"Eye Learners" versus "Ear Learners": Understanding the English Language Learners in your College Classroom

These typical characteristics may offer insight to a particular student's challenges or help you anticipate common challenges.

	International ELL Students	Resident ELL Students
Time in U.S.	• Usually arrive to the U.S. right before classes begin	• Part of formal education was in U.S. school system
Language Learners	• "Eye learners" who learned English from textbooks • Overwhelmed by psychological, and emotional demands of what is likely their first immersion experience	• "Ear learners" who learned English from listening and speaking • Overwhelmed by the demands of speaking one language at home and another at school • Fully bilingual or still acquiring aspects of English
Writing and Reading	• Use unexpected organization patterns • Unfamiliar with typical U.S. essay conventions • Have difficulty finding appropriate synonyms when paraphrasing • Have difficulty writing transitional phrasing due to studying mainly content-based words • Have difficulty reading college-level texts' vocabulary and complex sentence structures	• Use expected organizational patterns • Familiar with typical U.S. essay conventions • Have difficulty writing analytically in academic voice free of grammatical errors • Have difficulty paraphrasing and transitioning due to reliance on conversational language • Have difficulty reading college-level texts because of formal vocabulary and sentence structures
Grammar Knowledge	• Often know formal grammar rules • Often skilled at taking language tests • Have difficulty applying the rules to their own writing • Have difficulty generating alternative phrasings of what they read or need to write multiple times	• Have a sense of "what sounds right" • Sometimes know formal rules of grammar • Have difficulty applying the rules in formal writing • Usually able to generate alternative phrasings, but may be conversational in tone
Listening and Speaking	• Listening comprehension and speaking noticeably limited	• Overcome listening or speaking limitations quickly
Educational Culture	• Unused to participating because students' critical contributions may not be part of their culture	• More familiar and comfortable with the behaviors and expectations of U.S. educational culture

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