

# Chapter 1: Culture Considerations

## 1.1 Diversity

In any class, be it a homogeneous one (students from the same cultural background) or a heterogeneous one (an international mix of students), diversity is ever-present and must be taken into consideration to help every student feel that he/she is an equal part of the class and to learn as effectively as possible. When designing the curriculum and putting it into effect in any class, the teacher has to think about a vast array of concerns related to diversity that includes, but is not limited to, the list of categories identified below. A question about each topic has been provided to help the reader consider each of these topics further in relation to his/her teaching and classroom practices.

- 1) **Gender** - Differences between male and female students may need to be taken into account when we teach.
  - *How can we make a gender-neutral, bias-free classroom?*
- 2) **Race** - Not every student in our classes will share the same physical traits, ancestral heritage, or genetics.
  - *How can the classroom be less homocentric and more international and global in perspective?*
- 3) **Sexual orientation** - Students vary in their sexual preferences, i.e. being heterosexual or part of the LGBT community.
  - *What are ways in which we can help build understanding and acceptance of minority groups in general?*
- 4) **Political beliefs** - The political doctrines and parties that students follow can create tensions in the classroom.
  - *In what way can we address or avoid topics that may be politically charged, for example the tensions between Taiwan and China?*

- 5) Religion** - Differing faiths need special accommodation at times.
- *What should we take into consideration when students come from differing religious backgrounds?*
- 6) Prior knowledge** - Depending on where students have previously studied, they may have much more or less exposure to the subject matter than the average student.
- *How can instructors know where to start teaching and how can they help all of the students achieve the goals of the class?*
- 7) Motivation** - Students may come to our classes with curiosity and clear internal motivation, possibly understanding how the material will benefit them in the future and eager to study, while others may be fulfilling requirements with an attitude that they just want to pass.
- *In what ways can the instructor help build and maintain the students desire to attend the class and learn the subject matter?*
- 8) Learning styles** - Students have preferred ways of learning. Some people learn better through seeing pictures or graphic representations (visual learners), others can learn best by listening (aural learners), while still others learn best when touching and manipulating (tactile/ kinesthetic learners).
- *How can teachers make learning easier for students with diverse learning preferences?*
- 9) Abilities** - Some students pick up things more quickly than others.
- *Are there ways instructors can help students who need more time or more attention in order to understand the subject?*
- 10) Expectations** - What a student expects from a class depends largely upon how the student was educated and the type of classroom instruction he/she has experienced.
- *How can teachers design their classes in ways so that they address the expectations students have of what should take place in a class?*

More information regarding diversity:

- Introduction to College Teaching in the United States (Yale University)  
<https://goo.gl/MnX9Fa>
- Diversity in the Classroom (University of Technology Sydney)  
<https://goo.gl/gGvUNf>
- Diversity in the Classroom (UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development)  
<https://goo.gl/Njycyb>

Thus, teachers have a great deal to consider even before taking into consideration a more diversified class than they are used to teaching. Some good practices to develop in any kind of class would include treating students as individuals instead of thinking of them as part of a specific group, incorporating a variety of ways to address various learning styles, setting rules for student behavior in class, explaining clearly your teaching philosophy and why you are incorporating certain activities into the class, and using gender-free wording (“he/she” instead of “he”; and “businessperson” instead of “businessman”).

More information on dealing with diversity in the classroom:

- 7 Practitioners’ tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity (King’s College London) <https://goo.gl/dnjNRN>
- Learning and Teaching Across Cultures - Good practice Principles and Quick Guides (Betty Leask and Jude Carroll, October 2013)  
<https://goo.gl/ArPAxo>

Though the challenges of addressing diversity are present in homogeneous classrooms, in more heterogeneous classes certain categories listed above become much more exaggerated. The purpose of this handbook is to address those categories that are magnified the greatest due to teaching in a more culturally

diverse classroom, the biggest of which is the difference in **Expectations** (#10).

While it would be impossible to take into consideration every cultural difference between all of our students and try to adapt our teaching to each and every aspect, it is possible to take a more macro-level approach to culture that can give the teacher insights into how to help the students learn more effectively and efficiently. In the field of Cross Cultural Communication, cultures have been classified in a variety of ways (Lewis, 2005; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Hofstede, 1990; etc.), but one of the simplest and most common is dividing them into “*high-context*” or “*low-context*”. High-context cultures are ones that are more homogenous sharing a more consistent cultural heritage and common set of beliefs like Japan. Low-context cultures, on the other hand, are cultures with a more diverse cultural heritage where the beliefs and values are not shared as much between all of the citizens as in the United States of America (Hall, 1976). Thus, Japan and most native English speaking countries would be on opposite ends of the context spectrum with Japan on the far side of the high context spectrum and most native-English speaking countries such as the U.S. and Australia on the far side of the low-context spectrum as depicted in Figure 3.

## **1.2 Organizational Features of English**

One of the major differences between these cultural distinctions is the very different style of communication according to Hall (1976). A high-context culture is often implicit in how they communicate, which is highlighted by an indirect style where the main point does not come until the end.

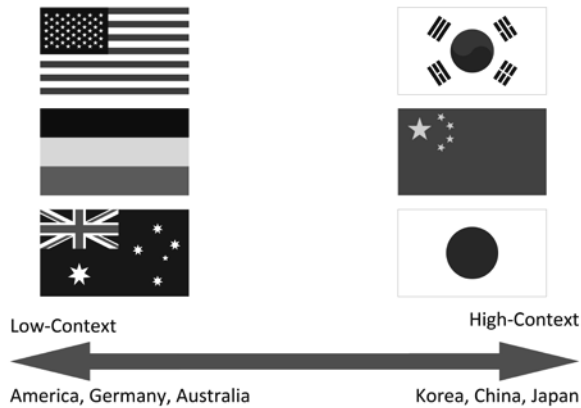
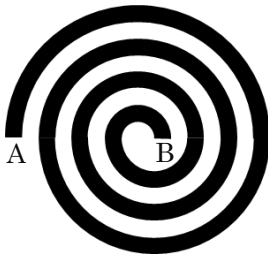


Figure 3: The Low-Context/High-Context Spectrum

Thus, the responsibility for understanding the meaning is the responsibility of the reader. The organizational style of high-context cultures is often represented graphically as a spiral moving inward until it reaches a central point, which represents the main point of their work.

In contrast, a low-context culture is more reliant on words and has a very explicit and direct organizational style. The responsibility of conveying the intended message lies with the writer, and thus, the message must be more precise and accurate. This is also commonly depicted as a straight line from point A to point B in graphic representations (Figure 4).

Understanding the difference between high- and low-context cultures can help teachers to organize their materials so that they are the most accessible to all of the students. The default setting in the teacher's mind should be a low-context style. While students from high-context cultures might find this style overly repetitive, it is important to remember that the majority of the



High-Context

Ambiguous, main point stated at the end



Low-Context

Precise and direct, main point stated at the beginning and repeated

Figure 4: Organizational Features Base on Context

students in our classes will be at a disadvantage because they are studying in a second language, and, thus, a more overt style could be beneficial to them also.

### 1.2.1 Organization of English

A quick search of Google for presentation skills will invariably present you with the age-old axiom attributed to Aristotle, “*Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you just told them*”. This organizational structure is very apparent in the traditional five-paragraph essay that is commonly used to help students learn and practice extended forms of academic writing or presenting. Organization of ideas in English follows a very standardized pattern beginning with an introduction, followed by supporting information and ending with a conclusion. Deviation from this pattern can cause students to have difficulty following the intended written or spoken message.

To illustrate, this organizational style will be explained followed by an example. While the example provided below may seem more applicable to writing, presentations are also based on written texts, and the organizational features do not change. Thus, this seems like a logical approach to any type of writing or oral presentation.

**Introduction:** After the title, which presents the overall topic of a presentation or essay, the introduction provides background information on the topic followed by a thesis statement that explains what the main point of the entire presentation/essay is. The background information may start with an interesting fact or example related to the topic in order to catch the readers'/listeners' attention. It will then provide background information about the topic that the reader may need to understand the context. This information will gradually become more focused tapering down to the main point or thesis statement. The thesis statement is usually the last part of the introduction and often includes a preview of the subtopics in the form of a list of what will be discussed further.

**Support:** The three points that follow the introduction are referred to as support. For each supporting point, the main idea should be provided in the first sentence, and it often restates information from the thesis statement and provides further clarity focusing on what will be discussed further regarding this point. This statement is then followed by facts, statistics, and examples that will provide support and clarity for the main point that was put forth at the beginning of this section.

**Conclusion:** Lastly, the main point of the essay is restated usually in different wording than in the thesis statement and closing comments or future course of investigation is laid out. Thus, moving from a more focused statement into more general statements once again.

A graphic depiction of a typical five-paragraph /presentation essay is presented in Figure 5.

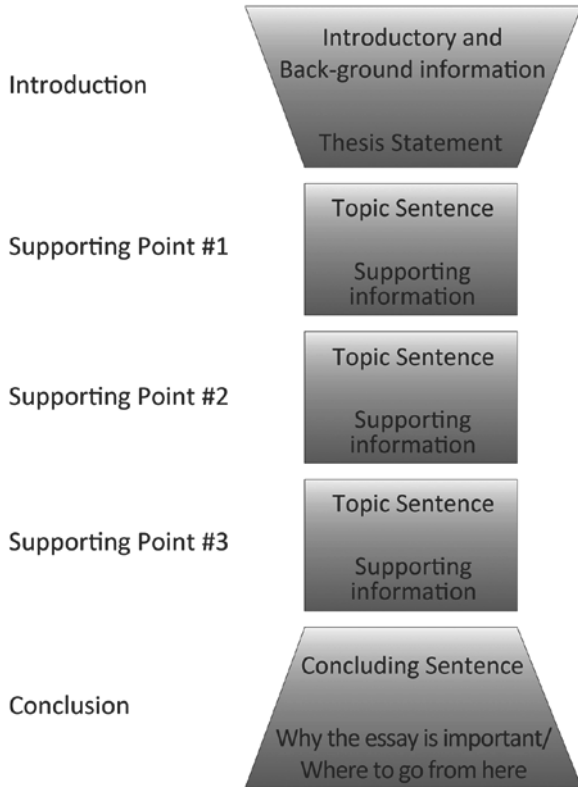


Figure 5: Graphic Representation of the 5-paragraph Essay/Presentation

One will notice that the graphic representation of the introductory paragraph is wider at the top and tapers down at the bottom. This symbolizes a broader, general statement at the beginning of the paragraph, which gradually becomes more specific leading to a focused thesis statement at the bottom of the paragraph.

The reverse is true in the concluding paragraph. The narrower beginning of the paragraph indicates the restatement of the thesis statement. And the comments that follow show a



broadening outlook of what to consider in the future and thus this paragraph widens at the base.

### 1.2.2 Outline format for presentations and essay

When preparing for a paper or presentation, it is best to put your ideas into an outline form, such as depicted in the outline format below, before writing out the essay or presentation to ensure clarity and complete coverage of the topic.

Introduction	
I. _____ _____ _____	Attention getter Background Info Thesis
Support	
II. _____	Main Idea #1
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____	Facts, Stats, and Examples
III. _____	Main Idea #2
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____	Facts, Stats, and Examples
IV. _____	Main Idea #3
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____	Facts, Stats, and Examples
Conclusion	
V. _____ _____	Restatement of Thesis/final comments

Figure 6: Outline Format for Presentation and Essay

In the outline above, each main idea in each supporting paragraph is followed by three supporting points: a, b, and c. This is because, in general, each paragraph needs to have at least three sentences to support the main idea. The information, given as support, often exceeds this number though.

To help clarify the essay/presentation process, the essay outline presented above has been filled in for an essay/presentation on the benefits of studying abroad. For an outline, it is not necessary to write in complete sentences, but rather to express the idea in a phrase as succinctly as possible.

Figure 7, the outline above (Figure 6) has been partially filled in with the thesis statement in the introduction, the topic sentences in the supporting points, and the conclusion for an essay/presentation on the benefits of studying abroad to show how these aspects of an essay/presentation are related to one another. In addition, this partially completed outline helps to exemplify how transitional words and phrases connect ideas and unify the essay/presentation. Hopefully, the reader will notice how the thesis statement provides the main idea for the entire essay/presentation and the topic sentences serve as the main ideas for each of the supporting points.

## Appendix

- Completed Outline Example: Appendix 1 (p.117)
- Completed Essay Example: Appendix 2 (p.118)

## ***Benefits of Studying Abroad***

### **Introduction with only the thesis statement:**

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*All students should take the opportunity to study abroad while they are in university to improve their language skills, to broaden their understanding of the world, and to understand their own cultures better.*

### **Supporting Point #1 with only the topic sentence:**

*First, living and/or studying in a foreign country is the best way to improve your language skills.* \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Supporting Point #2 with only the topic sentence:**

*Second, one can better understand the different issues other people face and gain a new perspective by being immersed in a different culture.* \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Supporting Point #3 with only the topic sentence:**

*Third, many people never take the time to think about their own culture until they are faced with explaining it to someone with no knowledge of it.* \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Conclusion with only the thesis restated:**

*In conclusion, if university students can overlook the short-term costs of spending time away from their home institution, they can gain valuable lessons including improvement to their language ability, a broader understanding of the world, and a better understanding of their own cultures.* \_\_\_\_\_

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Figure 7: Example with Thesis Statement and Main Topics

### 1.2.3 Transitional words and phrases (signposting)

As you can see from the example above (Figure 7), transitional words and phrases, like “*first*”, “*second*”, “*third*”, and “*in conclusion*”, are important aspects to help your audience follow your writing or presentation and easily identify the key aspects within it. These transitional words and phrases can also be used within a paragraph to clearly connect the ideas from one sentence to another. A list of words and phrases that one could use to help the audience identify the major points within your writing or presentation are listed below for your reference (Figure 8). The list provided is not comprehensive, it is meant to provide the reader with a list of the most common transitions for a desired meaning.

A more complete list of transitional words and phrases:

- Linking Words (English Language Smart Words) <https://goo.gl/xuadLH>
- Transitional Devices (Purdue Online Writing Lab) <https://goo.gl/NY7jzZ>

As you can see in the essay (Appendix 2, p.119) transitional words and phrases are used not only to highlight and connect the thesis statement with the main points presented in the topic sentences and the concluding sentence. They are also used to connect the ideas presented in the supporting sentences to one another.

Other essays that highlight organizational structure:

- Writing: example essay in Education (University of South Australia) <https://goo.gl/5t7CDC>
- Five Paragraph Essay Sample (John Langan, College Writing Skills with Readings) <https://goo.gl/BdEkKg>
- The Five-Paragraph Essay (Guide to Grammar and Writing) <https://goo.gl/JBgT5F>

## **Examples of Transitional Words and Phrases**

### **A. Showing agreement or additional aspects**

first, second, third	moreover	further more
in the first place	as well as	equally
in addition	and	important
additionally	also...	not only...but
similarly	likewise	too
		like

### **B. Opposing or contradicting**

in contrast	after all	then again
although	on the other hand	rather
however	otherwise	besides
but	despite	regardless
different from	even so	even though

### **C. Introducing examples or support**

for example	in particular	to emphasize
such as	in fact	to demonstrate
like	in general	in fact
including	namely	notably
for instance	chiefly	especially

### **D. Giving cause or intentions**

in order to	on the condition that	because
with the intention	in the event that	since
for the purpose of	if...then...	so that
as	when	so as to
so long as	while	due to

### **E. Showing effect/result**

as a result	thus	in that case
therefore	consequently	because
hence	accordingly	henceforth
for	in effect	thereupon
under those	for this reason	then
circumstances		

### **F. Concluding and summarizing**

In conclusion	on the whole	as can be seen
To sum up	generally speaking	in fact
In short	in a word	overall
In brief	given these points	all together
To summarize	in the long run	all in all

Figure 8: Examples of Transitional Words and Phrases (For Example: Deane, 2015; Strunk *et al.*, 1999; etc.)

### 1.3 Positive Reinforcement

Having raised two children in Japan, I have watched them go through various extracurricular activities, such as horseback riding, violin, flamenco dance, ballet, piano, and brass band, and the one thing that stands out is the amount of negativity in the coaches' or teachers' comments about the children's performances. No matter how well they performed, the most common reaction was on what was wrong rather than what was right. This goes along with the concept of "*kaizen*", or continuous improvement that has become synonymous with high quality products from Japan.

This negativity is in direct contrast to many other cultures where positive reinforcement is the norm. For example, in the United States, teachers and coaches focus on the good aspects of a performance, no matter how poorly the person does, as a way to encourage them to keep trying and working hard.

A definition of reinforcement is something done after a behavior to make that behavior more likely to be replicated in the future. People feel good about themselves when they are complimented on what they are doing and thus more motivated to do it again in the future. Students are turned off by negativity. Student perceptions of good teachers include the category of approachability. If the teacher is positive toward student interaction, friendly, and happy, students are much more likely to want to engage with their instructor than if they make the students feel stupid or unworthy of their attention in another way. This is much like the idea of positive reinforcement in other contexts, too.

Our non-verbal communication is equally as important, if not more important than the words we use to interact with our

students. If we show the students that we are interested and enthusiastic about the subject matter and concerned about them enough to be attentive to them and concerned about their learning and lives in general, they will feel more comfortable to interact with us. Thus, remember that how you say something to someone does carry a great deal of meaning, but the words that we use are also important. In some cases, we may not intend to be negative, but how we have expressed our instructions or comments may inadvertently carry a negative connotation. Being able to phrase things in a positive light is often difficult; however, understanding how to phrase expressions appropriately can help convey the positive aspects that we want students to receive.

### **1.3.1 Positively responding to correct answers**

It is very easy to be positive toward student responses when they are correct. Some common ways of doing this are listed below. I am sure the reader can come up with many more examples without too much difficulty.

- *Good job!*
- *Excellent!*
- *That is exactly right.*
- *Great!*
- *You obviously know what you are talking about.*
- *I couldn't have said it better myself.*

It should be noted that receiving a correct response from a student is wonderful, and we as teachers want to acknowledge their efforts. However, if we do so immediately with one of the expressions provided above, we will end any further discussion

on the topic. Thus, it might be advisable to withhold praising students until after the other students have had a chance to ponder the response. Consider the following exchange as an alternative.

<b>Teacher:</b>	<i>Could ("someone", "you", a specific student's name) tell me...</i>
<b>Student 1:</b>	<i>Well, I believe it is ... (The student provides a correct response.)</i>
<b>Teacher:</b>	<i>Thank you for your input. Let's hear what some other students think of your ideas. (a specific student's name) what do you think?</i>
<b>Student 2:</b>	<i>His answer sounds good. The only thing I would add is . . .</i>
<b>Teacher:</b>	<i>Okay, I see your point. Thank you. Well, (Student 1) was correct. Great job! You must have really spent some time considering this issue. (Student 2) also made an interesting point that exemplifies what (Student 1) said earlier.</i>

By withholding the fact that a given answer is correct until later, the teacher is able to spend more time having the entire class consider the completeness and positive or negative aspects of the previous response.

### **1.3.2 Positively responding to incorrect answers**

However, the difficulty arises when we as teachers need to be positive to students when they provide incorrect responses to questions. We want to encourage students to continue responding to the teacher when a question is posed, but we also want the student to understand that his/her response was incorrect. Some suggestions about wording your response to take into consideration this aspect of replying to incorrect answers are listed below.



- *Thank you for your answer. Does anyone have something to add to that?*
- *That's an interesting idea. What do the rest of you think about it?*
- *Thanks for getting the discussion going. Let's hear some other ideas.*

By responding in such a manner, the instructor is able to show appreciation to the students for the efforts they are making at answering the question without directly pointing out the errors in front of the entire class. By gathering input from various students, the instructor can compile the various responses at the end to formulate a completely accurate response without pointing out any one person as incorrect, or correct for that matter, but still provide corrections to any misconceptions that exist.

Another issue regarding feedback to student responses is the common practice of using “but” to precede negative information. Because of the understood or implied negativity of “but” it is best to try to word responses to students in a way that avoids the use of this word.

***Can you think of a way to rephrase the following comments in a more positive way without using “but”?***

- *Your thesis is very good, but you need to supply more sources.*
- *That is a good point, but your reasoning is faulty.*
- *Your answer was interesting, but it was completely wrong.*

***How about the following?***

- *Your thesis is very good. Do you feel that there are enough sources to support your position? Why or why not?*
- *You make a very good point. Is there anything else you could add that might help others understand your reasoning better?*
- *Your answer was interesting. Let's see what other people have to say about this question.*

Rather than giving direct opinions or answers to student papers or requests, it is often better to use an indirect approach by asking questions of the students. They can then often understand the logic and answer their own questions.

As teachers, students look up to us and respect our views. If they receive approval from us, they are more likely to continue working hard and to feel good about their efforts, so it is important for us to think carefully about how we talk to students.

#### **1.4 Politeness**

Another aspect of culture is the manner in which we address students. With the “*kohai/senpai*” relationships in Japan and the use of “*keigo*” to speak with people of higher status, the immediate reaction of an instructor in Japan might not be focused on showing respect for the students. However, research has shown that the number one perception from students of an effective teacher is how “respectful” they are to their students (Delaney *et al.*, 2010). While this term includes a variety of other nuances, such as the instructor understanding the challenging situations students sometimes face, treating all of the students equally and in the same manner, and showing that they care about their students, using appropriate language to show this aspect to students can go a long way toward making the right impression. Many non-native speakers of English make errors in the following ways without necessarily being aware of the issues.

Before discussing the ways to improve the language we use, one thing that needs to be reiterated is the way we say something is often as important as the words we use. Thus, instructors should try to maintain a calm, if not pleasant, delivery to what

they are saying even if impatience or negativity toward the student starts entering their minds.

### 1.4.1 Ordering/commanding versus requesting

It is easy as an instructor to slip into the habit of telling students what to do with directives or imperatives such as the ones listed below when we want students to do something. One of the reasons for instructors to do this may be the need for time efficiency. A classroom is a busy place and depending on how much material needs to be covered, the instructor may want to move the class along as quickly as possible. Imperatives, or commands, are the shortest and most direct way to get things done. Even if there are time constraints, taking a little bit more time making requests rather than demands can have positive effects on the atmosphere in the class.

#### **Order/Command**

- *Hand in your homework.*
- *Turn to chapter 3 in your book.*
- *Don't talk in class.*

#### **Requesting**

- *I would like you to hand in your homework now.*
- *Could you (please) turn to page chapter 3 in your book?*
- *Would you (please) not talk during class?*

There are a variety of other phrases that can be used to request something politely. In general, the longer the question or statement, the more polite it will be. Some examples of questions and statements on the more polite end of the spectrum include:

- *Would you mind...*
- *I wonder if you could...*
- *I was wondering if you would mind...*

However, I suggest instructors avoid these phrases because they could sound overly formal when interacting with students. In addition, there is also the risk of confusion with the phrase “*Would you mind...*” since students tend to answer them opposite from the way they actually should. For example, I often ask students the following questions to illustrate the confusion with these structures.

**Teacher:** *Would you mind closing the door?*  
**Student:** *Yes!* (said with a smile as the student stands up to close the door)

However, “*yes*” to this question means, “*Yes, I do mind,*” meaning “*I will not close the door for you.*”

**Teacher:** *Would you mind giving me 1,000,000 yen?*  
**Student:** *No!*  
**Teacher:** *Great!* (Holding my hand out waiting for the 1,000,000 yen)

Answering “*no*” to a “*Do you mind*” question shows a willingness to do something.

Politeness toward our students is a concern, but of course, there are situations when commanding or ordering students is appropriate. Imperatives should be used when students are about to do something that might be dangerous. For example, if a student is about to mix the wrong chemicals together that could have an adverse reaction in a laboratory experiment, the direct approach is necessary.

### 1.4.2 Unexplained action versus asking for permission

When students are busy with an activity in class, the teacher often needs to make a decision as to the appropriate amount of time to give students to complete a task. In my own teaching, I have found myself trying to determine if students have completed a task, such as copying notes from the blackboard, by inferring that they are done from a visual scan of the classroom, and I have often been caught out when I have said something like, “*Okay, it looks like everyone is done, so let’s move on,*” as I begin erasing the board. One of the students will invariably shout out “*Wait! I am not done,*” or more commonly gasps from students who are still working will be heard. An easy way to avoid such problems is to ask permission from the students as shown below.

#### Asking for permission

- *Is it okay if I erase the board now?*
- *May I erase the board now?*
- *Can I erase the board now?*

Again, other phrases can be used for asking for permission, such as:

- *Does anyone mind if I ...?*

However, as mentioned earlier, these can sound overly polite and can lead to confusion due to the opposite way of answering these questions.

### 1.4.3 Direct suggestions versus indirect suggestions

A particular difficult aspect of English is giving suggestion. Many English textbooks have a tendency to focus on the use of

the modals: “should”, “ought to”, and “had better” to make suggestions. While these terms are often used in writing to express the necessity to do something usually by a third person, they are never used in direct communication, especially conversation, because of the directness of the statement. When a person uses these models in conversation, it sounds pretentious in that the person giving the suggestion seems to be authoritative or giving an order rather than a suggestion. Thus, in direct communication, indirect suggestions are almost exclusively used.

**Direct suggestion**

- *You should include an explanation of how the experiment was conducted.*
- *That’s not right. You ought to have referenced your sources by giving the author’s last name, followed by a comma, and then the year.*

**Indirect suggestion**

- *What about including an explanation of how the experiment was conducted? It might make it easier for the reader to understand.*
- *Why don’t you double check the way to reference sources? I think this might be expressed a different way.*

Other possible ways to create indirect suggestions are listed below.

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • <i>How about...?</i>              | • <i>You/we can...</i>              |
| • <i>Why not...?</i>                | • <i>It might be a good idea...</i> |
| • <i>I think that you should...</i> | • <i>If I were you, I would...</i>  |
| • <i>Perhaps you could...</i>       |                                     |

You might have noticed that by changing the direct suggestion to an indirect suggestion you are also giving assistance without actually providing the answer to the student. This provides the students with the opportunity to contemplate what the instructor said, decide if the advice is useful or not, and if so, it often requires further research or effort, all of which provide the student with further opportunity to internalize and develop more long lasting learning.

### **1.5 Student Expectations**

Much of what students expect from a class is in response to their previous experiences in the classroom. Delaney *et al.* (2010) conducted a study at Memorial University in Canada where they used an online survey to have students list five adjectives to describe effective teaching and then explain in detail why they selected these adjectives. Out of the 330 responses, 69 separate adjectives were identified. These were then grouped based on similarity into nine separate categories: respectful, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organized, responsive, professional, and humorous. These categories are listed from the most represented answers to the least. While all of them are important to take into consideration and I encourage the reader to read this article in detail, I will focus on the top three responses because, in part, they support and nicely show the importance of my initial hypothesis that classroom management, language, and culture are three key aspects to take into account when teaching in English. Below, I provide more detail on the importance of the three most common responses: respectful, knowledgeable, and approachable.

### **1.5.1 Respectful**

As mentioned previously students, above all, want to feel respected by the teacher, and the language that the teacher uses in interacting with the students can affect how they feel about their teachers. Along with the language of politeness, other adjectives that were grouped together into this category included open-minded, flexible, compassionate, and patient. This group of adjectives touches further upon the affective issues. The gap between the teacher and students is often quite wide, and therefore teachers may have difficulty appreciating the students' perspective. Teachers can forget that students are often balancing packed schedules, part-time work, and club activities, and may have a host of other responsibilities. They have difficulties and problems in life just like everyone else. Being understanding of these issues while also being fair to all of the students is difficult to balance. Many of these issues will be expanded upon further in the section on Community Building.

Special attention also needs to be given to patience. Students are novices in the subjects that teachers are experts in and they might not have the interest or motivations that their instructors have. Having a great deal of knowledge may make it difficult to understand when students are struggling to grasp the subject or may even cause impatience to creep in. We should try not to let students know of this impatience or talk down to them in any way that might make them feel inadequate. If a teacher were to act this way, it students wouldn't want to face that situation again, thus, making it unlikely that they will seek help even though they might need it. In addition, while we would like all of our students to be enthralled in the subject, it might very well be



the case that students are required to take the course or might have distractions outside of school.

### **1.5.2 Knowledgeable**

Of course, as university instructors we all have spent years studying our subject areas. Therefore, it should be a given that everyone is knowledgeable, but some of the adjectives that are grouped together in this category might give more insight as to what the students were focusing their attention on in this category. For example, “*flexible*” was often stated, which might make one wonder how knowledge can be flexible. However, what students are referring to here is how that knowledge is presented. For example, is the teacher willing to get off their scripted plan and spend more time addressing a topic when students are not comprehending the subject matter.

One other adjective that appears within this category that may not be obvious is “*reflective*”. Students value teachers who can adapt to feedback in order to change what they are doing to meet the needs of the students. Later in this handbook, one of the activities outlined is “*the minute paper*”, or a comment sheet, which can be used to get feedback from the students on various aspects of the class or content. One way of being reflective would be to explain common comments brought up on these comment sheets and to tell the students what changes you, the teacher, are willing to make in an effort to address these issues.

Other adjectives within this category that seem particularly relevant are “practical” and “current”. If we can find ways to connect the subject matter to the students’ future lives or careers and help them to understand how the information will be of benefit, it will enhance their learning. The same could be said for

the adjective “current”. By presenting the information in the context of what is currently happening in the world, it will be more meaningful. As we explore Active Learning later in this booklet, you will notice how “*knowledgeable*” aspects are incorporated into activities to make learning more meaningful.

### **1.5.3 Approachable**

In this category, Delaney *et al.* (2010, p.10) identify “*three main themes: the positive interaction between the professor and students; the comfort level of students to ask questions and to seek advice; and the sincere effort on the part of instructors to help students reach their academic goals*”. Many of the aspects touched on in this section of the article will be addressed in this handbook when discussing the topic of building community in the classroom. It cannot be overstated how much the affective aspects of a classroom impact the students’ feelings about the class and their ultimate success. “*Retention studies conducted over the last two decades in higher education suggest that one of the most crucial factors in helping students complete their studies is creating an atmosphere of community.*” (McGlynn, 2001, p.55)