

# Tips for Communicating with Students who Speak English as a Second Language

## Communicating with ESL Students

The following techniques are useful in matching speech patterns to the needs of those who are experiencing difficulty with oral skills.

- ◇ Simple, active and present verb tense
- ◇ Talk slowly and clearly. Repeat, use synonyms.
- ◇ Use as many examples and models as possible
- ◇ Normal volume
- ◇ Use gestures and facial expressions
- ◇ Avoid use of slang and idioms
- ◇ Paraphrasing words, phrases, or sentences
- ◇ Non-verbal cues (for example: pointing at words, visuals, or pantomiming)
- ◇ Correction by restating or modeling

*Compiled by Barbara Gottschalk (1995), ESL Instructor. Youngstown State University.*

## Basic Principals for Explaining to ESL Students

- Be patient. Try to imagine yourself in their country as a student.
- Be sensitive to their cultural perspectives (including cultural thought patterns.)
- Explain the cultural expectations of American Higher Education.
- Help them to know how to use the library and computer lab.
- Give lots of speaking practice.
- Speak clearly, naturally and avoid using lots of slang.
- Ask students to repeat what you have just said to show understanding.
- If a student has trouble understanding you, write down what you are saying. If you have trouble understanding the student, ask him or her to write down what he/she is saying.
- Use lots of repetition.
- Encourage students to make friends outside of class because this will improve their English.
- Write down words the student does not know.
- Admit it if there is a communication problem; "I don't understand."

## Please Remember:

- Don't categorize students. ESL students come from a large variety of backgrounds.
- Don't treat students like children. English language proficiency does not indicate intelligence or ability level.
- Don't make snap judgments about someone's English skills based only on speaking ability.
- Don't be too serious. Make some "small talk" and try to use new vocabulary in a context the students are familiar with.
- Don't assume cultural or background knowledge.
- Don't just explain something. Use examples instead.
- Don't act as if you understand the student if you don't.

*Adapted from: Barbara Gottschalk, ESL Instructor & her students, Youngstown State University, 1995.  
Lewin, Ellen, Tutoring Tips for ESL Tutoring. Learning Assistance Center, Minnesota Community College; Minneapolis, MN.*