

Creating an Inclusive Syllabus: Best Practices and Tips

Co-Authored by The USC Writing Program's MLL Support Committee
along with The Diversity Committee

1. **Explicitly include a list of resources for MLL students in your syllabus.** Here is an example statement that can be included on a USC syllabus:

Resources for Multilingual Language Learners

MLLs bring diverse linguistic and cultural knowledge to our classroom and offer perspectives that make our class discussions and writing richer. For MLLs and international students seeking support, the University offers resources for MLLs and international students to address challenges related and unrelated to writing.

- **Writing Center** (<https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>)
 - The Writing Center is an incredibly valuable, FREE resource available to all USC students. The Writing Center offers 30-minute, one-on-one appointments with trained consultants. The staff will work with you on any stage of the writing process, from interpreting a prompt, to creating a rough plan, to polishing your final draft. The Writing Center consultants will not proofread or edit your paper for you, but they *will* help you to develop skills to revise your own work. Have the writing prompt (the assignment instructions) and specific questions ready when you meet with the consultant. Visit the Writing Center's website to make an appointment.
- **American Language Institute** (<https://ali.usc.edu/>)
 - Since 1959, the American Language Institute (ALI) has been providing English language instruction, assessment, and resources to support the academic and professional success of non-native speakers of English pursuing degrees at USC. The ALI offers English language courses for those students who want to improve their English as well as those who are required to take classes as a result of taking the International Student English (ISE) exam.
- **The Conversation Groups Program** (<https://ali.usc.edu/conversation-groups/>)
 - The American Language Institute's Conversation Groups Program aims at promoting English conversation between USC's international and native English-speaking populations. This free resource is an excellent way for international students to supplement their studies; it provides a venue in which they can practice their growing English skills with a native English-speaking USC student in



a casual environment. Past participants have reported an improvement in their English speaking fluency, a comfort in interacting with English native speakers, and a higher level of confidence in the English language.

- **One-on-One Conversation Partners** (<https://ali.usc.edu/one-on-one-conversation-partners/>)
 - The One-on-One Partners page, provided through the American Language Institute’s website, provides the opportunity to sign up for one-on-one conversation partner sessions by filling out conversation partner request form. These meetings give international USC students the opportunity to practice their
 - oral skills one-on-one with a native English speaker. The mandatory cost for these private sessions is \$15 per hour (60 minutes) and is non negotiable.
- **English Tutors** (<https://ali.usc.edu/find-an-english-tutor/>)
 - The American Language Institute also provides a list of recommended English tutors and their rates.
- **Office of International Services** (<http://ois.usc.edu>)
 - The Office of International Services (OIS) supports international students and scholars as they strive to achieve their educational, professional, and personal objectives. OIS is a resource center that provides advising, information, and opportunities for involvement to help members of the USC international community make the most of their USC experience. Recognizing the many benefits of international educational exchange, OIS advocates for these benefits on campus, locally and nationally. Their contact information is ois@usc.edu or (213) 740-2666.

2. **Explicitly include an anti-racism and anti-bias statement in your syllabus.** Here’s an example created by the USC Writing Program’s Diversity Committee:

Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias Statement, USC Writing Program Diversity Committee

We are dedicated to anti-bias in and out of the classroom. We wholeheartedly stand against racism, dehumanization, oppression, colonization, xenophobia, and white supremacy. Silence on matters of injustice is not an option.

We acknowledge that oppression and dehumanization can occur consciously and unconsciously; it is important to have patience with each other. But we must also commit to the lifelong work of deconstructing our unconscious and conscious biases; dismantling racist institutions; and creating an academic environment that rejects white supremacy in all its forms.

Even further, academic writing has historically been a tool for oppression. It has encouraged standardization originally based in whiteness – and so we must ask, “Who set those standards? Why do we value only those standards? And as writers, how can we reform the standards?”

Anti-racism/bias is, in fact, intrinsic to the goals of multimodal, multilingual, and decolonized writing and research.

As a writing class, we will actively engage in self-reflection to look inward and examine where our conscious and unconscious biases are rooted. We will encourage and support each other's journeys. We will cultivate authentic voices; interrogate our policies and practices; and commit to continually educating ourselves to provide an educational experience that is anti-racist, humanized, and celebrates intersectional identities. With collaboration, we will create an anti-bias classroom.

Some ways we will pursue anti-racism and anti-bias in our class:

- Engage in open, honest, and at times uncomfortable discussions confronting institutionalized racism and bias; and be accountable to one another in the acknowledging, confronting, and dismantling
- Work together to become comfortable with discomfort; realizing that our culture prioritizes comfort, and especially white comfort. Anti-bias work will be uncomfortable; especially for those of us who have benefitted from whiteness ideologies
- Actively respect, at all times, people's race and ethnicity, socioeconomic backgrounds, nationalities, immigration status, sexual and gender identities and/or expressions, abilities, and other aspects of identity – in assignments, discussions, language, behavior
- Learn and be attentive to how intersecting identities impact classroom dynamics; and equally value through assessment, feedback, and assignments intersecting identities
- Engage in collaborative, multimodal, and intersectional work as a class – anti-bias and anti-racism is lifelong work that must be communal to take root
- Elevate the voices of historically oppressed and marginalized groups through assignments, discussion, and feedback

3. **Explicitly address how the class community might navigate microaggressions that arise in the classroom.** This type of statement can appear in the syllabus and then launch an important early class discussion about how the class community would like to respond to issues of implicit bias. Here is an example statement written by USC Writing Program instructors Dr. Chris Belcher and Missy Rogers:

Navigating Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults towards individuals with marginalized or oppressed identities ([Derald Wing Sue](#)).

Another way to think of microaggression is that bigotry can take direct and indirect forms ([Natalie Wynn, ContraPoints](#)). In its direct forms, it arises as open content, slurs, discrimination, demonizing, shunning, subordination, and violence. Indirect forms of bigotry appear or are

described often as “concern,” “debate” of proxy issues, “defending x,” “law and order,” “political correctness,” “cancel culture.” Because our USC Principles of Community calls for awareness of bigotry, it is crucial to maintain awareness of bigotry in *all of its forms*, including microaggressions.

Verbal microaggressions may not be *intended* to be malicious, “but over time they can lead to a toxic environment that precludes feelings of belonging” ([Rebekah Bastian](#)). To understand the damaging effects that can lead to a toxic classroom environment, we should acknowledge the difference between *intent* and *impact*.

Intent	Example	Impact
You want to recognize the way your classmate’s gender presentation matches her identity.	“I never would have guessed you were trans, you look normal!”	In order for you to see and respect your classmate, they have to present in a way you deem ‘normal.’
You want to compliment a classmate’s insight into an issue you’re discussing in small groups.	“Wow, you’re so articulate!”	You’re surprised that your classmate speaks and thinks the way she does, given that she is an international student from Korea.
You notice that your classmate wears a lot of USC gear to class, seems to have a lot of school spirit.	“Are you here on an athletic scholarship?”	You believe that black male students are only admitted to the university on account of athleticism.
You want your classmate to understand that you are on her side and recognize her identity.	“My cousin is queer and her high school was super supportive.”	All queer identified people are the same and our experiences are interchangeable. You don’t need to hear your classmate’s stories because you have already heard someone else’s.

Ground rules for navigating microaggressions in the classroom

OUCH OOPS

- If something happens in class with another student (or with me) that makes you feel uncomfortable, consider speaking up.
 - A simple way to do so is to say “ouch,” but other verbal interventions are welcome.

- See [“Calling Out vs. Calling In”](#) for more language you might use.
- If someone says “ouch” in class, or otherwise lets you know that you have harmed them, apologize in the moment with an “oops.” This is an acknowledgment of responsibility, but it is just the beginning.
 - Follow up your apology with research. The person you hurt may not feel like explaining why your comment or action hurt. It’s your responsibility to seek out resources to educate yourself and figure out how you might do better going forward. If you need help finding resources, email me.
 - Do not seek validation from the person you harmed after re-educating yourself. Just do your best not to repeat the harm.
- This tool is for taking *collective responsibility*. We all have to contribute to creating an anti-oppressive learning environment, even if/when we are speaking from positions of privilege.
 - It is therefore fine to call out (or “call in”) a racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or ableist comment, even if you’re not sure if there is a person who identifies with that marginalized identity in the room.
- If you are not comfortable acknowledging an uncomfortable experience in the moment, please consider reaching out to me after class via email.
- Anonymous feedback is also an option if you are not comfortable speaking to me directly: [\[sample Google form\]](#)
- If you’ve acknowledged a microaggression in class or via email, I will follow up with you to take note of 1) what happened? 2) who may have been hurt and how? and 3) what needs to be done to address it?
 - You should feel empowered but not obligated to participate in the accountability process. Ignore the email if you don’t have the energy to provide a teaching moment.
- I will do my best to be aware of these moments as they arise and do my part as a classroom moderator to revisit our anti-bias classroom statement (on syllabus) as needed.

Document developed and revised from the [JMU Writing Center tool “Navigating Microaggressions”](#) by Missy Rogers and Chris Belcher, IDD Thematic 2020-21

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4. **Explicitly welcome all students and voices into your classroom on the syllabus.** Here are a few examples of how you might do this written by USC Writing Program faculty members:

“Unfortunately, many myths surround the writing process. First is that there’s only one way to write or that you have to sound formal and ‘smart.’ While that style is fine for some, the truth is, your writing might improve the more you incorporate your own voice in it. Remember, writing is about engaging audiences, and our words and style should be adapted to whoever we’re talking to.”--Dr. Zen Dochterman, Writing 150 Globalization Thematic syllabus (Fall 2021)

“I care about what **everyone** has to say. While I recognize that people have varying levels of comfort around speaking in a room full of people, discussion is a crucial part of this class: the more freely we share our thoughts, observations, and insights, the more interesting and productive our meetings will be. In short, we’ll learn more—and have a more enjoyable time doing it—if everyone contributes. Let me know if there is anything I can do to support you contributing more in class.”--Dr. Zen Dochterman, Writing 150 Globalization Thematic syllabus (Fall 2021)

“Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we’ll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.”--Professor Brent Chappelow, Writing 150 Globalization Thematic syllabus (Fall 2019)

If the course content is primarily centered on the United States (for example, the Writing 150 thematic “Identity and Diversity in American Contexts”), **explicitly welcome international and non-U.S. perspectives in your syllabus**, as well as repeating this welcome on assignment sheets and during class discussions. Here is an example from a USC Writing Program faculty member Corinna Schroeder’s syllabus:

“Please note that while we will often discuss sustainability within the context of the U.S. in this course, I always welcome global perspectives in our class discussions and your writing projects.”