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## CCCC Position Statement

A statement on an education issue approved by the CCCC Executive Committee

### CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers

*Conference on College Composition and Communication*

*January 2001, Revised November 2009, Reaffirmed November 2014, Revised May 2020*

#### Part One: General Statement

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) recognizes campuses around the world as fundamentally multilingual spaces, in which students and faculty bring to the acts of writing and communication a rich array of linguistic and cultural resources that enrich academic life and should be valued and supported. The aim of this document is to provide broad research-based guidelines for teachers and administrators to advocate for multilingual writers in all spaces of universities and colleges, including first-year writing, undergraduate and graduate courses across the curriculum, writing centers, and intensive English programs. The secondary aim of this statement is to promote social justice for all multilingual members of the academic community, students, faculty, and staff in order to make visible otherwise underutilized linguistic and literacy resources. This document is divided into sections detailing guidelines for writing classes, writing programs, teacher preparation, and teaching contexts as well as a selected bibliography of helpful resources.

In this document, we will use the term *multilingual writers* to describe students who often are institutionally categorized as English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. These students are also referred to by other terms such as English language learners (ELLs), second language (L2) writers, and limited English proficiency (LEP) learners. These terms point toward established fields of scholarship as well as a history of student support programs and pedagogical practices. We will use the term *multilingual writers* to acknowledge that for such writers English may be a second, third, fourth, or fifth language, as well as to acknowledge emerging scholarship about language use by these students.

Multilingual writers include international visa holders, refugees, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants, as well as naturalized and native-born citizens of the United States and Canada. Many have grown up speaking languages other than English at home, in their communities, and in schools; others began to acquire English at a very young age and have used it alongside their native languages. Multilingual writers can have a wide range of literacies in their first languages, from being unable to read or write to having completed graduate degrees in that language. They learn and acquire English in various educational contexts, by employing various strategies, and to meet various global/local standards.

Colleges and universities, including technical colleges, two-year colleges, four-year institutions, and graduate programs, have actively sought to increase the diversity of their student populations through recruitment of international students and establishment of international branch campuses, even as domestic language minoritized populations have

grown. Multilingual writers are and should be recognized as an integral part of writing courses and programs worldwide.

Multilingual writers may demonstrate different expectations for and understandings of discourse, because the nature and functions of discourse, audience, and rhetorical appeals often differ across national, linguistic, and educational contexts—for example, within academic writing, whether the main argument of an essay should appear at the beginning or end, or how sources should be used, are deeply rooted in specific cultural assumptions held by instructors and students. At the same time, however, other writers—especially graduate students—are already knowledgeable about the discourse and content of their respective disciplines. The process of acquiring academic literacies—including syntactic and lexical competence—in an additional language is a complex, recursive, lifelong process.

Historically, languages have been viewed as occupying separate spaces in the minds of multilinguals, so that language users actually “switch” between languages, using the resources from only one language at a time. We understand languages as integrated, so that multilingual writers have the ability to draw on their full linguistic repertoire for communication and meaning-making. We also recognize that language use takes place within material spaces, using diverse resources such as gestures, images, and physical objects. Even as writers develop their competence and confidence in English, they may (intentionally or unintentionally) employ features of multiple languages and literacies in their English writing as they begin to participate as members of their fields through upper-division and/or graduate courses, and beyond.

For these reasons, we urge writing teachers and writing program administrators to

- recognize and support multilingual writers’ practices of integrating their unique linguistic and cultural resources into writing both in classrooms and at the level of the writing program.
- recognize and take responsibility for the regular presence of multilingual students in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- offer teacher preparation based on evidence-based scholarship and best practices for multilingual writers in the forms of graduate courses, faculty workshops, relevant conference travel, and, when possible, require such coursework or other similar preparation for instructors working with writers in a higher-education context.
- investigate issues surrounding multilingual writing and writers in the context of writing programs, including first-year writing programs, undergraduate and graduate, technical, creative, and theoretical writing courses, writing centers, and Writing Across the Curriculum programs, and make multilingual practices visible and central across these spaces.
- include cross-disciplinary perspectives on multilingual writers in developing theories, designing studies, analyzing data, and discussing implications of studies of writing.
- advocate for emotional and legal support for multilingual writers around issues such as immigration and discrimination, and challenge materials and pedagogical and programmatic practices that disadvantage multilingual writers.

In the following sections, we provide more detailed guidelines for writing and writing-intensive courses, for writing program administrators, and for teacher preparation and pedagogy.

## **Part Two: Guidelines for Writing and Writing-Intensive Courses**

### **Class Size**

Since working with multilingual writers often requires additional feedback and conference time with the instructor, enrollments in mainstream classes with a substantial number of multilingual writers should be reduced to a maximum of 20 students per class. In classes

made up exclusively of multilingual writers, enrollments should be limited to a maximum of 15 students per class.

## Writing Assignment Design

When designing assignments, instructors should avoid topics that require substantial background knowledge that is related to a specific culture or history that is not being covered by the course. Instructors should also be aware that topics such as sexuality, criticism of authority, political beliefs, personal experiences, and religious beliefs may be sensitive for students of different cultural and educational backgrounds. We encourage instructors to provide students with multiple options for successfully completing an assignment, such as by providing multiple prompts or allowing students to write in a variety of genres for completing the assignment. Instructors should provide clearly written assignments so that expectations are not left tacit. For more on assignment design, see the teacher preparation section.

## Assessment

The evaluation of second language texts should take into consideration various aspects of writing (e.g., topic development, organization, grammar, word choice). Writing instructors should look for evidence of a text's rhetorically effective features, rather than focus only on one or two of these features that stand out as problematic. To reduce the risk of evaluating students on the basis of their cultural knowledge rather than their writing proficiency, writing prompts for placement and exit exams should avoid cultural references that are not readily understood by people who come from various cultural backgrounds. When possible, instructors should provide students with a rubric that articulates assessment criteria. For best practices on responding to student writing, see the teacher preparation section.

The Committee on Second Language Writing supports the recommendations in the [CCCC position statement on Writing Assessment](#). In particular, we endorse the ideas that best assessment practices use multiple measures, that writing ability should be assessed via "more than one piece of writing, in more than one genre, written on different occasions, for different audiences, and responded to and evaluated by multiple readers," and that instructors should "respect language variety and diversity and [assess] writing on the basis of effectiveness for readers."

## Textual Borrowing

Textual ownership and the ownership of ideas are concepts that are culturally based and therefore not shared across cultures and educational systems. Further, "patchwriting," defined by Rebecca Moore Howard as the copying of sections of texts, such as phrasings and sentence patterns, is a natural part of the process of learning to write in a second language. As with native English-speaking students, multilingual students may plagiarize when they panic about getting an assignment completed in time or doubt their ability to complete the assignment competently. Plagiarism is attributed to practices that range from the wholesale taking of an entire text to the improper use of citation conventions. To help second language writers avoid practices that violate institutional policies, all writing instructors, as well as disciplinary instructors and writing centers, should teach US expectations for textual borrowing and citation conventions. Instructors and administrators should not expect multilingual writers to perfectly execute these practices after a single lesson. We advocate that when suspecting a multilingual writer of plagiarism, instructors should take into consideration the student's cultural background, level of experience with North American educational systems, and confidence level for writing in English.

## Teacher Preparation

Any writing course, including basic writing, first-year composition, advanced writing, and professional writing, as well as any writing-intensive course that enrolls any second language writers should be taught by an instructor who is able to identify and is prepared to address the linguistic and cultural needs of second language writers. This preparation may be offered through preparing future faculty programs, first-year composition programming for instructors, or faculty development programming offered through Writing Across the Curriculum programs, writing centers, ESL support services, or other campus initiatives.

(More guidelines related to teacher preparation are provided in Part Four: Guidelines for Teacher Preparation and Preparedness.)

## Resources for Teachers

Writing programs should provide resources for teachers working with second language writers, including textbooks and readers on the teaching of second language writing as well as reference materials such as dictionaries and grammar handbooks for language learners. Moreover, writing programs should encourage — and offer incentives for — teachers to attend workshops on teaching second language writers that are presented at professional conferences such as CCCC, NCTE, and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Writing programs without experts in second language writing are encouraged to seek consultation from disciplinary experts.

## Part Three: Guidelines for Writing Programs

### First-Year Composition

#### *Placement*

Decisions regarding the placement of multilingual writers into first-year writing courses should be based on students' writing proficiency rather than their race, native-language background, nationality, or immigration status. Placement decisions should also not be based solely on the scores from standardized tests of general language proficiency or of spoken language proficiency. Instead, wherever possible, scores from the direct assessment of students' writing proficiency should be used, ideally with multiple writing samples. Writing programs should work toward making a wide variety of placement options available—including mainstreaming, basic writing, and second language writing as well as courses that systematically integrate native and nonnative speakers of English, such as cross-cultural composition courses.

Not all students self-identify as “ESL,” “multilingual,” or “second language” students. Some students may welcome the opportunity to enroll in a writing course designated for multilingual writers for the additional language support, while others may prefer to enroll in a mainstream first-year composition course. Due to these considerations, we advocate Directed Self-Placement (see Royer and Gilles; Saengkhum) using a combination of direct assessment of student writing and student choice. Writing programs should inform international and residential multilingual students of the advantages and disadvantages of each placement option so that students can make informed decisions.

#### *Credit*

Second language sections of first-year composition courses should be offered for credit that satisfies the college's or university's writing requirement. Second language writing courses that are prerequisite to required composition courses should be offered for credit that can be used toward satisfying the foreign-language requirement and should receive the same credit accorded other prerequisite composition courses.

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#### *Staffing*

In order to ensure that multilingual students receive high-quality instruction based on up-to-date developments in relevant disciplines (writing studies, TESOL, applied linguistics), it is important to prioritize, when possible, the hiring of tenure-track and tenured faculty. It is a

common misperception that “native speakers” of English will necessarily be better teachers; in fact, teachers who are themselves multilingual can offer valuable insight into language learning and serve as models of successful users of English.

## **Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines Programs**

Beyond the composition requirements, writing instruction, at some institutions, is encouraged or required to further promote academic literacy and prepare students for disciplinary discourse within and beyond the academy. This includes professional writing courses, often taught in English departments. Therefore, the literacy support of multilingual writers needs to extend beyond the composition requirement as well.

Institutions requiring undergraduates to complete writing-intensive courses across the curriculum should offer faculty development in second language writing that should include information about second language writing development, information about second language populations at the institution, approaches for designing writing assignments that are culturally inclusive, and approaches for assessing writing that are ethical in relation to second language writing. When possible, institutions are encouraged to design resources that accommodate their writing students who have moved beyond the first-year writing program (e.g., a campus with a large number of multilingual writers taking technical writing courses may develop a separate section for multilingual writers taught by an individual with expertise in both fields). Institutions requiring a writing assessment as a graduation requirement should design this writing assessment so that it is fair and equitable for multilingual writers.

## **Writing Centers**

Writing centers offer crucial resources to multilingual students in undergraduate and graduate levels. These students often visit the writing center to seek support in understanding writing assignments or developing a piece of writing, and to gauge reader response to their writing. They may also seek input on interpreting teacher feedback or assessment and learning more about nuances of the English language. Therefore, it is imperative that writing centers model and discuss effective approaches for working with multilingual writers in tutor training, make available reference materials specific to language learners such as dictionaries on idiomatic English, and hire tutors with specialized knowledge in second language writing. Writing centers that hire multilingual tutors will have someone who can provide second language writing students with firsthand writing strategies as well as empathy. Multilingual graduate writers can benefit from a writing center with a staff well versed in graduate-level literacy expectations and second language writing.

## **Support for Graduate Students**

At institutions with graduate programs, various writing administrators (especially WAC directors), second language acquisition specialists, and/or other informed advocates of multilingual writers should work closely with graduate programs enrolling multilingual writers to create discipline-specific writing support, such as a graduate writing fellows program, English for Academic Purposes courses, or English for Specific Purposes courses. In these courses second language writing graduate students can learn to examine discipline-specific discourse, and they can compose texts that will help them fulfill program requirements and participate in professionalization opportunities, in addition to learning academic English literacy conventions.

## **Part Four: Guidelines for Teacher Preparation**

The teaching of writing occurs in multiple contexts, from the type of course (basic writing, first-year composition, professional writing, WAC/WID, graduate writing, writing centers, and intensive English courses) to the media through which the course is taught (online classes, hybrid classes). As instructors prepare for these teaching contexts and student populations, they will need to consider some of the pedagogical assumptions that inform their practices. Writing instructor preparation needs to expand instructors' knowledge of writing issues in general, as well as how to specifically work with multilingual writers. Writing programs should encourage instructors to perceive their institutional roles as guides that will help all

students develop their academic literacy by identifying the strengths and the issues that need the student's attention. To this end, **second language writing should be integrated throughout the professional preparation and development programs of all writing teachers**, whether that be through a practicum experience, WAC workshops, ESL support services, writing center training, or other campus initiatives. If case studies are used as a methodology, for example, teachers in training might also conduct case studies with second language writers. If observation is used, teachers in training should consider observing both Native English speaking (NES) and nonnative English speaking (NNES) students. If student texts are shared for analysis, both NES and NNES texts should be used.

## **Teacher preparation should address the following topics:**

### **Cultural Beliefs Related to Writing**

Multilingual writers often come from contexts in which writing is shaped by linguistic and cultural features different from their NES peers. Beliefs related to individuality versus collectivity, ownership of text and ideas, student versus teacher roles, revision, structure, the meaning of different rhetorical moves, writer and reader responsibility, and the roles of research and inquiry all impact how student writers shape their texts. Teacher preparation should address the empirical research on these differences, although it is equally important for teachers to consider students' individual experiences and avoid reducing students to stereotypes.

### **Assignments**

Writing instructors should gain experience in reflecting on how writing assignments may tacitly include cultural assumptions or tacitly rely on knowledge of culturally specific information. Writing instructors should also gain experience designing writing assignments with second language students in mind, considering topics that are culturally sensitive to multilingual writers and including directions easily understandable to multiple audiences. Discussions on assignment design might include scaffolding, creating benchmarks within larger projects, and incorporating additional resources such as the writing center. Discussions might also include reflections on students' negotiations between composing in a home country language (including variations of English) and composing in academic English.

### **Building on Students' Competencies**

Teacher preparation programs should encourage instructors to identify strengths that multilingual writers bring to the classroom. Instructors should look for opportunities to use students' current literacy practices as a foundation for teaching the expectations of academic literacy. For example, second language students who use digital technology to keep in touch with friends and family across national borders often demonstrate savvy rhetorical strategies, including the ability to communicate with others who write in other varieties of English. With the help of an instructor, multilingual writers can learn to bridge the strategies they use to communicate socially through digital media to the expectations of the academy.

### **Response to Student Writing**

Teacher preparation should include discussion on how the prose second language writers produce can violate their aesthetic expectations for academic English. Instructors need to learn strategies for seeing and promoting the textual features that are rhetorically effective, and for prioritizing two or three mechanical or stylistic issues that individual multilingual writers should focus on throughout the duration of the course. Teacher preparation should include discussion on how response tools, such as rubrics and conferencing, might consider these differences.

### **Sustained Professional Development**

Teacher preparation experiences are often held as meetings during an orientation, guest lectures by experts, faculty workshops, and graduate-level seminars. While there is value in single-experience situations (e.g., a guest lecture, a single workshop, or a single class

dedicated to second language issues), instructors will be better prepared to work with multilingual students if issues of second language writing and writers are a consistent feature that is reinforced throughout their training in writing instruction, especially inservice training encouraged of all writing instructors.

## **Part Five: Considering L2 Writing Concerns in Local Contexts**

The role English has assumed as the lingua franca of academic, business, political, and technical communication internationally has increased the demand for English instruction in global contexts. US colleges and their surrounding communities have grown considerably more diverse in recent years. Recent statistics (2017) collected by the US Census Bureau indicate that 21.3% of the US population speaks a language other than English at home. Writing programs should consider that students enrolled in US college composition courses —“ESL” or “mainstream”—as well as in writing and writing-intensive courses across the curriculum may vary in their linguistic backgrounds and their experiences with academic English. We recommend that writing programs develop a better awareness of the language experiences of their students, including understanding the evolution of English—its fluidity and its global variation (i.e., World Englishes).

### **Building Awareness of Local Multilingual Populations**

We recommend that writing programs familiarize themselves with the multilingual populations surrounding their institutions. Doing so not only provides valuable insight into the language experiences of some students in their writing programs, but it also could identify large multilingual populations wishing to matriculate into the college/university. Information on local populations can be collected from the US Census Bureau’s website. Also, websites such as the National Center for Education Statistics provide data on the number of English language learners (ELLs) receiving special services in area high schools, some of whom might aspire to enter the university one day. Such information can be collected and disseminated on a centrally managed university website for the benefit of both instructors within the composition program and other university faculty.

### **Collecting Information on Language Use and Language Background**

Further, writing programs should actively seek to determine the language use and language backgrounds of their students, particularly since many universities often do not collect such information from multilingual students who enter the university from US high schools. Yearly surveys conducted across the sections of first-year writing could provide writing programs with insight into the language needs of students in their courses. Further, posting the results of these surveys on a centrally managed website could help educate faculty across the university on the language needs and backgrounds of their students.

### **Encouraging Cross-Institutional Collaborations**

For many resident second language students, the journey from secondary school to postsecondary is often met with awkward or inconsistent transitions (Harklau). Writing teachers and writing program administrators would benefit greatly from developing a better understanding of these students’ experiences prior to entering the college or university setting. One way to begin to learn about those experiences and to facilitate a more fluid journey across these educational contexts is to create more opportunities for cross-institutional collaborations with secondary schools and local secondary school teachers. Some possibilities for encouraging such collaborations might include bridge programs for local second language students, writing center outreach to local schools, and collaborations with English teacher education programs.

For more information, see the NCTE *Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*: <https://ncte.org/statement/teaching-english-ells/>.

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