

Teaching and learning issues

Supporting English and Maths

English and Maths are the silent skills underpinning everything we do and learn. On some courses we may be thinking that our learners don't need help. However, the truth is that we all do to some degree—because developing oral and written language and maths continues throughout life as we move into new jobs, different subjects or higher levels of study. English and Maths are not done and dusted at GCSE.

Many City Lit learners have not studied for a long time. For some learners, English may be an additional language and even the most fluent may not fully understand the nuances used by the teacher. Some of our learners, eg in community learning, are at level 1 or below in their English and or maths skills. In fact the government calculates 1 in 4 adults are below level 2 in English and Maths.

So what are these skills? Most of our learners will need to read—often quite complex texts. They will have to conquer the new terminology for the subject. They will have to follow the teacher's talks and instructions. They may be asked to express opinions or present ideas to a group.

Visual Arts learners learn to write about their work. They also have to measure, calculate volume, angles, scale or proportion. The example of an English and Maths Audit in the box opposite indicates the range.

On accredited courses the demands are usually higher. Learners may be facing new sorts of reading eg theory and not know how to go about it in a skilled

Sample English and Maths 'Audit' for a printmaking course

- Learning and defining new terminology
- Reading handouts and instructions (often quite complex)
- Expressing views in group discussion eg critiques of peers' work, explaining ideas and work, etc.
- Calculating ratios (eg 2:1) for preparing acids, and timings for using them
- Calculating ratios for paper sizes
- Making notes from and reflecting on teacher's feedback
- Writing commentary on own work for exhibitions or online, eg artist statements, press releases, etc.
- Writing reviews of exhibitions to share with peers via online forums or in class

What English and Maths are 'hidden' in your course?

way. Or they may need to produce a new genre of writing that is expected for that subject or profession eg writing case studies, reports, academic essays, or reflective accounts.

Supporting English and or maths within another subject does not mean teaching English or Maths. Research has shown most learners wouldn't want this. All teachers *can*, however, discreetly support learners with those oral, written and mathematical skills they need to succeed in their subject.

Some general strategies:

Actively teach terminology

This is relevant for almost every subject. Avoid relying solely on a printed glossary. There are some ideas in the box on page T4.

Create clear accessible handouts

Are you handing out handouts that are more complex than they need be? Full of dense text? This does not mean avoiding key terms your students need, but making sure the text is accessibly written, using visuals wherever possible.

Prepare learners for giving presentations (or similar)

If you are asking students to give a presentation, discuss how to structure it. You might elicit this from the group

- Start with an overview
- Make 3 points with examples
- Sum up your main points

Avoid using cultural references and idioms

A bilingual student whose English is fluent may still be confused by the following:

- ‘Let’s not beat around the bush’
- ‘You’ve hit the nail on the head there’
- ‘You look all at sea’

Give feedback on English on written work

On accredited courses a key method is to give feedback on English on written work, including on spelling, punctuation and grammar. We are soon to offer training on how to do this sensitively as part of our revised cross college English and Maths strategy.

Teachers discussing how they support and develop English and Maths:

Access to Drama

Laura Baggaley’s drama students have to write annotations on the play script. about their characters and how to perform them. It is also a piece of coursework. Some students seem to have a difficulty

The power of visual images

The Drama Department used to get many enquiries about dates, times and cost of courses, even though they thought their posters were clear. They started putting a simple image next to each piece of information. To their astonishment, they now get hardly any enquiries



Sundays, 22/5/16 26/6/16



15.45—17.15

with this every year. She worked with Helen Cottington to consider what would help as part of our embedded English and Maths project.

Laura had felt she was supporting students well with this task. She reminded students each week to include points they had covered in the session. However the scripts she got back either had little on, or far too much.

She realised the students didn’t really understand what was expected of them. What to include and what to leave out. They also didn’t fully understand they would be expected to do this as professional actors.

So first she created a ‘frame’ - a list of questions to consider when annotating with a space for notes. (see the box on the next page)

She asked students to work in pairs answering questions on their own characters in the play. This helped them understand the kind of things they needed to note on their script.

She also realised that weaker students were likely to be given smaller parts so there was far fewer clues to the background of the character. So in her examples she tried to focus on smaller characters in the play.

Laura commented that ‘It is easy to forget that something may seem obvious to you but not to your students’.

Interestingly she thinks that as a result, students are preparing for characters much more effectively.

Laura's Frame

| | |
|--|--|
| Script Annotation | |
| Make these notes for every scene you are in. Keep them with your script for easy reference throughout rehearsal. | |
| <i>*mark these on your script as well</i> | |
| Who am I? | |
| What time is it? | |
| Where am I? What surrounds me? | |
| Where have I just come from? What have I just been doing? How am I feeling? | |
| What is my relationship with any other people present? What is my relationship with the audience? | |
| What do I want from the other people present? What is my immediate objective*? | |
| What is my new objective if it changes in the course of the scene*? | |
| What are the events of the scene - the key moments of change*? When and why do my objectives change? | |
| What do I do to get what I want? | |

Visual approaches to reading theory in Visual Arts

Ian Tucknott remembers starting his art theory and practice degree and not understanding anything he had to read. He felt stupid in seminars, and unable to participate in discussion. He slowly realised that before he could understand theory he needed to learn how to read academic texts, so he developed his own system. Based on this experience he is anxious to not only teach theory but help his students learn how to read.

Firstly he talks about methods of reading with his students. As most artists are very visual he discusses underlining, highlighting, and doodling – visual ways of engaging with reading and breaking up the uniformity of written text.

He often sets two readings each week, one harder and one easier so students can choose.

He also gives people a task that is more visual to help elucidate meaning from within the reading. If the class is on society, for example, he may ask them to bring in an image that they feel represents 'society', which provides something tangible to apply and explore the more abstract ideas from within a written text.

Students discuss the reading in class in pairs and small groups, and along with the objects, art works or other examples, work together to help make sense of the topic. Other techniques, such as mindmaps, are often used to explore what key words *actually* mean, for example eg 'society', 'politics', to bring out an initial definition of terms. Importantly, the words we use regularly may differ in definition set out in a dictionary, or original, etymological meanings. Often the students find it interesting to compare everyday *working* uses of words and more formal definitions.

Overall, Ian looks to make the text more visual and explore reading as a practical exercise; to emphasise that texts are not precious objects but can be written, drawn on and pulled apart to find meaning and comprehension.

Delegating and writing on Health and Social Care level 2

Many students in Connie Stapleton's class are at level 1 in their literacy skills. Connie is dyslexic herself and has difficulty with spelling. So she delegates. For example she used the word *embellish* recently. They discussed what it meant. One student looked it up in the dictionary, as usual. They wrote it up on the board. This approach she felt created a 'feeling of mutualness in the class and of team effort, of humour and friendliness'.

Connie once used the word 'scribe'. They weren't sure it was a real word. So once again they

consulted a dictionary and found it should be using 'scribe'. They also looked up the origins of the word to fully understand its significance.

Students have workbooks to complete. At the beginning of the course Connie asks students to consider what the difference is between 'Describing', 'Listing' and 'Explaining'. She gives them example pieces of writing to help marry the style of writing with the tasks set in the workbook.

Scaling in Fine Art

Chris Hough tackles the problem of scaling an image in a student's sketchbook (A5) up to a larger drawing (A2 or A1). He finds if students try and use measurement they get lost. Instead he uses the fact that paper sizes are regular and double each size (so A4 is exactly double A5; A3 is double A4 etc)

He gets students to mark the points where the drawing touches the edges in their sketch book. Then he folds a piece of paper in four to show them their drawing fits into one quarter and they simply need to transfer those points to the whole page. If it is roughly quarter along an edge in their A5 sketch book, it will be roughly quarter on A1. Once students grasp this, they can then use measurement to check their scaling.

Following instructions in Animation and Cartooning

Litza Jansz's students often have difficulty with reading and find it hard to follow written instructions. She has to teach sequences and processes on the computer. She finds that using demonstrations well enables all her students to learn: assertively requesting attention of the whole group, staging demonstrations in manageable chunks, pointing at icons clearly to identify them and their function, revising using fun activities such as quizzes, 'spin the bottle' or 'phone a friend'.

She gives notes using lots of pictures to help students remember the sequence and revises regularly. She encourages peer help and support. Once someone has conquered a new technique she introduces them to the rest of the group as 'the expert' and encourages them to demonstrate to others.

Litza demonstrates how good teaching practice can enable those with literacy difficulties to learn.

Learning the language of your subject

One of the key ways we can all support English is by ensuring learners can use the language of our subject. Even educationally confident learners need to engage with new words and meanings.

Many teachers give out glossaries, but this is not a very 'active' way of ensuring all students engage with terminology confidently and use it. Some ideas:

Put a '**word of the week**' on the whiteboard each week. Ask students to discuss what it means. You could also ask them to look up its origins, or find the equivalent in their home language. This serves as revision, and creates a deeper understanding of the term.

Create a **poster** of key terms and put on the wall. Refer to it regularly.

Use **starter activities**. Prepare a set of cards with key terms, and another set with definitions. Have two groups, one with terminology cards and the other with definition cards. Ask people to find their 'partner' matching definitions to terms.

Prefixes and Suffixes in anatomy and physiology

Tahlecion Jaay and colleagues in Health and Lifestyle regularly teach prefixes and suffixes to help students with the names of movements and parts of the body.

ad - adduction - adding to the midline of the body

ad—adrenal' - adding to the renal (kidney)

ab - abduction - taking away from the midline of the body

'But I do that without thinking' says Alan Billington in Health and Lifestyle. But that is developing English! Small things we do make a difference.

This newsletter is written by Wendy Moss, with help from **Anna Ritchie**, the link person for Cross College and English and Maths. Contact Anna.Ritchie@citylit.ac.uk for advice on embedding. Thanks to all the teachers who contributed to this issue.