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.
- Make your expectations clear. Provide explicit, step-by-step instructions and clear, detailed feedback.
- 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.

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 <u>answer</u> 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 <u>ask</u> 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.