

# Understanding How Culture Influences Learning and Writing: A Guide for English Language Learners (ELLs)

Welcome! This guide is designed to help students understand how culture influences approaches to learning and writing, particularly in U.S. higher education. By exploring cultural assumptions and expectations, students may navigate academic writing and achieve their educational goals more easily.

## How Culture Shapes Learning and Writing.

### 1. Individualism vs. Collectivism

- **U.S. Culture:** Emphasizes individualism, where personal opinions, critical thinking, and individual achievements are highly valued. In writing, this means students are encouraged to develop their own voice, express unique viewpoints, and critically analyze texts.
- **Other Cultures:** May emphasize collectivism, where group harmony, shared values, and collective success are prioritized. Writing from these cultural backgrounds might focus more on group perspectives and consensus.

### 2. High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication

- **U.S. Culture:** Tends to be low-context, where communication is direct, explicit, and relies on clear, concise language. Academic writing requires clear thesis statements, logical organization, and explicit evidence.
- **Other Cultures:** High-context cultures rely on indirect communication, where meaning is often derived from context, non-verbal cues, and shared understanding. Writing may be more implicit and nuanced.

### 3. Power Distance

- **U.S. Culture:** Generally low power distance, meaning there is less hierarchy between students and teachers. Students are encouraged to question and engage with instructors and texts.
- **Other Cultures:** High power distance cultures may show greater respect for authority and less questioning of teachers. Writing might defer more to established authorities and texts.

#### 4. Approaches to Knowledge

- **U.S. Culture:** Knowledge is seen as evolving and constructed through inquiry and evidence-based reasoning. Writing often involves presenting arguments, supporting them with evidence, and engaging with multiple perspectives.
- **Other Cultures:** Knowledge may be seen as more fixed and passed down from authorities. Writing could focus on presenting accepted knowledge rather than arguing or questioning it.

## Cultural Assumptions in U.S. Higher Education.

#### 1. Critical Thinking and Argumentation

- **Expectation:** Students are expected to engage in critical thinking, which involves analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information. Writing should present well-structured arguments, supported by evidence.
- **Tip:** Practice questioning sources, identifying biases, and constructing logical arguments. Use evidence from credible sources to support claims.

#### 2. Originality and Academic Integrity

- **Expectation:** Originality is highly valued. Plagiarism is strictly prohibited, and students must cite all sources properly.
- **Tip:** Learn and adhere to citation styles (e.g., APA, MLA). Paraphrase and quote sources correctly to avoid plagiarism. Develop individual ideas and insights.

#### 3. Writing Structure and Clarity

- **Expectation:** Clear and organized writing is essential. Typical structures include introductions with thesis statements, body paragraphs with topic sentences, and conclusions that summarize key points.
- **Tip:** Outline essays before writing. Use clear topic sentences for each paragraph. Ensure each paragraph supports the thesis and transitions smoothly to the next.

#### 4. Participation and Collaboration

- **Expectation:** Active participation in discussions and group projects is common. Collaboration is often part of the learning process.
- **Tip:** Engage in class discussions and group work. Share ideas and listen to others. Reflect on how collaborative activities can enhance understanding and writing.

# Achieving Your Writing Goals in U.S. Higher Ed.

## 1. Understand Assignment Expectations

- Carefully read assignment prompts. Note key requirements, such as length, format, and specific questions to address.
- If unclear, ask instructor or TAs for clarification.

## 2. Develop Your Writing Skills

- **Practice Regularly:** Write frequently to improve writing skills. Keep a journal, write essays, and seek feedback.
- **Seek Resources:** Utilize campus resources like writing centers, tutors, and online tools. Attend workshops and writing courses.

## 3. Adapt to Academic Conventions

- Be familiar with academic conventions in your field of study. Read scholarly articles and notice their structure, tone, and citation practices.
- Adapt your writing style to meet these conventions while maintaining your unique voice.

## 4. Manage Your Time Effectively

- Plan writing tasks. Break down large projects into manageable steps.
- Set deadlines for each step, including brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising.

## 5. Embrace Feedback and Revision

- View feedback as an opportunity to improve. Take notes on areas for improvement and apply them to revisions.
- Revise written work multiple times. Focus on both global issues (structure, argument) and local issues (grammar, punctuation).

Recognizing cultural assumptions and adapting to academic norms can help ELL students develop their writing skills in the academy. Seek resources, practice regularly, and embrace feedback. International students' unique perspectives are valuable contributions to our academic community!