Teaching international students: General

Common observations

- No response to questions asked of the whole class.
- Asking teachers questions only after class.
- Difficulty in getting students to speak up (ask/answer questions, make comments, etc.) during class.
- Seeking help from peers instead of the teacher.
- Reproducing memorised passages from textbooks, lectures in assessment tasks.
- Inexperience with typical Australian academic requirements such as critical thinking, analysis, group work, classroom discussion, essays, etc.

Why these observations are common

- Used to different education system!
- Focus on memorising and reproducing info
- End of term exams only assessment – not used to continuous assessment
- Used to structured tasks only: fill in the gap, listing vocab, reproducing things from memory.
- One-way classroom – speaking up during class rude and inappropriate

What you can do (general tips)

- Don’t assume students should “just know” how to work as a group, write an essay, etc.! It is very likely that they have never had to do this before.
- Don’t just tell students things, show them. Put things in writing, and use visual aids (maps, pictures, objects, etc.)
- Consult your teacher’s tipsheets!
Writing Powerpoint slides

Layout and formatting

- Font size for main text no smaller than 28 points.
- No more than two lines per bullet point.
- Lines should be spaced at a minimum of
- Aim for no more than 10 bullet points per slide.
- Set your bullet points to come up one by one on a mouse click.

Content

- Think of bullet points as headlines for your explanation and examples, not a speech cut into pieces!
- No sentences or phrases more than two clauses long.
- **Show as well as tell.** Use visuals (pictures, graphs, maps, diagrams) with or instead of text wherever possible.
Setting assessment tasks: General

Language
• Use straightforward, everyday English.
• Use simple, everyday words and phrases.

Layout and formatting
• Keep your sentences short: no more than three clauses long.
• Paragraphs should be no more than 5-6 lines long.
• Break long paragraphs into shorter paragraphs and bulleted lists (where applicable).
• Put the key word or phrase which tells the student what to do in **bold**.

Grammar
• Avoid subordinate clauses (“Their costs, **which were vast**, are...”)
• Avoid using the passive tense (“**Students are advised** that...”)
• Keep jargon to a minimum.
• Avoid idioms and slang.
Setting assessment tasks: Type of task

Unstructured

Some students may never have done unstructured tasks like essays, short answer questions, oral presentations, etc.

- Provide explicit, step-by-step instructions on (a) what they must do, (b) how to do it, (c) over what time frame, and (d) what help and support they can access.
- Providing an annotated example of the type of assessment task you’re setting (for oral presentations, use video footage).
- Describe what sort of answer you expect in detail, or indicate it with space you leave for their answer (don’t leave four lines when you want a one word answer!).
- Provide clear, detailed feedback (see Feedback).
- Use structured tasks (see below) to teach key ideas before setting an unstructured task.

Structured

Almost all students will be familiar with structured tasks. These are helpful for teaching new ideas and concepts and preparing students for harder tasks like analysis, critical thinking and unstructured tasks. Try:

- Cloze tests
- Complete the sentence exercises
- Complete the graph or diagram exercises
- Summarise a key passage in half the words
- Link the term with its definition
- Multiple choice
- True/false
Spoken English

General tips
- Enunciate clearly.
- Keep your grammar simple.
- Don’t talk too fast.
- Pause a little after each clause: this allows students time to process and translate if necessary.
- Show enthusiasm for your subject.

Vocabulary
- Use straightforward, everyday English words.
- Be careful with jargon and technical words. Provide a printed glossary, or give students relevant terms in advance so they can look them up.
- Be careful with slang and idiom. Keep them to a minimum, and explain them if you use them.

Making teaching accessible
- Don’t just tell them, SHOW them. Write things down, use pictures, diagrams, maps, objects.
- For lectures, give students a list of the main points to be covered, and refer to it as you speak.
- Watch students closely to make they are listening.
- Ask simple open questions to check understanding (one-on-one or during a group activity is less intimidating)
- Be careful about “throwing questions to the floor”: volunteering an answer in public is hard for students unused to this style of teaching.
- Give students time to prepare what they say before asking them to speak during class
- See also Class Participation.

Developed for Monash College by Dr Fiona Swee-Lin Price, 2013.
Setting reading

Textbooks:
Help students identify the main themes **before** they read. Try:
- Directing students to the chapter summary, if there is one.
- Drawing students’ attention to sub-headings which indicate main themes

Articles
Help students identify key themes and sections. Try:
- Taking them through one article in class, explaining the sections and themes
- Pointing them at the abstract, if it’s straightforward and clear. If it isn’t, write a better one or a bulleted outline yourself and give it to students to guide their reading.

Fiction
Give students an overview of what the story is about. Try:
- Providing an overview of plot and characters, in writing, not just orally.
- Pointing them at an online overview, if a good one exists.
- Encourage them to watch the film of the story, if a good one exists.
Class participation: General

Make your expectations clear
Remember many of your students may come from cultures where speaking in class is rude and inappropriate!

• Give students a clear, explicit explanation of what you expect from them.
• Ideally, show them footage of “good class participation” to help with this.
• Use role models: if one student makes a good contribution, praise them and remind the class that this is what you want.

Break students in gently to public speaking in English

• Be specific about which student you want to speak, rather than asking a question and hoping for a volunteer.
• Give students advance warning about what and when they will be contributing (tell them early on or ask them in a particular order, e.g. “go around the room”)
• Allow students time to prepare before they speak in public (a few minutes’ group discussion time can serve this purpose)

Very reticent students?

• Limit their audience. Put them in small groups with a specific question that every group member must answer in turn.
• Get them to read something short aloud in class, warn them in advance, and give them a few minutes to look over it first.
Class participation: Eliciting contributions

Getting students to answer questions in class
For closed questions (e.g. “What is the annual profit?” “What units do we need to use?”), be specific about who should answer and allow preparation time, e.g.
- Nominate a student to answer a repeated type of question (“David, your job today is to tell us what units to use”)
- Go around the class and ask each student in turn for an answer, so they know when they’re up next.

For open questions (e.g. “What do you think?”), try:
- Letting students discuss the question in pairs/groups and:
  - Talk quietly to each group for their thoughts while the discussion is on (providing a sense of privacy), and/or
  - When you announce the discussion, tell each group to nominate a speaker to report back (allows preparation)

Getting students to ask questions in class
- Use role models: if a student does ask a question, praise them and encourage other students to follow their example.
- Allow time at the end of class for students to ask questions one-on-one, which is less intimidating.
- When students ask questions after class, praise them for asking and encourage them to ask questions in class as well.

Facilitating class discussion
- Open-ended discussion prompts may be challenging at first. Get them started with structured questions or guidelines.
- For shy students, give them structured prompts to discuss in small groups before asking them to speak to the whole class.
- Good topics to inspire discussion include: food, technology, shopping, controversial events involving people in or from their country, generational differences, sport, movies, gifts.
Facilitating group work

Putting students into groups
• Remember most students gravitate towards peers from their own culture if given the choice.
• Encourage cross-cultural communication by randomly assigning students to groups from the start.
• If you want students to choose their groups, build in incentives for cross-cultural communication (e.g. ask them to compare different cultures)

Helping students understand group work
• Tie group work to their careers: use job ads, position descriptions, explain the importance of multicultural teams in the global workplace.
• Provide explicit, structured instructions on what they must do (eg hold meetings, delegate tasks, take minutes)
• Get students to hold their first group meeting in class time, so you can advise and supervise.

Monitoring individual contributions
Ask students to record:
• When they hold group meetings
• What each person contributes during each meeting.
• How tasks are delegated to group members
• What each person has done.
Giving feedback

General
• Feedback should provide input which students can apply in their next piece of work.
• **Show as well as tell students what makes good work**, e.g. take students through an example of a good short answer in class, explaining what makes it good.
• Don’t just provide global feedback (general comments about the assignment); **be specific** in your praise and criticism.
• Be very clear about what your expectations were in the task and where these were met and not met.

Marking
• Explain to students how their work will be assessed. If you have a marking grid, show this to the students (provided the language is clear and straightforward)
• Break the mark into components for English expression, understanding, information covered, etc.
• For essays, be conscious of how the students’ first language shapes how they write. Look at the profiles in the Handbook for further information.