

DESIGNING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS INCLUSIVE OF MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

Make Space for Multiple Perspectives

Design writing assignments that take into consideration multiple cultural contexts. If students are expected to have certain knowledge related to politics, history, culture, etc., be sure to provide and familiarize them with the necessary context (“CCCC statement,” 2020). For example, if you have an assignment that asks students to write from a specific cultural perspective (e.g. – Imagine you are a U.S. diplomat advocating for X economic policy...), consider broadening the assignment to be more inclusive, inviting students to write from a country or cultural perspective of their choice.

Provide Clear, Specific Expectations

Multilingual students find it helpful when faculty have clearly written and expressed expectations in assignments and rubrics; reviewing these in class conversations is important as well (“Effective Writing Assignments”). Specify the audience, purpose, and conventions of the assignment, as well as how you will assess students. Similarly, review citation conventions and source usage expectations for your assignments when relevant. If possible, encourage and allow students to use sources written in multiple languages (see *Using Your Language as a Resource* for more information).

Use Accessible Language

Faculty may use idioms, colloquialisms, phrasal verbs (e.g.-- “play out”), and/or culturally specific language that may be unfamiliar to students. Be mindful of whether or not these terms occur in your assignments and consider revising them for greater clarity. This also applies to common academic terms that may need to be clarified and explained (e.g.-- genre analysis,, thesis statement, reflection, expository essay, synthesis)

Share Models

Models help multilingual students understand genre and disciplinary conventions and expectations (Sowell, 2019; “NCTE position paper,” 2020). Accessible models such as articles you have read in class or anonymous work from previous students help frame assignments within familiar context. Additionally, highlighting what features of the model made it successful, and/or what aspects of the model did not work well and how they could be improved further clarifies your expectations.

Provide Adequate Time

Distributing assignments ahead of the deadline (ideally 3-4 weeks) benefits all students by giving them time to plan for completion, balance their workload efficiently, and meet with support resources (Writing Center tutors, office hours, etc.) well in advance of the due date. You can also build deadlines into the assignment by scaffolding.

Scaffold Assignments

Scaffolding involves breaking down assignments into smaller pieces completed over time (“What Makes a Good Writing Assignment?”). Scaffolding provides students with greater opportunities to ask questions, receive feedback, and plan for an assignment, and it can also discourage procrastination. When scaffolding, include steps of the writing process that encourage students to prewrite/brainstorm, outline, draft, revise, edit, receive feedback, and revise prior to the final submission.

Encourage and Normalize Writing Support

Many students come to Hamilton with the idea that academic support through tutoring and office hours is remedial, and should only be utilized when you are doing poorly in a course. You can help change this perception by recommending that all students visit the Writing Center and sharing how you work with others on your own writing to make clear that this is a common part of the writing process. Offer opportunities for peer feedback and discussion, building in writing workshops and peer review sessions on assignments.

Sources

CCCC statement on second language writing and multilingual writers. (2020, May). Conference on College Composition and Communication. <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting>

NCTE position paper on the role of English teachers in Educating English language learners (ELLs). (2020, March 6). National Council of Teachers of English. <https://ncte.org/statement/teaching-english-ells/>

Sowell, J. (2019). Using models in the second-language writing classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 57(1), 2-13. https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/etf_57_1_02-13.pdf

Using your language as a resource. (2021). Wesleyan University Writing. <https://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/multilingual-writers/Language-as-a-Writing-Resource.html>

What makes a good writing assignment? (1997-2021). WAC Clearinghouse. <https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/teaching/intro/assignments/>