Tips for Supporting Students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL)

These tips are for faculty supporting diverse students who have English as an additional language.

Potential Challenges Facing Some EAL Students

While all students are facing significant challenges at this time, there are some challenges that might affect some EAL students to a greater degree:

- Being very far from home and worrying about family (e.g., India – political unrest in addition to COVID)

- Being far from Courtenay and worrying about connecting with their instructors / peers

- General stress of living in a foreign country / functioning in a second or additional language

- Living with other family members/friends in tight conditions (multiple students sharing one room / laptop)

- Not having physical access to library / computer labs

- Reliance on using a phone to connect with instructors, peers and course materials

- Racism / xenophobia related to COVID / negative perceptions of 'others'

Core Learning Components

ACCESS: **A= assess**, C=content, **C=communicate, E=engage**, S=summarize, **S=support**

1. ## Assess
   - **Avoid Timed Assessments**
     Strictly timed assessments disadvantage students functioning in an additional language in ways that do not reflect their knowledge by also assessing their speed of reading / processing information ('dial-up' versus 'high-speed')

   - **Invite Reflection**
     Use assessments that require individual reflection rather than 'Googling' and 'cutting and pasting' content, forces students to create original work and shares their understanding

   - **Include Spoken Assessment**
     Consider using oral assessments for students who are less strong in written skills (unless you are teaching them writing)

   - **Be Flexible**
     Ask students about how they can demonstrate they have met the course learning outcomes – that can take the heat off you as the instructor and can provide ideas you've not thought of (this also promotes feelings of inclusion and engagement)

2. ## Communicate

- **Focus on Relationship Building**
  - Instructor – student: Initiate one to one contact, e.g., send an introductory email with a photo, video presentation of you talking and introducing the course, and / or arrange one to one office hours using BlueJeans.
  - Student – student - Put students into small groups so they can work offline together. Begin with 'get to know you' exercises). Building trust is key to engagement.

- **Be Flexible**
  - Consider using student's alternate email address it not engaging using NIC email.
  - Use Blackboard Learn to email / send regular announcements

- **Create Community**
  Use community building activities from the outset (e.g., discussion board questions – students share something about themselves that they are happy sharing; Padlet with a map to show where they are currently living or from where they originate).

- **Think about Language**
  Use multiple ways modes of presenting information and opportunities for engagement that support EAL learners in terms of language.
  - Use platforms such as YouTube and TED Talks that have functions such as close captioning or subtitles in multiple languages. Include materials that can be viewed multiple times.
  - Present information using narrated PowerPoint presentations with an accompanying transcript;
  - Consider using annotated PDFs of readings, where students can bring up the definition of words they may not know;
  - Create or get students to create a glossary of key terms for students to refer to ahead of reading and associated online engagement). Explain idioms and metaphors.

3. ## Engage

- **Optimize the Opportunities of Asynchronous Learning**
  Focus more on asynchronous activities to reduce stress of 'live' communication if you know students are in other time zones / might not have access to good Internet or technological tools.

- **Foster Inclusion**
  Find out as much as you can about students' individual circumstances (obviously without prying) – helps guide what is feasible to include in instruction and makes students feel like they're being included – e.g., any technological limitations (access to certain sites if abroad, differences in time zones).

- **Invite Student Experience**
  Draw on individual student experiences. One of the biggest barriers to student engagement / motivation is not feeling 'part of a community.'

- **Engage in Diverse Ways**
  Allow students different ways of engaging depending on the comfort level in different language skills (e.g., some students may be able to better engage and demonstrate their learning through

videoing themselves with their phone explaining a concept, rather than writing a paper and emailing it to the instructor).

- **Use Signposting**
  Key points are organized in different places across languages. EAL students are often looking in the 'wrong place' for the key ideas.

- **Use Visuals**
  Use diagrams, photos, pictures etc. to support explanations, especially if they help with understanding abstract concepts. Concrete examples that illustrate the concept or theory you are explaining increase understanding.

4. ## Support

- **Reassure**
  EAL students often need a lot more reassurance in terms of language skills. If you are not assessing writing / language let students know you are focusing on the content of their ideas, not how they articulate it.

  o NB – reassure more if using 'chat,' 'discussions,' etc. that are synchronous, where it can be hard for students to focus on the idea, grammar and spelling of how they express that idea, all at the same time.

- **Invite Diverse Ways of Interacting**
  o If using BlueJeans, encourage use of the chat function (but bear in mind the above comment);

  o Use asynchronous discussions, wikis etc. so students have more time to think and formulate ideas;

  o In synchronous sessions, be mindful that it's hard to interrupt in a second language and much harder in an online environment, since we can't see as clearly non-verbal cues that help us know it's okay to speak next.

- **Provide More Time for Learning**
  o Having EAL is like having 'dial-up' versus 'high-speed' Internet. There are also more likely to be 'connectivity' issues (finding the right word), and 'technical' problems (accessing appropriate sentence structure, idioms etc.).

  o It takes 2-3 times longer to read complex articles in a second / additional language. This is important to consider when planning the amount of written content that you expect students to get through and also when creating assessments.