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**Helping international students
make academic and cultural
transitions**

[The first week] was really a tough week for me in Australia. I came to a totally different country and far away from my family, my friends and everything I used to be familiar with. I remember clearly the first day when I arrived here; I just went into my room, sat down and cried out of control . . . I had a terrible dinner in the evening . . . noodles without salt. (10)

(Briguglio&Smith 2012, p22)

1. Living: Accommodation, food , shopping, finance
2. Socio-cultural: culture shock, conflicts in norms and behaviours
3. Personal Psychological: homesickness, alienation and loss of identity
4. Academic: language problem, conflicts of expectations

1. Do we support students with their most immediate needs on arrival?
2. Do we support a variety of social interactions?
3. Do we acknowledge that personal and socio-cultural factors may impact on the academic?
4. Do we think about the timing of important orientating sessions? Is front loading the best way?

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Language and skills



Write about the following topic:

Some people prefer to spend their lives doing the same things and avoiding change. Others, however, think that change is always a good thing.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinions.

250 words

40 minutes

Source : Cambridge IELTS examination papers 6

- Emphasises subjectivity
- Format does not encourage extended reasoning
- Does not integrate reading with writing
- Does not promote writing as an extended process
- Encourages formulaic approach to writing

- Interestingly writing in my country is just to show our “information bank” to our teachers and nothing else, students have to write big essays and teachers give good grades to their favourite ones” (IS18).
- “My teacher always wanted to check how much I know about the given topic, she never asked to show my own thoughts and arguments. This is, in my point of views is the main drawback of non-English speaking countries education system” (SRS37).

Shaheen 2012, p132

- Reader responsibility v Writer responsibility
- Implicit v explicit
- Organisation and rhetorical structure

As an Arab we have a different writing. We give direction first and at the end you will find like the conclusion or the things you want to say. I find in English it is not that way, it is mostly you find the important things in the top and down is the explanation. So vice versa. So in my thinking, I have to switch from this idea to the English idea (M1).

I think we have different thinking ways, because I am from China and most Chinese people will put the most important sentence at last. But in Western style they put the most important sentence at the beginning. If I change my thinking ways, it's difficult for me. And sometimes this is the great challenge (F4).

(Wang & Li 2007, p43)

33% of students questioned had a vague or no idea of what critical thinking is

“CT is to find faults from others work and correct them”

(Shaheen 2012, p112)

“I can recognize a good piece of student writing when I see it. I know when it is well structured and has a well-developed argument but it is difficult to say exactly what I am looking for, let alone describe a good argument more fully”

(Creme & Lea 1997, p. 36-37).

Do we provide concrete models of our expectations that are integrated throughout courses?

- explicit thinking and writing skills integrated in content teaching
- annotated models of good writing
- feedback that is specific and exemplified
- developmental approach to writing skills

Complex processes

- Processing language whilst trying to take notes
- Identifying word boundaries in extended speech
- Speed and differing accents make word recognition harder
- Distinguishing main point from supporting points
- Understanding cultural references and examples
- Following non linear structure

Certain features have been shown to aid comprehension

- Explicit signposting during lectures makes structure and purpose more transparent
- Explain cultural references and colloquial aspects of language
- Pause enable audience to keep up

- Are complex learning environments that include cultural aspects of communication such as turn taking and interrupting
- Involves understanding, thinking and speaking in real time which international student report as particularly problematic
- Studies indicate frustration at missed opportunities to contribute because of slower processing times
- Can lead to a feeling of marginalisation and feeling of loss of identity

‘As soon as I made the question ready in my mind I wanted to put it in words and say it but suddenly a native speaker asked a question and I would get frustrated so I would keep the question till the end and ask the professor then’. (SI2)

(Hennebry et al 2012,p 219)

Native speaker like?

‘Nativespeakerdom’ is problematic from a linguistic point of view as native speaker fluency is derived not from creative language use, but from the use of a shared set of memorised stock phrases that native speakers understand and tacitly agree are efficient and expected ways of expressing ideas. It is the use of non-conventional language that marks international students as non-native speakers and can marginalise them within their disciplinary community (Schmitt 2005,p36)

- Encourage collaborative work where each participant has a specific role
- Offer opportunities for less stressful rehearsal in pairs prior to whole group discussions
- May be an expectation that staff or responsible for managing a fair distribution of turn taking

- Only 7% of International students reported having friendships with British students (Brown 2012)
- Replace deficit model
- Build teaching and learning around an ethos that acknowledges and explores difference in terms of culture language, experience and knowledge
- Thirdspace' pedagogy (Ryan& Viete 2011)

Students need to feel confident to learn in their new educational setting. Yet students can feel constrained by ways of communicating and learning that seem opaque and fixed because they are permeated with norms never made explicit, knowledge they do not share, or **the language of others**. Thus aspects of academic communication take on a mystical status; they seem to ‘belong’ to a certain group of ‘native speakers’ and to remain ‘out’ there, unchanging and tantalisingly out of reach. **It is not relevant that the discourses of academia are ‘no-one's mother tongue’** .

(Ryan &Viete 2009, p308)

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