

CCCC Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers

Part One: General Statement

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) recognizes the presence of a growing number of second-language writers in institutions of higher education across North America. As a result of colleges and universities actively seeking to increase the diversity of the student population, second-language writers have become an integral part of higher education, including writing programs.

Second-language writers are found in writing programs at all levels—from basic writing and first-year composition to professional writing and writing across the curriculum—as well as in writing centers. Although providing additional linguistic support in the forms of intensive language programs and special second-language sections of writing courses may be helpful they will not remove the responsibility of writing teachers, researchers, and administrators to address second-language issues because the acquisition of a second language and second-language literacy is a time-consuming process that will continue through students' academic career and beyond.

Second-language writers include international visa students, refugees, and permanent residents as well as naturalized and native-born citizens of the United States and Canada. Many of them have grown up speaking languages other than English at home, in their communities, and in schools; others began to acquire English at a very young age and have used it alongside their native

language. To many, English may be the third, fourth or fifth language. Many second-language writers are highly literate in their first language, while others have never learned to write in their mother tongue. Some are even native speakers of languages without a written form.

Second-language writers—who have come from a wide variety of linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds—may have special needs because the nature and functions of discourse, audience, and persuasive appeals often differ across linguistic, cultural and educational contexts. Furthermore, most second-language writers are still in the process of acquiring syntactic and lexical competence—a process that will take a lifetime. These differences are often a matter of degree, and not all second-language writers face the same set of difficulties. While some native speakers of English may face similar difficulties, those experienced by second-language writers are often more intense.

For these reasons, we urge writing teachers and writing program administrators to recognize the regular presence of second-language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs. We also urge graduate programs in writing-related fields to offer courses in second-language writing theory, research, and instruction in order to prepare writing teachers and scholars for working with a college student population that is increasingly diverse both linguistically and culturally.

We also stress the need for further investigations into issues surrounding second-language writing and writers in the context of writing programs. Since those issues permeate all aspects of writing theory, research, and instruction—from textual features and composing processes to collaborative strategies and writing assessment, we encourage scholars and researchers of writing to include second-language perspectives in developing theories, designing studies, analyzing data, and discussing implications.

Part Two: Guidelines for Writing Programs

Placement

Decisions regarding the placement of second-language writers into writing courses should be based on students' writing proficiency rather than their race, native-language background, nationality, or immigration status. Nor should the decisions be based solely on the scores from standardized tests of general language proficiency or of spoken language proficiency. Instead, scores from the di-

rect assessment of students' writing proficiency should be used, and multiple writing samples should be consulted whenever possible. Writing programs should work toward making a wide variety of placement options available—including mainstreaming, basic writing, and second-language writing as well as courses that systematically integrate native and nonnative speakers of English. Furthermore, writing programs should inform students of the advantages and disadvantages of each placement option so that students can make informed decisions.

Assessment

Writing prompts for placement and exit exams should avoid cultural references that are not readily understood by people who come from various cultural backgrounds. To reduce the risk of evaluating students on the basis of their cultural knowledge rather than their writing proficiency, students should be given several writing prompts to choose from when appropriate. The scoring of second-language texts should take into consideration various aspects of writing (e.g., topic development, organization, grammar, word choice), rather than focus only on one or two of these features that stand out as problematic.

Class Size

Since working with second-language writers often requires additional feedback and conference time with the instructor, enrollments in mainstream writing classes with a substantial number of second-language writers should be reduced; in classes made up exclusively of second-language writers, enrollments should be limited to a maximum of 15 students per class.

Credit

Second-language sections of composition courses should be offered for credit that can be used toward satisfying the writing requirement. Second-language writing courses prerequisite to required composition courses should be offered for credit that can be used toward satisfying the foreign-language requirement and should receive the same credit accorded other prerequisite composition courses.

Teacher Preparation

Any writing course—including basic writing, first-year composition, advanced writing, and professional writing as well as second-language writing courses—that enrolls any second-language writers should be taught by a writing teacher

who is able to identify and is prepared to address the linguistic and cultural needs of second-language writers.

Teacher Support

Writing programs should offer pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs in teaching second-language writing. Writing programs should also provide resources for writing teachers, including textbooks and readers on the teaching of second-language writing as well as reference materials such as dictionaries and grammar handbooks for language learners. Moreover, writing programs should encourage—and offer incentives for—writing teachers to attend workshops on teaching second-language writers that are presented at professional conferences such as CCCC and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Part Three: Selected Bibliography

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The Executive Committee of the CCCC approved the Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers in November 2000. The statement was also endorsed by the TESOL Board of Directors at their February 2001 meeting.

Members of the CCCC Committee on Second Language Writing are: Paul Kei Matsuda, Chair; Akua Duku Anokye; Christine Pearson Casanave; Helen Fox; Tony Silva; Guadalupe Valdés; and Bob Weissberg.