



## **Strategies for Teaching Multilingual Learners Series**

### **PART 1: Who are Multilingual Learners?**

UC Davis is a linguistically diverse campus, with much of its student population being bi or multilingual. According to UC Davis Admissions, of the undergraduate students admitted in 2016-2017, about 41% spoke only English at home, 27% spoke English and another language, and 33% spoke only another language at home. This resource will provide some information on the complex linguistic and cultural backgrounds of multilingual learners, and offer a number of specific strategies and suggestions for supporting these students in the classroom.

#### **Who are multilingual students?**

Multilingual students come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of language, culture, immigration or visa status, and time spent in the US. The majority of **international students** are bi or multilingual, with some having taken English classes throughout their schooling, while others attended international high schools where English was the primary language. Others may be **refugee students** (or those with similar backgrounds), who may have limited or interrupted literacy development in both their home languages and English (Menken, 2013). Another group common in California are long-term permanent residents and the children of immigrants who arrived when they were young children. Often identified as **Generation 1.5**, these students primarily grew up learning English in the US school system (Menken, 2013).

#### **Challenges multilingual students may face in the classroom**

Given their varied backgrounds, it is important to recognize that multilingual students may differ quite a bit from each other in the challenges they face in the classroom. Here are a few general examples of the challenges faced by multilingual students, and some suggestions on what you can do to help support them:

| Challenges  | Explanations   | Teaching Suggestions   |
|---|--|--|
| <i>May be proficient in some modalities of English, but not others.</i> | Multilingual students may differ in their proficiencies with English, or with certain modalities of English (i.e., writing, reading, listening, or speaking). For example, international students may be proficient in writing or reading in English, but may struggle considerably with their listening or speaking skills. In contrast, Generation 1.5 students may sound verbally indistinguishable from native English speakers, but may struggle with reading or writing in academic contexts (Menken, 2013). | Consider employing a variety of modes when lecturing, and when designing activities. For example, Freedman (n.d.) notes that all students, not just multilingual ones, can benefit from the inclusion of visuals (e.g., PowerPoints, Prezis, writing key concepts on the board, etc.) with your lecture. Encourage students to read ahead so that vocabulary is present and activated during class, and highlight assignments that require more reading/writing so that students can plan accordingly. |
| <i>May experience a high amount of cognitive load.</i>                  | Multilingual students may experience a high amount of cognitive load as they attempt to learn complex content in your class in a language they are still in the process of acquiring.  | Sweller (2017) suggests clearly defining and explaining key course concepts in class, instead of expecting students to induce the information themselves from readings. Accompany these explanations with visuals that help students understand complex terms or ideas. For additional suggestions on teaching to reduce cognitive load, <a href="#">see Crosby (2015)</a> .   |



|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><i>May feel uncomfortable participating in class discussions or activities</i></p> | <p>Multilingual students, especially those who struggle with their speaking and listening skills, or those who come from cultures that don't encourage discussion in class, may feel uncomfortable or anxious about speaking during class discussions.</p>  | <p>Some of the anxiety surrounding speaking in class may be alleviated by first having students discuss in smaller groups. Have students get into groups of 2-6 people, and ask them to select one person to report their ideas to the class. You can also employ think, pair, share activities, which will give multilingual students time to think through their response in writing first.</p>      |
| <p><i>May have difficulties completing or understanding course readings</i></p>       | <p>Multilingual students may struggle to get through lengthy readings, especially when those readings use complex academic language and/or jargon.</p>  | <p>Students may benefit from a quick overview of the main ideas, structures, and language in a reading. It may also be helpful to discuss effective reading strategies with students. Consider assigning <a href="#">Karen Rosenberg's "Reading Games"</a> at the beginning of the term. This article, written for college students, provides strategies for tackling complex texts quickly.</p>       |
| <p><i>May submit writing with consistent grammar or syntax errors</i></p>             | <p>Writing from multilingual students often displays consistent errors or patterns of error (particularly with articles and/or prepositions) that can distract from the writing's content, and in some cases, its intelligibility. These students are often anxious about their writing, and may ask you specifically about their grammar.</p>  | <p>Before grading the paper, consider the impact these errors have on the student's ability to communicate their ideas/content. Freedman (n.d.) suggests allowing students to complete rough drafts for peer review, or show you in office hours. You can also encourage students to access the <a href="#">Writing Assistance Services</a> provided by SASC.</p>                                      |
| <p><i>May have inconsistent knowledge of US writing conventions</i></p>               | <p>Many students may have inconsistent knowledge of US writing conventions, especially regarding citation and plagiarism. Some may be unfamiliar with the concept of "ownership" in Western writing, or may have learned English by memorizing or repeating texts. They may also have been taught rhetorical conventions and/or methods of organization that differ from standard academic writing in the US.</p> | <p>Establish clear guidelines for plagiarism in your syllabus, and discuss this with your students. Also, consider the intentionality behind suspected plagiarism, and how your response can help the student learn from the mistake. For more suggestions, see the <a href="#">Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs</a>, as well as our "<a href="#">Addressing Plagiarism Series</a>."</p> |

*Adapted from:* Freedman, n.d.; Sato, 2015; & UWCTL, n.d.

**Additional Resources**

- [The International & Academic English Program](#)
- [Writing Assistance Services, SASC](#)

As many multilingual learners are also international students, please also refer to our "[Strategies for Teaching International Students Series](#)" for more suggestions and strategies specifically regarding international students.

**Citation**

Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE]. (2018). Strategies for Teaching Multilingual Learners Series. *Just-in-Time Teaching Resources*. Retrieved from <https://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT>



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## **Strategies for Teaching Multilingual Learners Series** **PART 2: Promoting Success for Multilingual Learners**

In the 2014 reaffirmed “[Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers](#),” the Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC] emphasizes that the linguistic backgrounds of multilingual students are often quite varied. Because of their highly varied relationships with English, it is important that instructors recognize the individual needs of multilingual students and resist taking a one-size-fits-all approach to the classroom. Instructors can play an important role in supporting multilingual students, both in the classroom and outside. They are often uniquely positioned to spot students who are struggling, and to intervene if possible, or to alert an advisor that the student may need additional support. Here are a few ways that instructors can support multilingual students in the classroom:

| Strategies   | Teaching Suggestions  |
|--|---|
| Take time to figure out who your students are.   | Consider having your students complete a survey or poll at the beginning of the year, and include questions about their language and communication experiences and strengths.   |
| Recognize the unique perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and skills multilingual learners contribute to the classroom. | As discussed above, a survey or poll at the beginning of the year can help you understand your students prior knowledge. Consider the skills and knowledge your students have coming into the classroom, and develop ways to leverage and build on that experience in your lectures and activities without asking students to act as the sole representatives of their entire culture or ethnicity. For example, asking open-ended questions during class discussions can be one way to encourage students to offer their own perspectives. |
| Provide regular opportunities for students to interact with their peers and with you.                                    | In class, have students work in varying pairs or groups, and provide peer feedback opportunities on major projects. Encourage students to come to office hours, and if possible, build time for one-to-one meetings with students (i.e., on major projects, on their progress in the class, etc.)   |
| Provide timely feedback on writing and other coursework.   | Endeavor to provide feedback in a timely manner (within a week if possible), so that students have an opportunity to integrate your comments into their next assignment. For more feedback strategies, see our “ <a href="#">Effective Feedback Series</a> .”   |
| Be strategic in your feedback, and focus on more than just grammar.  | While multilingual learners can benefit from feedback on error patterns or consistent mistakes in their writing, they can also benefit from feedback on the content, support, and structure. Consider prioritizing comments on content and organization when giving feedback. If you do mark papers for grammar, try to distinguish between errors that obscure meaning in the paper and errors that may be distracting but are ultimately unrelated to your course goals.  |
| Build in opportunities for reflection and assessment.  | Build in opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, and for you to assess how well the class is understanding your content. For example, you could have students complete a quick “clicker” quiz or a “minute paper” at the end of class.   |
| Provide numerous opportunities for students to ask questions.  | It can be helpful to open several lines of communication, and to encourage your students to ask questions. For example, you could create a specific discussion board on Canvas for questions, and encourage students to message or email you if they don’t feel comfortable sharing their question with the class.  |



Intervene when you notice a student is struggling.

When you notice a student may be struggling in your class, reach out to them through email or on Canvas. Sometime, just showing that you're concerned about them can help a student feel more comfortable asking for support.

*Adapted from:* Freedman, n.d.; Sato, 2015; & UWCLT, n.d.

### **Additional Resources**

- [The International & Academic English Program](#)
- [Writing Assistance Services, SASC](#)

As many multilingual learners are also international students, please also refer to our “[Strategies for Teaching International Students Series](#)” for more suggestions and strategies specifically regarding international students.

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