

STRATEGIES TEACHING DIVERSE LEARNERSⁱ

IN A NUTSHELL

- I assume that students are not familiar with Camosun's way of doing things, and that they need time to adjust to everything: to language (e.g., expressions, accents), schedules, academic expectations)
- I speak slower than usual.
- I always make sure things are clear and explain everything in detail: class content, but also assignments, policies, expectations, and grading schemes.
- I find ways to acknowledge the value of the diversity of experiences in the classroom on a regular basis.
- I make myself available for small group or one-to-one help.

On the first day, and reiterated numerous times:

- I make expectations very clear, using multiple methods (explaining, using PPT handouts, etc.)
- **Teacher-Student relations as I see it:**
 - I explain what I expect from the students and what they can expect from me.
 - I talk about possible cultural differences between how we teach here and what some students may be used to (e.g., Canadian teachers may use humour, sit on their desk, wear jeans, ask to be called by their first name). I tell them that this is normal and usual in this academic culture.
 - I invite them to come to talk to me about anything that might lead them to feel uncomfortable (after class, during office hours, etc.)
- **Expectations for participation and group work:**
 - I recognize that students' group work experience may be different, but that we will learn from each other.
 - I make a point of valuing the diversity in the classroom (e.g., the different experiences that can be shared, the different English accents, the different languages spoken by students).
 - I emphasize that, out of respect for each other, only English is spoken in class at all times because it is the only language that we all understand.

- **Academic integrity and rules:**

- I acknowledge that academic cultures regarding academic integrity can be different in different parts of the world.
- I make it clear; however, Camosun rules and policies are **not flexible**, with examples, etc.
- I give clear examples of what is considered cheating and plagiarism in Canadian higher education.
- I review academic integrity and grade appeal rules before every summative assignment.

- **About grades, especially before assignments:**

- I explain how I grade assignments or tests, and I insist on the care and time I take in grading, on the use of rubrics and feedback, to justify the marks a student has earned, etc. (If grade negotiation is an issue, I explain that unless there is a mistake in the calculation of the points I have given, I will not change my professional judgement of a grade.)

Before the end of the first class, I ask students to write a page about their prior experience with studying/ working, reading, etc. on the topic of the course. I ask them to write their name, where they are from, and what their first language is. I also ask them to share with me if there is any other information they want to share that might help me to support their learning.

In class, for verbal interactions:

- I speak more slowly. I restate and rephrase questions multiple times.
- I avoid using slang, idioms, acronyms, or jargon.
- I provide visual or written support for information communicated orally.
- I often provide questions ahead of time to alleviate possible anxiety.
- I give students time to formulate their responses. I may give them a few minutes to compose their answers, or I have students quickly share their responses with a partner before responding before the whole class.
- I ask different types of questions. I may call on non-native English speakers to respond to questions that require brief, factual answers. This can boost confidence.
- I allow a student time to reformulate their response and come back to them after asking others in the class.
- I avoid asking closed-ended questions such as “Do you understand?” Instead, I ask if specific words or terms require clarification.
- I rephrase the student’s answer (even as questions), or I repeat key words of an incomplete answer.
- I encourage students to come to my office to discuss classroom policies. I set-up specific appointments for some students to come to my office.

For group work and students interactions:

- I acknowledge that group work can be challenging, especially with people we don't know. I inform them that they will be asked to work in intercultural groups.

- When developing intercultural group work, especially the very first time, I try the following:
 - A. Students individually write about **their best experience** working in a team, any kind of team.
 - B. They share, in pairs or small multicultural group (four or fewer), and **agree on best practices**.
 - C. Each group shares with the whole class. Teacher writes answers on the board w/categories, e.g. respect for deadlines, distribution of work, etc.
 - D. **This sets expectations for all group work.**

For subsequent group workⁱⁱ:

- I remind the group of the expectations we agreed upon.

- I vary the groups so that students work with different people from different cultural backgrounds throughout the semester.

- Whenever possible, I allow students to be assessed on individual performance even while working in groups.

- I create activities that require cooperation (e.g., I ask students to answer different questions or summarize different parts of a text).

- I create activities with intercultural learning outcomes reminding students of the infinite ways of doing things around the world (e.g., "Find out what is the usual practice of XYZ in another country/culture").

- I keep groups to four or fewer students.

For Lectures:

- I provide an outline of the lecture, or a list of key words and phrases that the students can use during the lecture. I refer to the outline/key words explicitly throughout the period so students can follow along.
- I use multiple modes for conveying information. I write important terms on the board, include them in a PowerPoint presentation, or other types of visual aids.
- I use framing words or discourse markers throughout the lecture to indicate when moving from one point to another.
- I build redundancy into the lecture through examples, anecdotes, repetition, and paraphrases. I use discourse markers to show that I am rephrasing or giving an example (“Let me say that a different way”, or “Now let’s look at an example of that issue”)
- I constantly remind myself to avoid acronyms, slang, idiomatic, or culturally-laden expressions. When I catch myself using theme, I write them on the board and explain their meaning. If there isn’t time for explanations, I try restating or rephrasing.
- When I feel comfortable doing so, I allow students to record lectures.
- I stop frequently to check for comprehension, but rather than asking “Do you understand?” (which often results in blank stares or “Yes” without accurate understanding), I ask students to list or restate the main ideas, I give them two minutes to write down specific questions, or I ask them to respond to specific questions about the course material (small groups or in pairs).
- I provide students with examples of successful note taking strategies or article annotations and/or refer them to the writing centre.

Developing assignments:

- I keep in mind that both reading and writing in a foreign language is more cognitively demanding than in one's native language.
- I avoid using questions or examples that are culturally loaded or I ensure that students have enough information to understand.
- I recognize that non-native speakers may require more time to complete reading and writing assignments than native English speakers.
 - When possible I give assignments well in advance of their due date so that all students will have time to complete them.
 - If possible, I consider allowing extended time on tests. This will provide a more accurate assessment of student learning.
- I review academic integrity rules.
- I provide examples of what cheating would look like for this specific assignment type.
- I include clear assignment sheets that include specific goals and expectations. I provide a rubric that clearly articulates criteria for assessment.
- I explain assignments and grading rubric orally in class as well as on paper (or online). I allow time in class to answer questions about assignments.
- If possible, offer models or examples of successful papers, reports, and other types of assignments.
- I consider requiring a draft of written assignments and creating opportunities for students to get feedback. *Providing input throughout the process will ensure students stay on track and may help avoid plagiarism/collusion, and with grade appeals.*
- I remind students of my office hours if they need more information.

Responding to written assignments:

- I focus on content and its organization before focusing on language and grammar.
- I give direct and specific suggestions for improvement.
- I avoid responding to every error. I try to encourage gradual improvement in accuracy.
- I use rubrics when grading assignments. *This will keep me from over-or-under emphasizing the role of grammar in the assessment of students' writing, and will help in grade appeals.*

ⁱ Strategies inspired by, and adapted from:

<https://www.udayton.edu/lrc/development/tags/understanding.php>

Nanda Dimitrov & Aisha Haque (2016): Intercultural teaching competence: a multi-disciplinary model for instructor reflection, *Intercultural Education*. 27 (5): 437-456.

ⁱⁱ Also, Allport (1954) contact theory is still widely used to promote intercultural group work. His recommendations have been reviewed by many researchers, including Pettigrew (1998):

*Allport's hypothesis specified four conditions for optimal contact. The situation must allow equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support (e.g. the teacher). Recent research adds another: **The contact situation must have "friendship potential."***

Allport GW. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. 537 pp.

Pettigrew TF (1998). Intergroup Contact Theory, *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 49:65–85