

Strategies for Building Confidence in Writers Developing Fluency

Like all students, writers developing fluency in English can suffer from low confidence about their writing abilities. As these writers are operating in a second—and sometimes third or fourth language—they face particular pressures. Give them respect and control through direct instruction of U.S. expectations.

Never make assumptions about what students know based on their vocabulary and phrasing. Anticipate that a complex idea drives their expression.

Directly explain and illustrate cultural differences in writing conventions.

Show how U.S. papers develop an idea, rather than simply report information. Help them answer questions like: Where do readers look for main ideas? How does a thesis capture the writer's goal? Give examples and be explicit: "Use one sentence or less of quoted material here" or "Shorten this anecdote to two sentences."

Explain that U.S. academic writing style is more direct than many other countries' academic conventions. U.S. academics prioritize clear, concise language over poetic, flowery, or less-direct prose. A paper's organized structure emphasizes this directness; for example, concluding sentences of paragraphs and transitions that seem "repetitive" or "obvious" outside of the U.S. are intended to clarify points so thoroughly that readers will not question how to interpret them.

Show students how U.S. readers expect relationships between paragraphs.

Students familiar with report-style papers may list rather than synthesize (i.e., First, Second, Third, and Finally). Give other options such as cause/effect, compare/contrast, or problem/solution to help them develop a more analytic voice. Have them scan the "subordinating conjunction" list on p. 309 of the Hacker guide.

Directly instruct international students on how to use outside sources in the ways that U.S. academic essays require. Explaining plagiarism (what it is, why it's a problem, etc.) can help students understand how to effectively integrate outside sources into their work.

Provide students with templates, models, and other relevant handouts.

- Materials on the Writing Center's Student Resources webpage
- Sample pages at the end of citation style sections in the Hacker manual
- Model essays from Moodle or the Writing Center Tutor Binder (email Kate Oakley, oakley@lakeforest.edu)
- Online resources like the Purdue OWL or UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center site

Refer students to the Writing Center.

The Writing Center has both peer and professional support for writers developing fluency in English. Contact Tracy McCabe, Director of Writing Programs, with specific requests and concerns.