so they need to be kept informed of the student's progress so that they can decide whether to continue funding their studies or not. Sponsorship issues can require lengthy bureaucratic processes to sort out and the Universities relationship with sponsors is important if we are to continue to receive sponsored students (Inegbedion 2013).



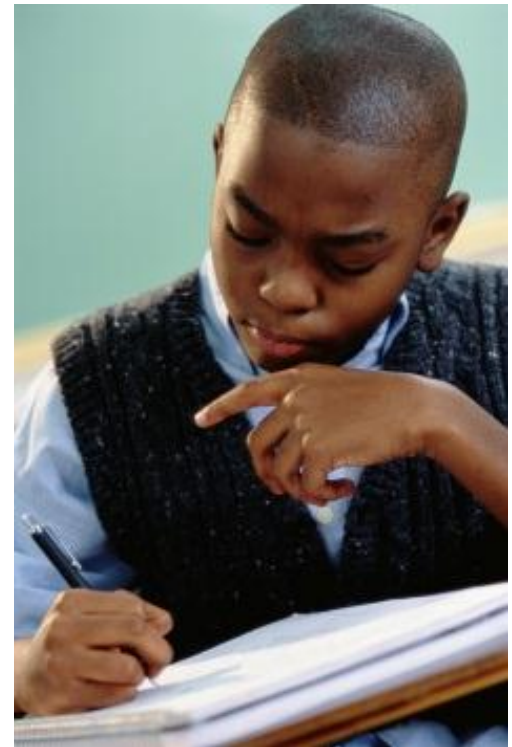
So, when working with international students it is important to check if they are sponsored by an agency from their home country (especially research students), and what these sponsors require. For example how often progress reports have to be submitted, what needs to be reported on, who is responsible for sending the report, and how formalised the process is.



The international Office within the University of Southampton are responsible for co-ordinating any reports which are required and should be alerted as soon as any issue arises with regards to the students studies so that they can provide you with support and also keep the sponsor informed Check who is your liaison contact in the international office so you can build up a rapport with them.

I. English language standards for international students

This section will provide an overview of the English language testing systems and the University's requirements for entry to study.



How do we judge an international students' ability to study in the UK?



In order to study in a UK University international students have to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency with English language.

Understanding language proficiency testing for the international student



There are a number of different approaches to test the language proficiency of international students . The University of Southampton requires international students to either:

- have achieved a first degree from a UK university that has been taught and assessed in English, or
- have been taught and assessed in English and come from a country that appears on the list of those exempt from testing, or



- achieve a satisfactory standard in an approved test in English eg
 - International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.5 with a minimum grade for each section to be 5.5 (although some programs/faculties demand a higher score of 7 and Foundation degrees will accept a score of 5.5), or
 - Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) paper based test score of 580, or
 - TOEFL Internet based paper score of 90, or
 - Other English language qualifications which are accepted are listed on the international section of the University web site.

English Language Tests



It is important for teaching staff to understand the English language skills an international student has in order to fully appreciate the challenges which these students face. There are a number of different systems for testing English language proficiency one of which in common use is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

English Language Testing System (IELTS)



IELTS assesses listening, reading, writing and speaking and it provides an overall score for the whole test. The requirement for entry to the University of Southampton is IELTS score of 6.5 (although some programs/faculties demand a higher score of 7 and Foundation degrees will accept a score of 5.5). The student with this score is somewhere between a competent user who generally has an effective command of the language and a good user with operational command over the language (see the level descriptors).



However, although the student may have gained an average score of 6.5 across the categories of listening; reading; writing; speaking, they may have only scored the minimum score we accept of 5.5 in *one or more* of the categories tested. This has major implications upon their ability to engage fully with their academic studies because for example it is possible for a student to have only partial ability to read English, yet be able to listen; write or speak English fairly well. Schmitt (2005) has found a wide gap between the language capacity the scores suggest and the vocabulary the student is actually able to use.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

descriptors:

Bandscore	Skill level	Description
Band 9	Expert user	Full operational command of the language. Use of English is appropriate, accurate and fluent, and demonstrates complete understanding.
Band 8	Very good user	Fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate usage. May misunderstand some things in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
Band 7	Good user	Operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally can handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.
Band 6	Competent user	Generally have an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
Band 5	Modest user	Partial command of the language, and cope with overall meaning in most situations, although likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in your own field.
Band 4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Frequently show problems in understanding and expression. Not able to use complex language.
Band 3	Extremely limited user	Convey and understand only general meaning in very familiar situations. There are frequent breakdowns in communication.
Band 2	Intermittent user	Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
Band 1	Non-user	Has no ability to use the language except a few isolated words.
Band 0	Did not attempt the test	Did not answer the questions.

Exemptions from English language testing



It is important to note that not all international students have to take a language proficiency test prior to admission to University. Those who are exempt from the tests include students who were educated in English or in Commonwealth countries. The University of Southampton web site provides a full list of all exempt countries on their English Language entry Requirement section in the International section of web pages:

http://www.southampton.ac.uk/international/entry_reqs/english_language.shtml.

II. Module preparation

This section looks at the importance of providing simple written information about the course and modules which the students are going to undertake.



Provide information about the module and the assignment in writing



It is estimated that international students, even with the stipulated results in IELTS and other tests, understand only 10-50% of the spoken language when they first start their studies (HEA 2013). Therefore they need written materials about the module (assessment, hand-in dates, stylistic and other requirements, etc) to refer back to and check for vital information (Carroll 2008a and 2008b). However, overloading them with too much information can be overwhelming for them and therefore a balance needs to be achieved so that they get the essential information they need

Simple English



Regularly referring back to that written information in class will remind the students to refer back to their course materials.

It may seem obvious to state this, but when providing written resources it is important to avoid complex sentences, jargon, and unnecessary terminology. The international students often find it easier to understand bullet point lists rather than long sentences.

When using the appropriate terminology, it should be accompanied by a definition (Carroll 2005).

III. Overcoming language challenges

This section covers

3.1 Listening and understanding

3.2 Reading

3.3 Oral participation

3.4 Writing and assessments

3.1 Listening & understanding

This section examines some of the challenges international students have with listening and understanding especially in the early stages of their studies. It provides some strategies to help overcome these issues.



Issues with listening and understanding in class



Initially international students may only understand between 10% and 50% of spoken language (Hellsten & Prescott 2005). This means that, especially at the start of their studies, they may use a lot of guesswork to understand when the language and terms used by the lecturer are un-familiar.

A range of other factors will also contribute to the difficulties the international students face with listening & understanding eg fast paced lectures; accents; use of non-standard English; local references as well as the discipline specific language (HEA 2013)



The following pages provide some advice and tactics to help improve students' understanding.



Providing key terms

In order to help the international students to understand the subject it helps to prepare a list of key terms and concepts that will come up regularly in your module. These should be included in the written information given to students at the commencement of the module. This gives students the opportunity to check key terms in advance and therefore to understand better what is discussed in lectures, seminars and literature (Dickens & Doubleday 2013).

You can also consider adding relevant terms to your lecture PowerPoint's or hand-outs, as a kind of running glossary that can give additional guidance (Carroll 2005; HEA 2013).

Pre-reading to aid understanding in class



One way of helping your students to understand your lectures is to ask them to do some preliminary reading. To encourage the students to undertake this reading, you could ask them to post a summary of about 100-150 words on the Blackboard site. That way they will have thought about the subject before class and they will have had a chance to look up key terms and relevant vocabulary (Dickens & Doubleday, 2013).

Providing your lecture PowerPoint slides in advance also provides an opportunity for the students to look up terms prior to the lecture, as well as facilitating note-taking during the lecture.



During the lecture

During the lecture the HEA (2013) recommend that the lecturer should:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Ensure that important concepts and ideas are explained in several ways to help students to understand
- Use both simple and complex words and expressions so that students can understand but can also gradually increase their vocabulary
- Develop a system where students can discretely alert you if they have not understood something



- Try to leave at least 5 minutes after the lecture for students to ask individual questions. However, be aware that some international students may not feel comfortable asking questions for a variety of reasons (uncomfortable with speaking English in front of others; cultural differences where questioning may be seen as causing lack of face for the lecturer or themselves). So you may want to consider other means of testing understanding at the end of a session, whilst also encouraging them to seek clarification via other means such as email.

When lectures are key and complex



Some lectures are, by nature, complex and need to deliver a lot of key facts. In this case the HEA (2013) suggest that such lectures, especially in the early stages of the course, should be recorded so that the students can refer to it again.



Some international students may find it difficult to follow spoken language, because more processing-time is needed due to working in the second or third language. It is therefore important to reiterate key points regularly throughout the lecture to help understanding and it will benefit all the students. (Exley & Dennick 2004a; Exley 2013 Engagement in Lectures).



The HEA (2013) also recommend being explicit about the structure of a lecture in order to sign-post what you are going to discuss next. This helps the students to follow and structure their notes.



Avoiding colloquialisms

Colloquialisms, idioms and cultural references, such as catch phrases, or references to TV or advertisements are likely to confuse some international students, or the point will be lost on them and this can lead to them feeling excluded and isolated from the other students (Beals 2010; Kim 2011; Wu & Hammond 2011). The lecturing section of the HEA website gives some good examples of how the use of English can affect understanding.

If you want to use colloquialisms, idioms and cultural references, give explanations or synonyms, etc in order to help understanding. Also, flagging up that it is an idiomatic expression is useful.



Hand-outs and visual signposts

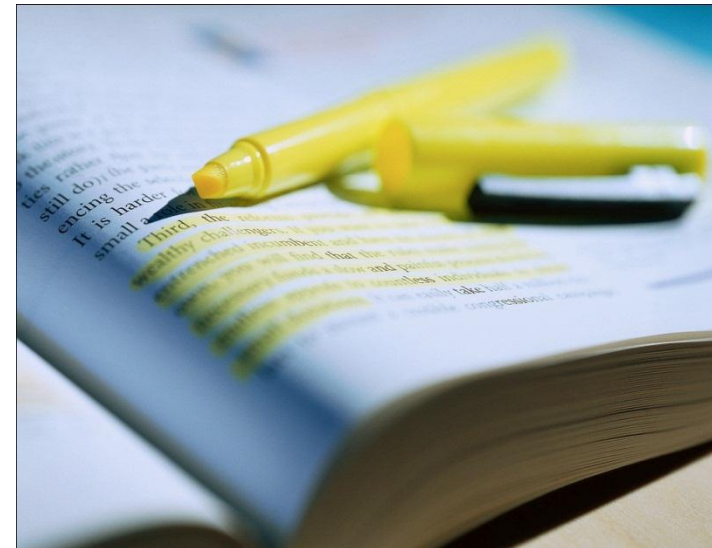
In your lectures, consider using visual signposts, such as specific colours; graphics or pictures. Visual learners will find it easier to understand these concepts and are more likely to remember what has been highlighted in that way.

Consider using hand-outs with spaces for students to fill in or complete information during the lecture. This will focus their attention, help with note-taking, and act as useful revision tools (Exley 2013, Engagement in Lectures; HEA 2013).

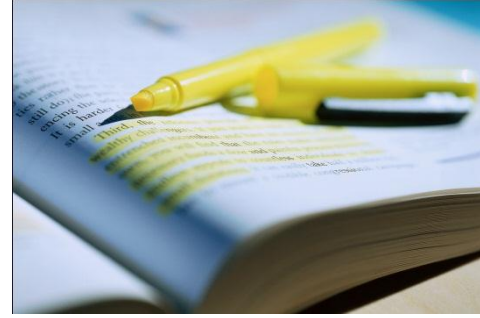
3.2 Reading

This section presents some of the issues international students have with reading in English along with strategies to facilitate:

- Reading and interpreting the main points,
- Note-taking, and
- Critical thinking

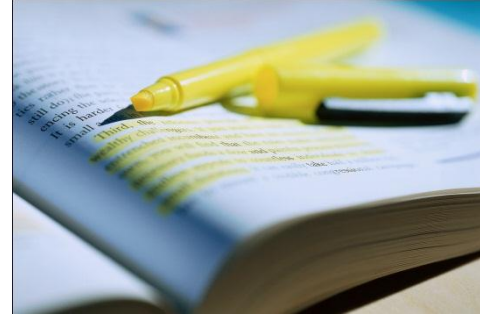


Problems with reading



In several cultures, students are expected to learn core books by heart, and therefore they need guidance in how to choose relevant information, skim read and to be prompted to consult several sources (rather than relying on one text) to obtain all the relevant information (Timm 2008).

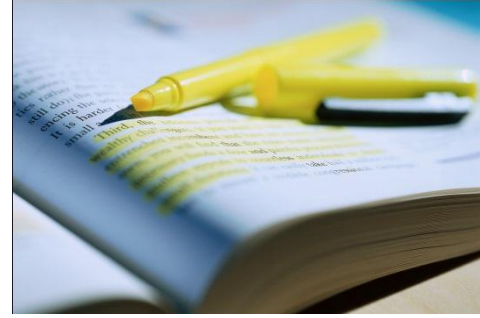
The students can often be daunted by the volume they are expected to read and find it difficult because it takes them a lot longer to undertake it (Schmidt 2007).



They can find it difficult to make the transition to using appropriate reading strategies to gather information. Skim-reading and scanning pages to find relevant information can be particularly challenging (Schweisfurth & Gu 2009).

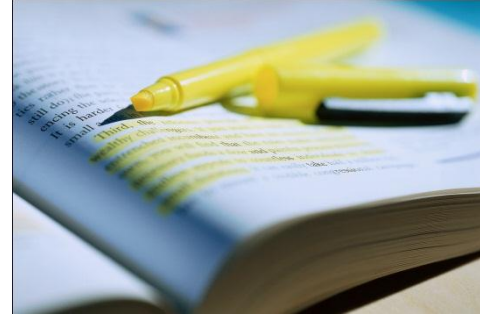
Whilst learning to read in English students are often taught to read as a method of learning the language through checking vocabulary and grammar. Experience of working with international students has shown that when reading many of them tend to focus on checking they understand every individual word rather than the central arguments of the text (Schweisfurth & Gu 2009).

Reading strategies

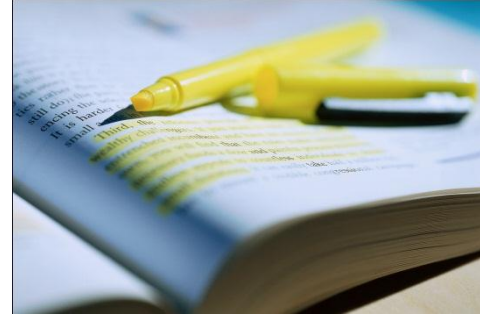


Reading will be the most important activity for any student to build their vocabulary and understanding. This is vital for their writing, but also for classroom discussions.

The students may need to be taught how to read effectively, especially if they have not attended one the pre-session courses. One way of assessing their reading and comprehension capability, is to ask students to read up on a topic and post a summary of 100-150 words on your Blackboard site. This will give them a focus and repeated practice.



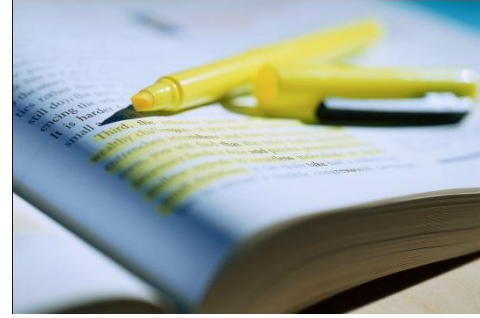
Providing some guidance on how widely you expect them to read prevents them from becoming very anxious when presented with a long reading list for each module. Reinders, Moore and Lewis (2008) suggest students are provided with an annotated reading list which specifies the core texts which they are expected to read and supplementary reading for finding additional information. It is also helpful to specify which part of the module each text is most relevant to so that they can pace their reading accordingly, ***and which parts of the book you expect them to read*** (otherwise students may assume they have to read all of every book) (ThinkingPeople 2013; Dickens/Doubleday 2013).



It may help the student to grasp the subject better if you advise them to read around it in their own language first so they develop an understanding before they read English texts on the subject. Some lecturers have good experiences with asking more advanced students from the country to check if there is information in their own language that you can use to aid understanding.

In order to avoid students thinking they can gather all the information from one source it is important to specify how much they are expected to read in preparation for each session and for an assignment.

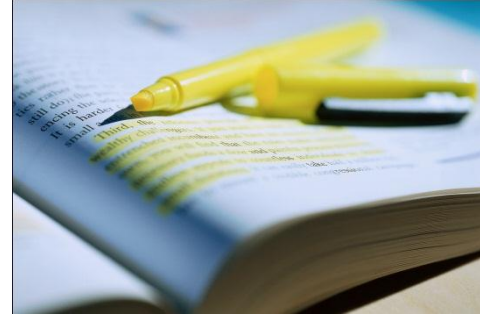
Reading and note-taking



Experience has shown that many students find note-taking while reading challenging, because it might not have been a necessary part of their previous study (Timm 2008).

Grabe (2003) has found that international students frequently copy large passages from texts rather than noting the key points in their own words. In doing this they miss out on questioning the information, the source, and the purpose for which they are using it, and hence do not develop or practise their critical thinking skills adequately.

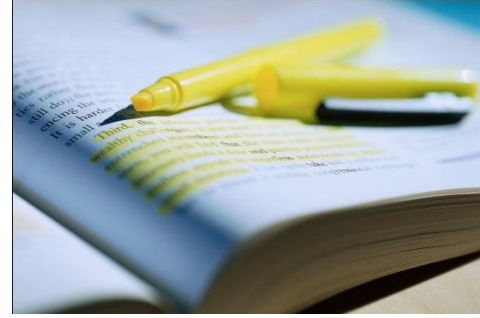
Reading and critical thinking



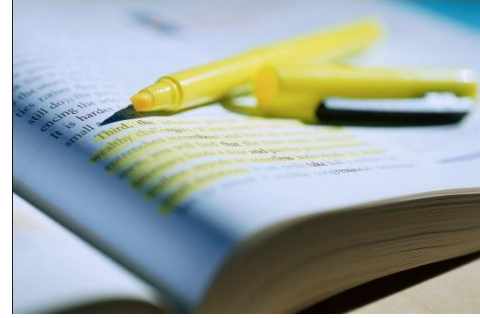
Many international students have developed skills in critical thinking, but they have difficulties articulating it in English, because they lack appropriate vocabulary.

UK universities also have very specific expectations of how criticality should be demonstrated, but these expectations are often taken for granted and not made explicit to the students (Turner 2006; Arenas 2009)

Developing reading and critical thinking

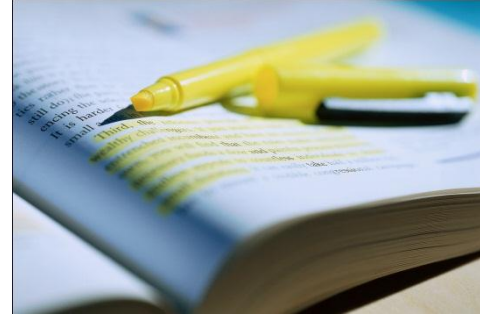


At the start of their studies the student would benefit from an explanation of what we mean by critical reading and writing. The EAP toolkit ('English for Academic Purposes') also has exercises on Reading and Critical Thinking, and Good Practice in Note-taking to Avoid Plagiarism.



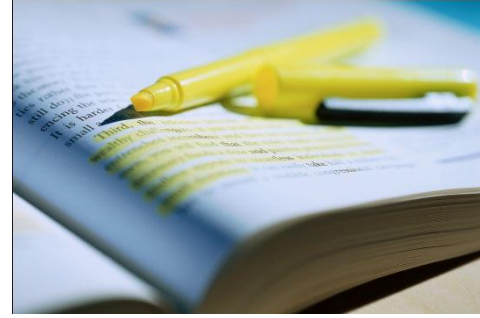
It is useful to include reading exercises in class so that the students can identify and discuss the key points. At the same time you can discuss the validity of the information and the source of information (ie whose intellectual property it is) as well as how to reference (see section on Writing and Essays). This will give students practice in reflecting on how they relate to information and how they deal with arguments from different sources.

Tips for helping with critical thinking



Cottrell (2005) and Charnock (2010) suggest the following framework could enable students to develop skills in critical thinking and writing:

- Think about how the information presented in the text adds to what we know about the subject.
- Identify the central argument and how it is supported/defended;
- What is the theoretical background to this work?



- What methodology was used to generate it?
- How was the data collected and analysed? Think about academic rigour, ethical issues, etc.
- Does the evidence support the claims the author made at the outset?

The Open University also has a good summary of how to combine reading and critical thinking available for download at

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/critically-processing-what-you-read.php>

Avoid capitalisation in information and materials given to the students



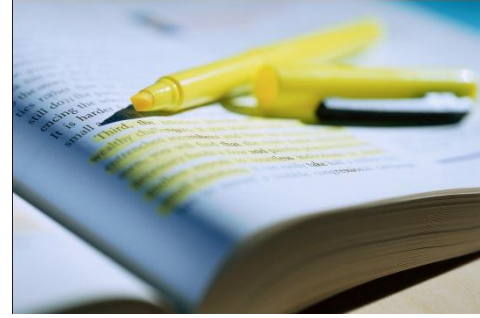
Block capitals are less easy to read for both native and non-native English speakers. International students have typically been taught to read sentence case, ie the standard use of upper and lower case.

When preparing module guides and PowerPoint presentations it is better to write everything (including headings) in sentence case. (Exley & Dennick 2004a; ThinkingPeople Consultancy 2013).

Resources available to help students with reading



- The EAP toolkit ('English for Academic Purposes') provides excellent exercises on reading strategies such as prediction strategies for finding out which articles are useful for them and reading to identify the main points.
- LearnHigher at <http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/staff/reading.html> has useful recommendations for both quick pick-up-and-go resources as well as activities that require more time and are suitable for group projects.



- The Centre for Language Study in the Department of Modern Languages offers free language advising sessions. Students can sign up for one-to-one sessions either on a sign-up sheet outside the Language Resources Centre, or by sending an email to advising@soton.ac.uk.

NB The language advisors do not offer proof-reading or structured tuition.

3.3 Oral participation

This section introduces the challenges international students face in taking part in classroom discussions along with some strategies to facilitate their oral participation.



Challenges with speaking in class



In the UK we encourage students to demonstrate their critical thinking in classroom discussions. Classroom contributions and discussions are vital because they give students the opportunity to express the key points in their own words, this helps all learners to transfer from surface to deep learning (Marton and Säljö 1976). In addition discussions enable international students to build their English vocabulary and subject specific language.



However, some international students may not be used to this and therefore find it difficult to participate in discussions. One issue is that many international students feel that the lecturer must not be challenged by questions or counter-arguments (ThinkingPeople 2013).

Another problem is that it takes longer to find the confidence to speak up in a foreign language and to feel able to express their thoughts in English (Jones 1999; Sovic 2008; Ryan & Viete 2009).

Facilitating discussion in class



These factors can make it challenging for the lecturer to facilitate a group discussion. Jones (1999) and Cortazzi & Jin (2008) recommend some general steps to create an atmosphere in class that encourages all students to contribute:

- Respond to students' ideas, not their language, thus showing that you are interested in less-than-perfect contributions, too.
- Reformulate their idea (carefully), thus modelling language.



- Hold back from finishing/closing remarks/giving the answer yourself; ask 'Anyone else?' and wait for 10 seconds to encourage other contributions.
- Wait longer for replies. Cortazzi & Jin (1998; 2010) found that the average waiting time is 1-2 seconds, which is too short to think about an answer in a second or third language. Wait for at least 6-8 seconds to give students enough time to think and gather the courage to speak.

Facilitating group discussions



Exley & Dennick (2004a) suggest preparing for discussions by giving students 1 or 2 minutes thinking time – either individually or by discussing the topic with their neighbour – so they can prepare what they want to say.

This will focus their attention, but crucially 1 or 2 minutes are not long enough for them to get distracted from the lecture/ seminar topic.

Group work across nationalities



By mixing international and home students in group work it encourages the international students to practise their English listening and speaking skills. This is particularly relevant where students have to submit group assignments, eg in management courses, or in preparing for laboratory work or other practical activities.

When doing this Ryan & Viete (2009) and Dickens & Doubleday (2013) suggests that home students may also need guidance on how to accommodate non-native English speakers and recommend the following:



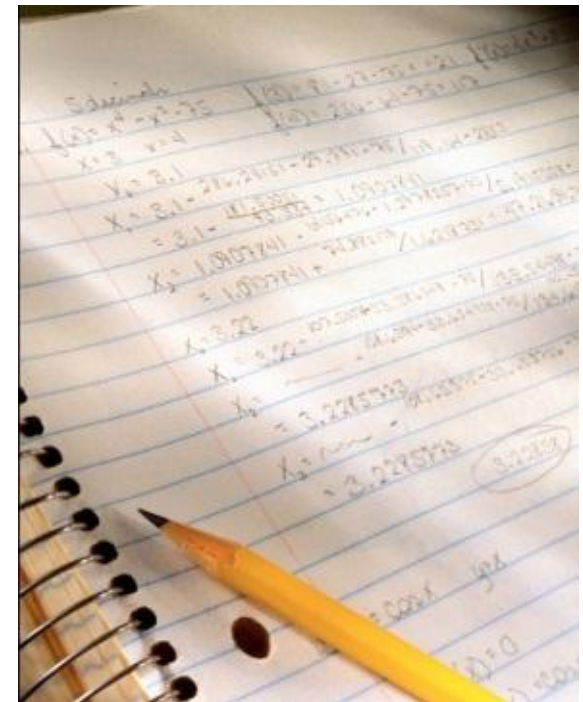
- Avoid culturally specific references
- Rephrase to aid understanding
- Explain colloquialisms, idiomatic language, etc
- Listen carefully

These activities work best if they are pre-prepared: ie by allocating students roles and to specific groups.

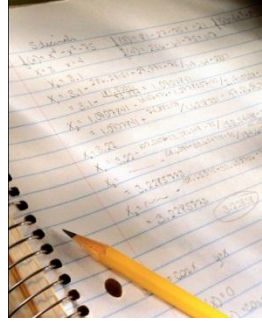
3.4 Writing and assessment

This section looks at the challenges of writing in academic English. It covers:

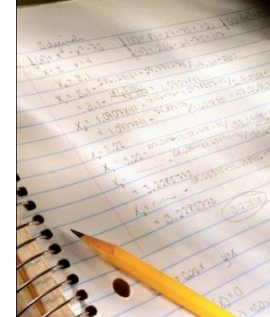
- Students' previous assessment experiences,
- Clarifying the assessment,
- Encouraging criticality in assignments,
- Providing opportunities to practise,
- Helping students to select the right resources to underpin their work,
- Avoiding plagiarism,
- References,
- Marking,
- Providing feedback on assignments



Writing in academic English

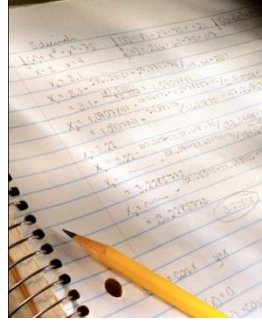


Some international students can easily get frustrated because they find it harder to express themselves in academic English than they would in their own language. Just because they can write a summary or analysis in their own language does not mean that they can do it in English (Kern 2000).



‘I know how to say it in English as well, but I know a better way to say it in [my native language]. It’s more like a childish way if you see what I mean. I know how to say it in English in very basic way ... sometimes I feel like I am five years backwards when I am writing in English ... to me when I read it, it is like someone with less education than I have or would have written’. (HEA; 31/07/2013)

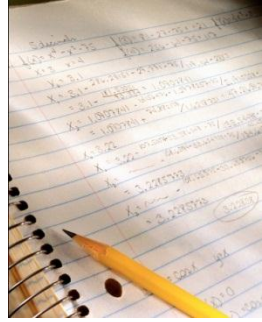
The problems with writing are complex



International students have not only to find the right words to express themselves, but also have to create sentences; link paragraphs together and include relevant evidence all in a different language to their own (HEA 2013). So for them it is a matter of learning far more than the normal writing convention for their chosen subject.

Scudamore (2013) also suggests that the international student will often struggle with the subtleties of academic writing such as writing in the past or present tense.

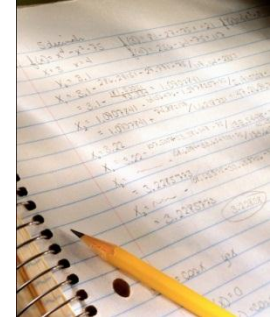
Supporting the development of academic writing



Setting formative assessments or exercises for the students to complete early in their course can help with diagnosis of any issues so that the student can be referred to the appropriate sources of help to improve their writing skills.

The following web sites are useful resources: both for students and lecturers:

<http://writing.colostate.edu/> is an open-access web site which provides resources for writers and teachers.

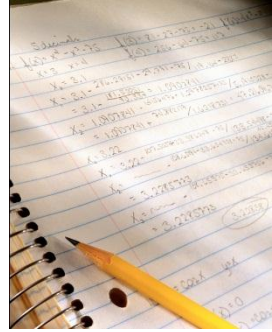


<http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/ideas> is a resource designed for teachers which provides ideas on how to help students to develop their writing.

<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk> provides resources for students to practise academic skills as well as resources and information for staff.

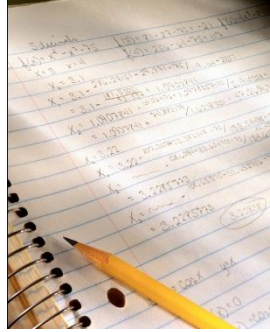
In addition the EAP Toolkit on Blackboard has some specific resources to help students to develop their writing skills.

Preparing for the assignment



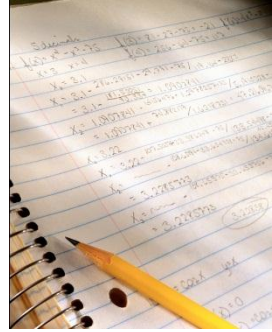
“The goal is to ensure that differences between students’ performances [in assessments] are not due to language proficiency or lack of understanding of [assessment] procedure, but rather due to differences in their discipline-related skills, abilities and knowledge” (Oxford Brookes University 2007)

Previous assessment experiences

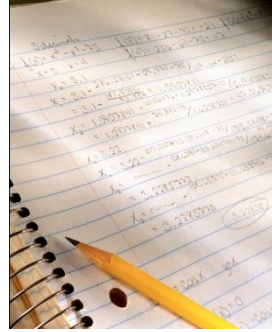


Many international students may previously have only experienced being assessed by exams or short answer questions and may never have written longer essays (Carroll 2008).

Carroll (2008b) and Scudamore (2013) suggest that they need explicit written information (so they can refer back to it) about such things as:



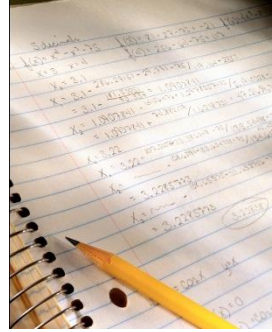
- The length of the assignment (with an explanation as to why longer is not better)
- Clarification of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- Which aspects are being assessed (especially the proportion of the mark which is awarded for English proficiency).



The University of Southampton Quality Handbook under the Assessment Framework (ND pg 11) states that:

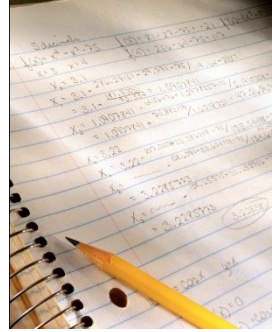
“Each student should be given, in writing at the beginning of each semester or year, the details of the assessment method for each module, including coursework requirements, deadlines for submission and criteria by which work will be assessed”.

Clarifying the assignment task



The way in which the assignment task is written can cause confusion for both UK and international students. For instance Barnatt (2009) suggests that students may not understand what is meant by the term “discuss” and so do not comprehend what is expected of them; he suggests that it is better to say things like:

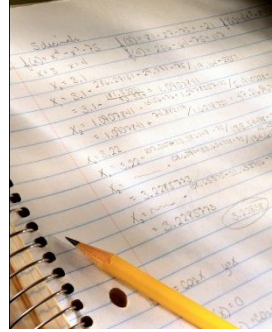
- Give an example of...
- Argue for and against....
- Show evidence of.....



Another example of a question which could easily be misunderstood and where the student might think they have to write about every single aspect is:

“Can the UK be described as a homogeneous society? Choose one of the following aspects and describe its effects: social class, cultural identities”

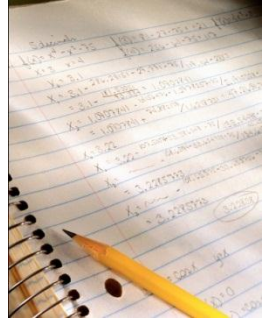
By re-phrasing this, the task can be clarified eg:



Answer one of the following questions:

- a) *Can the UK be described as a homogeneous society?
Analyse social class and its effects on access to
education, political representation and public services.*
- b) *Can the UK be described as a homogeneous society?
Analyse cultural identities and their effect on
education, political representation and access to
public services.*

Clarifying the assignment format

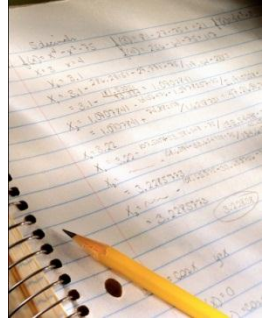


As students may not be familiar with different forms of assignments (eg reports, essays, reflective accounts, posters, etc) they need clear and specific advice as to what each of these is and what is expected of them (Carroll 2008b).

Providing examples of the different formats helps them to see what is required

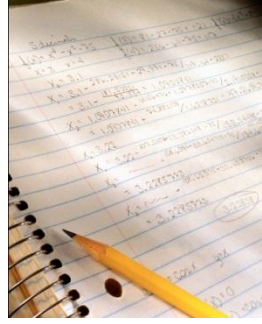
The written guidance provided to students needs to be clear and unambiguous. Bullet points are easier for the student to follow than lengthy complex sentences (Doubleday 2013).

Encouraging criticality



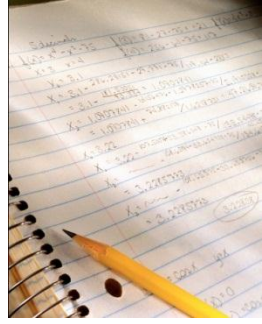
Students (both UK & International) can become confused about the meaning of criticality. HEA (2013) point to a lack of understanding of the term which is hardly surprising when words such as *argue*, *argument*, *criticise*, *issue* have different meanings or connotation in an Higher Education context than they do in day-to-day usage eg *argue* in day-to-day usage is associated with disagreement, falling out, unpleasantness, even unreasonable behaviour / reaction.

It is therefore important to explain what criticality means and the sorts of things which we expect from our students.



Browne & Keeley2012 suggest the following will help students to understand what is expected:

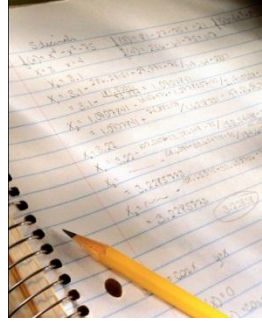
- being thoughtful eg thinking carefully about what they read
- being inquisitive, questioning, testing
- not taking what they read (or hear) at face value or for granted
- identifying evidence and finding good reasons before believing something to be true
- judging the credibility of resources



- not just repeating the ideas of others, but looking for connections (or lack of)
- constructing own arguments
- challenging ideas, based on credible evidence
- spotting bias and flawed reasoning
- looking for gaps, suggesting new or different solutions

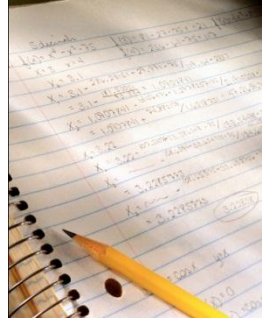
The EAP (English for Academic Purposes) Toolkit on Blackboard has useful exercises on this topic.

Providing examples and opportunity to practice



Practice helps students to understand what is required of them within the assessment and Carroll (2008b) and Scudamore (2013) recommend:

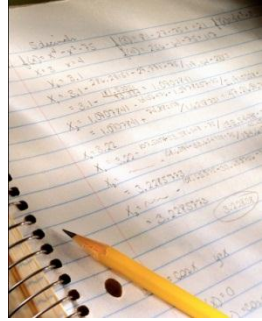
- discussing examples of good and poor work
- giving opportunities to practice new and un-familiar skills before the students are formally assessed (eg via formative assessments)



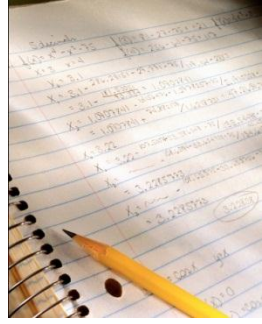
- Providing model assignments; previous exam papers or previous successful assignments so that students can get an idea as to what is required

Another good way to help the students to understand what is expected is to give them sample assignments (good and mediocre) and ask them to individually mark them using the assessment criteria. The students can then discuss the marking of the assignments and thus gain insight into what is required (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange 2008; Clarke 2009)

Issues with selecting the right resources to underpin their work

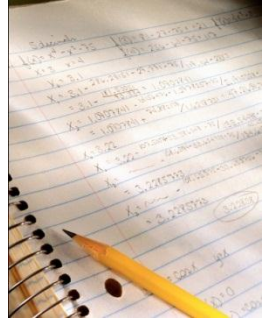


Many international students may not be used to gathering a lot of information from different sources to support their academic assignments. In addition Scudamore (2013) says that selecting reliable and valid sources is more challenging when the students do not appreciate the refinements of English language. This makes it difficult for them to distinguish between the different agendas of sources using terms such as “shocking discovery” and “Scientists prove” or “new studies suggest”.



Providing students with a selection of articles from a wide range of resources and analysing them in class will help them to make the distinction between good and poor resources (Scudamore 2013).

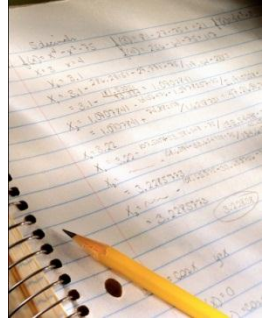
Problems with Plagiarism



There is little evidence to show that home or international students differ in levels of deliberate plagiarism (Partridge and West 2003; Gilmore et al 2009).

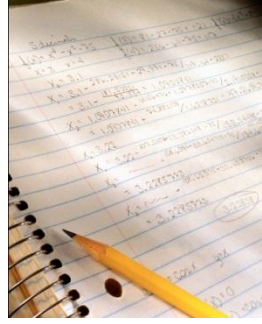
Shi (2004) suggests that international students tend to copy longer strings of words from the original text than native speakers; this is probably due to the difficulties they have in expressing things in English. This copying is easier for the marker to identify due to the differences in writing style and so it gives the impression that plagiarism is higher amongst international students (Carroll 2008b).

Avoiding plagiarism

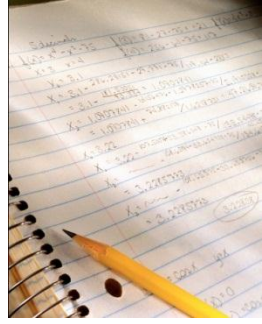


Carroll (2008b) suggests the following tactics to manage plagiarism:

- Provide opportunities for discussion in an environment where the students feel safe to ask questions and test out their understanding of what constitutes plagiarism
- Explain what constitutes plagiarism and give specific examples to help them to understand

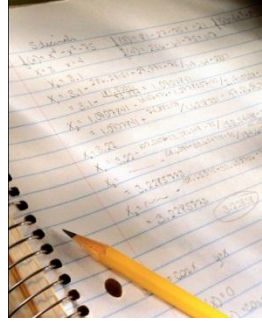


- Rather than telling the students what they should not do it is better to be explicit about what is valued For instance: rather than saying “Do not quote verbatim” it is better to say that we award marks to students who can explain in their own words what an author has said.
- Design the assessment to discourage copying. For instance assessments which ask the student to discuss or describe something are more likely to encourage copying than an assessment which requires them to rank; choose; justify or evaluate something.



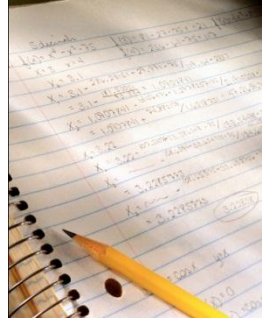
The EAP toolkit ('English for Academic Purposes') on Blackboard has exercises on finding out about plagiarism, identifying plagiarism and bad practice, and how to use quotations, which you could include in your information.

Referencing



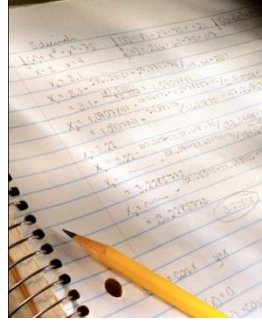
As with all students referencing is often a challenge at the start of their program of study. The students need to understand why they have to reference their work and understand the referencing system you expect. It is helpful to point them towards the example references in the referencing guidelines issued by your faculty.

The students' confidence will increase if they have the opportunity to practice referencing different sources of information with immediate feedback on the style they are supposed to use.



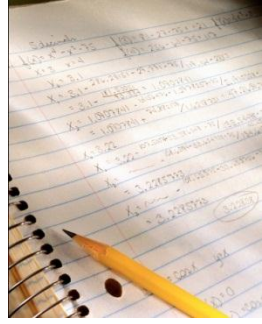
The EAP toolkit ('English for Academic Purposes') on Blackboard includes a chapter on Academic Writing, which has learning activities for the student to complete on understanding, describing and compiling reference lists.

Differences in marking systems



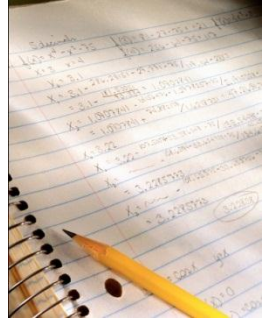
Most international students will not have encountered a marking scale from 0-100 with a pass mark of 40-50%. In addition in the UK there is a tendency to disregard the top 25% of the scale so top performers are frequently given marks in the 70% range (Scudamore 2013).

International students can feel very disheartened by the perceived drop in their marks when studying in the UK and so lose confidence in their own abilities.



It is important to explain the marking system and ensure they are aware of the marking criteria. In particular they need to be aware of how much of the overall mark is awarded for English grammar etc (Carroll 2008b).

Providing feedback on assignments



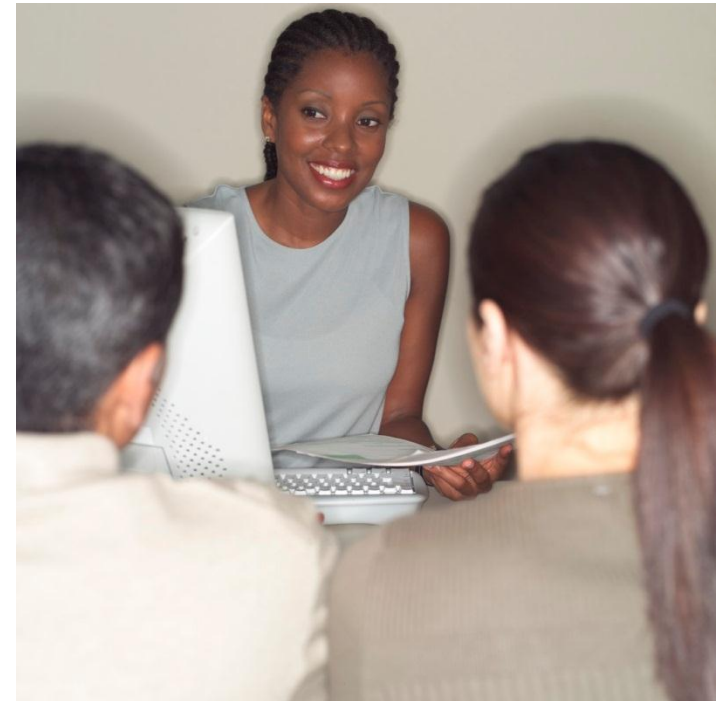
This is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects for lecturers because the feedback needs to be explicit if it is going to help the student to improve their work.

Carroll (2008b) suggests that the marker should concentrate on describing the desired behaviour rather than focusing on what the student has not done.

Rather than saying “Are these your own words?” say: “When you are using someone else’s words you must enclose the words you copied in quotation marks to show that they are not your words”.

IV. Overcoming cultural challenges

This section introduces some of the complexities of different cultures and the way this may influence the students integration into academic life in the UK.



Wide variety of cultures



Obviously, in this section we can only outline a few of the cultural differences which may have an impact upon your teaching in the classroom because there are such a diverse range of different cultures. It is important to develop some understanding of the cultural differences you may encounter because of the miss-understandings which may occur as a result of them.

In addition your approach to teaching will be different if there are just a few international students within a larger group of UK students (in which case you would be trying to ensure your teaching is inclusive). On the other hand if the group is predominantly international you may find you are trying to support their transition to UK education.

National culture dimensions



Understanding culture is complex because there are so many variables involved. Geert Hofstede's renowned longitudinal study provides one viewpoint by identifying how values are influenced by culture (Hofstede ND). This work has, in recent times, been superseded by more recent studies which have sought to understand the experiences of the international student.

Hofstede's six dimensions of national culture (which were identified through this study) help us to understand differences between cultures but we should not try to categorise every student from a country as sharing the same culture or values (Scudamore 2013).



The six dimensions are described on the following pages. Each of the dimensions provides an insight into the different expectations which a student may have with regards to their own and other's behaviours and what they perceive as right or wrong etc. They are:
Power distance, Individualism vs collectivism,
Masculinity vs femininity, Uncertainty avoidance,
Long-term orientation, and Indulgence vs restraint.

Power distance



This dimension looks at the differences in how power is distributed in distinct cultures. In cultures with a high degree of power distance the population accepts the hierarchy and their own place within it. In populations with low power distance people strive for equality and fight against inequality, viewing it as an injustice. (Hofstede ND)

This may explain why some international students are more comfortable with formal relationships and prefer to address the lecturer as 'Sir' or 'Madam' or by their title, whilst others will be comfortable addressing their lecturer by first name.



In some cultures teachers are seen as the expert on a subject and so students may initially find it difficult to question the lecturer because it would be seen as challenging their authority in their own country. You may need to explain to the students that you want them to ask questions and that they will be rewarded for demonstrating independent critical thinking.



In addition some international students would feel they had done something wrong if asked to attend a meeting with their lecturer (ThinkingPeople Consultancy 2013). You may need to clarify that individual meetings are part of the normal way we teach in the UK (see also Prepare for Success, EAP Toolkit and StudySkills Toolkit in the useful resources section).



Clarifying the relationship which lecturers expect to have with the students and discussing cultural differences will help the students to understand that they are expected to question the lecturer and seek clarification

Individualism vs collectivism



Individualism is a loosely-knit social framework with an expectation that one will take responsibility for themselves and immediate family. On the other hand collectivism refers to societies with a tightly knit framework where individuals can expect relatives or other tightly-knit groups to look after them. In collectivism people are very loyal to one another. (Hofstede ND).



This aspect may influence how comfortable students are in working together in groups – especially if the task is linked to an assessment. It is therefore important to establish the ground rules for such group work.

In addition, if the student is used to taking responsibility for themselves it might not immediately occur to them to ask for help.

Masculinity vs femininity



Masculinity refers to a more competitive society where achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards are sought. Femininity, on the other hand, represents a more consensus society where co-operation, modesty and caring for the weak are valued (Hofstede ND).



You may find that some international students are more competitive whilst others are willing to co-operate with other students. In addition in some cultures men and women might be reluctant to work together. This will influence the way in which they interact with their peers on group tasks. Again setting clear ground rules and being explicit about your expectations will help them to understand what is required of them.

Uncertainty avoidance



This element refers to how tolerant society is of uncertainty and ambiguity, and whether it seeks to try to control the future or just let events unfold. In societies with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance unorthodox behaviour or ideas are not tolerated and they maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour. Weak uncertainty avoidance societies have a more relaxed attitude and value practice more than principles. (Hofstede ND).



Some cultures find it very difficult to deal with uncertainty. Scudamore (2013) says that some students will indicate that they have understood something even though they have not. They do this in the belief that admitting to not understanding will imply that the teaching was not clear or that they themselves have problems understanding or carrying out the task.

Therefore it is beneficial to clarify that asking for help is seen as taking active responsibility for their studies and therefore is encouraged

Long-term orientation



“The long-term orientation dimension can be interpreted as dealing with society’s search for virtue. Societies with a short-term orientation generally have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth. They are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. In societies with a long-term orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results.” (Hofstede ND).



This may indicate why some students have more difficulty in adjusting to their new environment than others. These students will need clear guidance in order to engage fully in their studies. Scudamore (2013) stresses the importance of induction and the need for it to continue beyond the normal student induction programme in order to help these students to adjust.

Indulgence vs restraint



Indulgent societies are those that focus on enjoying life and having fun. Restraint societies, by contrast, tend to have strict social norms for regulating behaviour and individual gratification (Hofstede ND).

This may influence how students behave with regards to their studies. The University of Southampton Student Charter provides a good starting point for discussing the rights and responsibilities of both staff and students (University and the University of Southampton Students' Union (SUSU)(ND).

Conclusions

There are many practical steps that can be taken to support international students. These steps are not radically different from the existing good practice in higher education.

The main difference is the need to emphasise and make explicit such things as your expectations of the students, your own role, rules for interacting, signposting in sessions, etc. In addition, provide opportunities for students to practice new skills, especially with regard to using English language skills.

The following section provides information about additional resources you might find useful.

V. Useful resources

In this section we have compiled a number of useful resources that are available online.

Rather than providing web links which may become obsolete, we have copied screenshots of the relevant webpages so that you can get an idea of the various resources available. The web address at the time of publication of this guide is on the top of each screenshot.

The resources come from the following sites:

- Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- LearnHigher
- University of Nottingham resources
- Leeds Metropolitan University resources

Higher Education Academy (HEA)

The HEA is committed to promoting an equitable and global learning experience for all students on UK higher education programmes, whether they are studying in the UK or abroad. They work closely with higher education institutions, key partner organisations and practice networks to develop international teaching and the research and evidence that underpin it.

The HEA works on the principle that policy and pedagogic practice that works for international students also works for the benefit of all students. They promote a curriculum which is informed by a broader global view, that is taught in a range of ways and enables students to study abroad to learn more about themselves, their disciplines and their future professions.

HEA resources

You can find useful resources on the HEA's (Higher Education Academy) webpages, if you follow the path: www.heacademy.ac.uk – Resources Centre – Internationalisation – International Student Life Cycle.

The resources cover areas such as teaching context (lectures, seminars, supervision, etc), teaching approaches (pedagogy, group work, language, etc) as well as learning skills (critical thinking, academic writing, plagiarism, independent learning, language, etc).



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- ▶ Assessment and feedback
- ▶ Changing the Learning Landscape
- ▶ Education for sustainable development
- ▶ Employability
- ▶ Flexible learning
- ▶ Internationalisation

Teaching International Students

Home > Resources Centre > Internationalisation > International Student Lifecycle

International Student Lifecycle Resources bank

Use the links below to access the materials in the resources bank.

1. Pre-arrival and pre-sessional support



LearnHigher

LearnHigher is a collaborative Centre for Teaching and Learning (CETL) committed to improving student learning.

It provides resources to support students' learning development on a range of activities, such as academic writing, assessment, referencing, critical thinking, reading skills, oral communication, etc.



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Teaching & Learning Resources

Learn**higher** provides a set of resources for teaching & learning at university. Browse our material across several areas below.

All our resources are available for free educational use under a [Creative Commons licence](#). You are welcome to link to them, use them and adapt them if necessary for your students, but please acknowledge Learn**higher** as authors.



University of Nottingham – Learning from internationalisation

This website provides a number of short videos and papers addressing internationalisation and teaching strategies.

Leeds Metropolitan University

This site has a themed resource bank for internationalisation of Higher Education with links to many other resources under each of the themes

WORLD-WIDE HORIZONS



- Welcome
- Internationalisation at Leeds Met
- CAPRI
- Publications & Resources
- Leeds Met Africa
- Contact Us

Themed Resource Bank for Internationalisation of HE

Available below are links to the Higher Education Academy commissioned (2007) **The Internationalisation of UK Higher Education: a review of selected material** and other more recently commissioned, themed and annotated bibliographies on the subject of internationalisation of Higher Education.

For ease of navigation the Nottingham Trent annotated bibliography includes a contents page, whilst the PMI2 Strategic Dialogues bibliography comprises a series of separate documents, one for each of seven themes.

CAPRI is in the process of consolidating libraries of global sources compiled for the original literature review and those relating to subsequent projects into one fully searchable resource which will be made available via a CAPRI link to dedicated pages within the University's Open Educational Resource.

➤ [Back to CAPRI Home](#)

University of Southampton staff contributors

We would like to thank all of our colleagues who have shared their experiences of supporting international students with us so that we could put this guide together, some of whom have agreed to be named here:

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Dr Mary Morrison, Faculty of Management;
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