

# WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON LITERACY ISSUES

## AIMS

- ◇ an awareness of who our ESL students are
- ◇ knowledge of the English language criteria for acceptance at an Australian university
- ◇ an understanding of the adjustments that students with language backgrounds other than English have to make in the higher education context
- ◇ an awareness of practical strategies for teaching international students
  - ⇒tutorials
  - ⇒lectures
  - ⇒assessment
  - ⇒writing

## 1. Who are our ESL students?

- ◇ Of a population of 22,000 students, 4,000+ claim that they speak a language other than English at home
- ◇ Only about 450 permanent residents fit criteria for Access & Equity group
- ◇ Currently about 1600 international students from Asia, Europe, Scandinavia, USA, South America, Africa

## 2. English Language Requirements for entry to La Trobe University – an overview.

International students at La Trobe University must provide evidence of their English language proficiency as follows:

1. IELTS - A minimum overall band score of 6.0 (6.5 for postgraduate entry) with no sub-set score less than 5.5 (6.0) *OR*
2. TOEFL - A minimum score of 550 (575 for postgraduate entry) with a score of 4.5 (5) or better in the Test of Written English *OR*
3. O Level English - a score of C or better in the Singapore, Hong Kong or British O-level English exam *OR*
4. English was the language of instruction in secondary and/or tertiary studies *OR*
5. Satisfactory mark or score in another examination or test acceptable to the University *OR*
6. A completion certificate from La Trobe University Language Centre's English for Further Studies - Stage 5.
7. Achievement of the required grades in La Trobe University's Foundation Studies Program

Information from La Trobe University's International Programs Office homepage:

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/international>

and La Trobe University Language Centre homepage:

<http://www.language.latrobe.edu.au/>

## IELTS Interpretation of Results

Each Band corresponds to a descriptive statement giving a summary of the English of a candidate classified at that level. Overall Band Scores can be reported in either whole or half Bands.

The nine bands and their descriptive statements are as follows:

9	Expert User	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very Good User	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good User	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent User	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest User	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited User	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely Limited User	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent User	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non User	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0		Did not attempt the test No assessable information provided.

**Question: If a student receives the following scores, would they be accepted for study at undergraduate level?**

Student No.	Overall Band	Individual band scores				Would you accept this student?
		Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	
1	<b>5</b>	4.5	6	6	4	
2	<b>5.5</b>	6	6	5	6	
3	<b>6</b>	7	5.5	5	7	
4	<b>6</b>	4.5	6.5	7	5	
5	<b>6.5</b>	8	5.5	5	7	
6	<b>6</b>	6	6.5	6	6	

## TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language

A full table of test scores is available online at: <http://www.toefl.org/table4.html>

Some key scores are listed here:

	<b>Paper Test</b>	<b>Computer based test</b>
	620	260
	600	250
<b>Entry to Postgraduate level</b> →	<b>577</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Entry to Undergraduate level</b> →	<b>550</b>	<b>213</b>
	527	197
	500	173
	477	153
	450	133

More information about TOEFL is available at: <http://www.toefl.org>

## La Trobe University Language Centre certificates

A completion certificate from La Trobe University Language Centre's English for Further Studies - Stage 5 will be accepted as proof of English language ability.

There are three levels of certificate:

- Undergraduate Certificate (equivalent to IELTS 6)
- Postgraduate 1 - suitable for postgraduate courses. (equivalent to IELTS 6.5)
- Postgraduate 2 - suitable for research postgraduate studies and those courses requiring a high level of oral skills eg. teaching, health professions.

## Other tests

**UCLES - University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate** (Cambridge English Exams)

These tests are popular in Europe and some other parts of the world. There are a number of exams which test a range of language skills. Those most relevant to entry to university are

**Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)** – a high level test. A student with a pass in this test would be well prepared for the language demands of study at university at most levels.

**Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)** – an advanced level test. A grade of at least C in this test would probably indicate readiness for most undergraduate courses. Higher grades would indicate readiness for some postgraduate courses.

**First Certificate in English (FCE)** – an intermediate level test. A high grade (A) in this test would probably be acceptable for entry to an undergraduate course. However further support would be needed.

Please note: these are rough guides only. Generally these tests are used for employment / vocational purposes and are well known in Europe. They are not specifically an indication of a person's ability to use English in an academic context.

Further information about these test is available at: <http://www.cambexams.com.au/>

### **3. An understanding of the adjustments that students with language backgrounds other than English have to make in the higher education context.**

#### 3.1 Culture of teaching and learning in a higher education context

Elements of the academic culture:

- teaching styles
- learning styles
- role of teacher
- role of learner
- assessment practices and functions

##### 1. How do you teach?

- what do you physically do
- how do students obtain information
- what is the aim of your teaching
- what are the expectations of your students in the classroom
- do clarify your expectations with students - how

##### 2. How do you see your role as a teacher?

##### 3. What are the dominant learning styles in our culture? How do we expect our students to take knowledge on board?

##### 4. How do you see the role of the learner?

##### 5. What is the nature and function of assessment ?

- what type of assessment
- what is its purpose

See handout: *Enhancing Learning Outcomes for Students from Language Backgrounds other than English*

### **4. An awareness of practical strategies for teaching international students**

- ◇ tutorials
- ◇ lectures
- ◇ assessment
- ◇ writing

See handout: *Enhancing learning Outcomes for Students from Language Backgrounds other than English*

#### 4.1 In summary it is essential to:

- recognise that teaching and learning are culturally constructed
- avoid stereotyping
- be explicit about your expectations
- help students understand their new learning context
- provide guidelines for tasks given
- provide modelling for tasks given
- provide opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers in classes
- be explicit in assessment about proportion given to grammar

#### 4.2 Common grammar errors in student writing.

- Subject/verb agreement: Self-awareness is the primary task for **people who wants** to understand other people.
- Verbs : tense, construction
- Number (esp. if marked with a number eg: two dog)
- Articles
- Prepositions
- Countable/uncountable nouns: information, research, evidence etc.
- Vocabulary
- Word class: ie: noun used as a verb etc.
- Using incomplete sentences as full sentences
- Result of paraphrasing.

#### 4.3 Common structural errors in student writing.

- Introduction not establish argument
- Too many ideas in one paragraph
- Little elaboration of central idea of the paragraph
- Overall lack of explicitness
- Little cohesion/connectedness

#### 4.4 Examples of texts.

Which ones are satisfactory?

1.

The researchers' position was a positivism. They interviewed informants to identify on how persons with UN experienced their life. Here, the researchers stood on as an objective observer of subjects. Reasonable to say, " The first author interviewed the participants five to seven times each, over 16 weeks. The interviewer invited the participants to describe their resent occupational experiences." The authors used written and verbal information to collect data and interviewed was recorded. The research was situated at rehabilitation clinic and patients' homes.

Problems of: word class related to the verb to be, prepositions, number, subject/verb omission, article.

2.

However, the following two cases presented in the paper was little bit hard to follow. This is because the writer discussed both cases within different context.

Problems: s/v agreement, number,

3.

Culture and cultural beliefs in health is a significant factor in every community. Culture is a “collective noun which describes the symbolic and learned aspects of human society, including language, custom and convention, and by which human *action* can be distinguished the *behaviour* of other primates” (John & Senga, 1994, p.259). Although there are many definitions of culture, most refer to the beliefs, values, and behaviour by learning of members of social groups which is a design of living. Culture is more than isolated elements of beliefs and custom, it is a pattern of values and behaviour, an integrated whole that provides people with a map that charts their living styles, thought and behaviours.

Problems: structural

4.

Besides, the attitudes of care staff are also another example of explaining the condition of aged care in hospitals. Childish treatment and communicational endearment are represented. Kenwright (1997) reports that inappropriate speech toward the elderly is underpinning in the attitudes of care staff. Depersonalised and homogenous treatment without individual knowledge and information of each patient own has, is also the result of stereotypes of care staff toward the elderly. .... Therefore, largely spread negative attitude toward elderly is revealing serious care deprivation and conducting negative out comes for the quality of the care.

Problems: vocabulary, paraphrasing, prepositions, verb tense, editing,