

# Tips For Working With Students Whose First Language Is Not English

New Beginnings Conference Workshop  
Cynthia Macknish & Ildi Porter-Szucs  
Department of World Languages  
Eastern Michigan University  
August 24, 2023



# Workshop outcomes:

Participants will identify & develop greater understanding of the challenges & assets of students whose first language is not English & evaluate teaching strategies to meet needs.



Photo: [starweekly.com.au/sports](http://starweekly.com.au/sports)

## Agenda

1. Consider the assets that culturally & linguistically diverse students bring to the classroom.
2. Discuss challenges that culturally & linguistically diverse learners face.
3. Discuss challenges that instructors face.
4. Consider teaching strategies for supporting culturally & linguistically diverse learners.

# Diverse Labels for Students whose First Language is not English



Terminology and students differ  
but principles remain the same.

Our shorthand will be **EAL**  
(English as an Additional Language)

- English learners
- ESL students
- nonnative speakers
- international students
- immigrants
- multilingual learners
- generation 1.5
- heritage speakers
- students whose L1 is not English
- linguistically & culturally diverse students



# In discussion, be aware:

We may talk in generalities, but we should remember that individuals & contexts within a culture or country vary greatly.

**We can't stereotype!**



Image Source: [whiteazn.blogspot.com](http://whiteazn.blogspot.com)

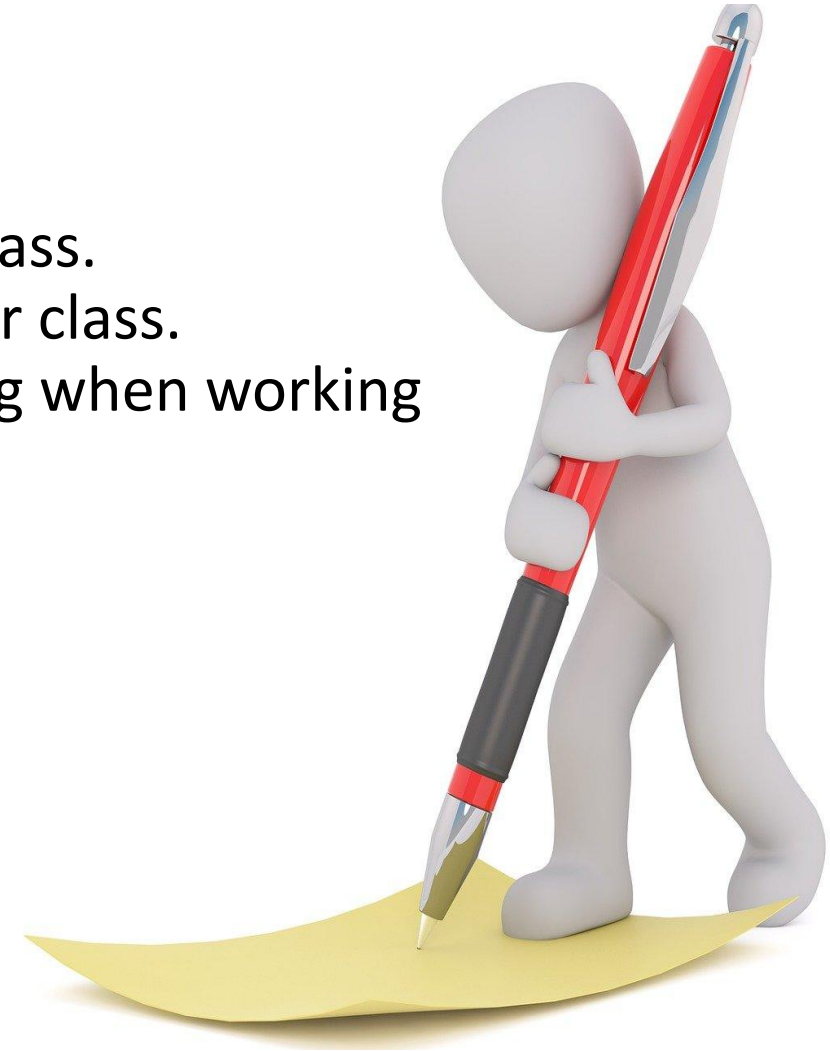
# Consider your experience teaching or working with EAL students

Write on 3 sticky notes.....

1. 1 (or more) assets that EAL students bring to your class.
2. 1 (or more) challenges that EAL students face in your class.
3. Something you would like to change in your teaching when working with a class that includes some EAL students.

\*\*\*\*\*

4. Place your sticky notes in the relevant column.
5. Take a look at what other people have shared.



# Assets & Contributions of EAL Students



## Such students...

- enhance local students' awareness of the rest of the world through sharing stories, experiences, cultures, religions, ideas, beliefs.
- help broaden the outlook of locals by prompting reflection & examination of perceived norms.
- ensure some courses remain viable, providing all students with more choice.
- compel instructors & local students to express ideas clearly.
- share alternative & varied perspectives on issues.
- provide discussion examples from outside the US.
- contributed nearly **\$34 billion** & supported 335,423 jobs to the U.S. economy in 2021-22.  
(NAFSA National Association of Foreign Student Advisers).



# Challenges from the EAL Students' Perspective



Photo by huffingtonpost.ca

As you watch the clips, consider whether students in your courses might face these or similar challenges.





# Challenges EAL Students Face



**Part 1:** 0:45-1:45 (Malawi: need for critical essay) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quI0vq9VF-c>

- 1. Did anything stand out in the video?**
- 2. How might a similar concern emerge in your class?**

**4:00**



# Challenges EAL Students Face



Part 2: 0:18-1:30 (Japanese: writing style) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koViA1gqiUs>

1. Did anything stand out in the video?
2. How might a similar concern emerge in your class?

4:00

# Issues in Working with EAL Students

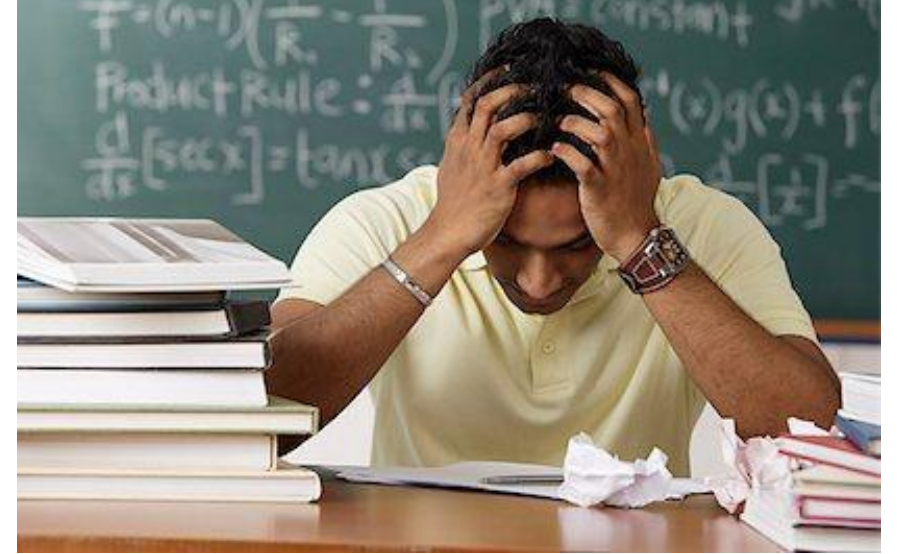
## Differing expectations about:

- classroom culture - teacher role, student role, relationship with professors
- teaching methods, group work, class discussions, asking & answering questions, homework
- purpose of writing
- writing styles, organizational structure & rhetorical style
- library research & amount of reading
- academic conventions, academic integrity
- grading, formative assessments, written feedback
- seeking help



# Analyze & Discuss.

## What makes a text complex? Consider your own texts.



*The proof hinges on a centuries-old principle called quadratic reciprocity that involves the squares of two prime numbers. Stange's team discovered how reciprocity applies to circle packing. It explains why certain curvatures can't be tangent to each other. The rule, called an obstruction, propagates throughout the whole packing.*

<https://www.quantamagazine.org/two-students-unravel-a-widely-believed-math-conjecture-2023081>

**4:00**

# What can instructors do?



1. Be aware of cultural variations.
2. Speak clearly & project your voice.
3. Provide information in multiple ways (use visuals, whiteboard) & repeat key points.
4. Don't lower standards, but do increase scaffolding. Explain cultural references & jargon & idiomatic language.
5. Provide varied & frequent opportunities to clarify understandings through peer-peer & instructor-student interactions. Avoid "do you understand?" Increase wait time slightly.
6. Make explanations, expectations, & instructions more explicit than you usually would. Demonstrate Canvas, syllabus, assignment instructions.
7. Make rubrics transparent & model the kinds of work you want your students to do; analyze examples according to the expectations.
8. Provide frequent opportunities to practice applying knowledge & skills you want students to learn; provide clear, meaningful feedback.
9. Consider providing additional time on tests & quizzes or allowing re-writes.
10. Consider when to penalize and when not to penalize spelling or grammar errors.



# Encourage Students to Use Learning Strategies

## Demonstrate; don't simply advise students to...

- check Canvas regularly.
- do assigned readings before class, formulate questions.
- do research to find answers & explore further.
- practice reading strategies.
- listen actively & take notes.
- record lectures (after getting permission).
- ask questions.
- revise/rewrite notes after class.
- meet with the instructor to clarify specific points or assignment instructions/expectations.
- form study groups (with local students).



Photo by [Muhammad Rizwan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Try making some small changes to support your EAL students



# Thank you for your participation!

Cynthia Macknish  
[cmacknis@emich.edu](mailto:cmacknis@emich.edu)

and

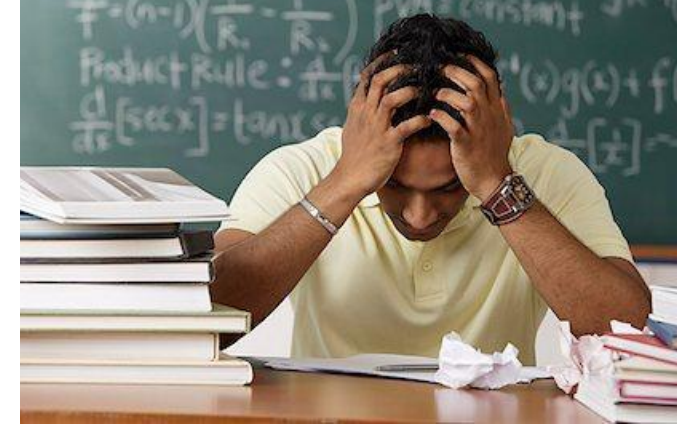
Ildi Porter-Szucs  
[iporters@emich.edu](mailto:iporters@emich.edu)





# Analyze & Discuss

## What makes a text complex?

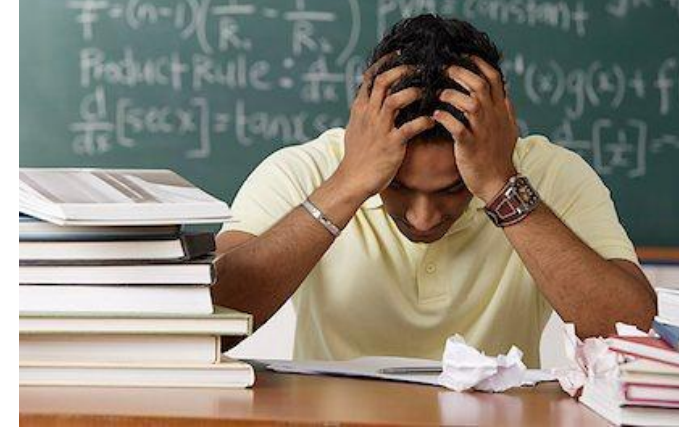


*“The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.”*

Judith Butler <https://unherd.com/2021/09/judith-butlers-toxic-nonsense/>  
Photo by Masterfile

# Analyze & Discuss

## What makes a text complex?



*"The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse-the agency of a people-is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative" (LC 148)-which is to say, between the people's status as "historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy," and their ability to perform themselves as "'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary [national] presence" (LC145).*

Homi Bhabha <https://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/perloff/bhabha.html>