Communicating with international students: 
10 top tips for library staff

"International students may experience difficulty with: accents; individual sounds in English; individual words; vocabulary; unfamiliar pronunciation; the rhythm of English; sounding polite."

Dawn Leggott, Workshop on language awareness when working with international students. Leeds Metropolitan University, 2011.

1. Slow down your speech (but not too much!) International students will feel grateful for this, not patronised.

2. Don't raise your voice, keep your tone measured.

3. If an international student doesn't understand what you have said, repeat it without any modification. Try to avoid reformulating or changing the sentence.

4. Stress the key words in a sentence and use intonation - a rising voice - to ask a question.

5. Use written instructions where possible, and if necessary ask students to write things down (e.g. when asking questions at the Helpdesk).
6. Body language is important. Offer eye contact, and smile.

7. Don't point at people / things, use an open hand gesture. Pointing is rude in some cultures.

8. When you are explaining something, consider whether you can use simpler language than the word / phrase you want to communicate. Try to ensure the vocabulary you use is not too sophisticated.

9. Use plain English and straightforward sentence structure. One way is by cutting out introductory clauses (‘So, whilst not wishing to underestimate the importance of xxx, I think it is important to stress yyy’). Another is by choosing vocabulary that is in common use as in ‘living in’ rather than ‘domiciled at’ (HEA, 2013). Avoid colloquialisms.

10. Improve your cultural awareness by watching the UKCISA video Bridging our Worlds [http://catalogue.shu.ac.uk/record=b1560901~S11a](http://catalogue.shu.ac.uk/record=b1560901~S11a)

"In this DVD students from across the globe talk frankly about the things that have surprised, puzzled and challenged them about living and studying in the UK. British students and staff also reflect on the issues facing international students, how they can help with the adjustment process…”
([http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/material_media/pubs_crosscultural.php](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/material_media/pubs_crosscultural.php))

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**Teaching international students:**

**10 top tips for library staff**

"You will help if you use straightforward terms and avoid metaphors, puns, jokes and verbal acrobatics (a metaphor!). If you complete your words, taking care to pronounce the last consonant, this will slow you down without losing the shape of the phrase. Allow silences and be willing to repeat what you said."

(Carroll, 2002)
1. Think about the search examples you are using, will they be known by
international students or are they part of UK culture?

2. Group / paired work encourages a "safe" environment that international students
may feel they can contribute to more easily.

3. Giving information in a visual format may help understanding, but ensure what you
are using is not UK culture specific.

4. Make sure all instructions you give are simple. Stress keywords. Written
instructions can help.

5. Explain the exact purpose of doing something, if you can provide a model or
example this may make it easier.

6. Write up new terms, abbreviations and acronyms on the board to ensure these are
understood.

7. "Try to read one of the several guides to teaching and learning for international
students, especially anything written by Jude Carroll and Jeanette Ryan. If you only
have half an hour to spare, try Carroll (2002). If you have a little longer, try Ryan
(2000)" (Warwick, 2012)


9. Use pauses to get attention, and for emphasis before or after a key concept or
idea. (Gross-Davis, 2009).

10. Use the top tips for communication above.

**SHU blog:**

International network at Sheffield Hallam University: a resource for staff

[https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/internationalnetwork/](https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/internationalnetwork/)

**Further reading**

CARROLL, J. (2002) *Suggestions for teaching international students more effectively.*
OCSLD. [online] Last accessed 20th March 2013 at:

[http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/resources/briefing_papers/international_stu
dents.pdf](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/resources/briefing_papers/international_stu
dents.pdf)


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**With thanks to contributions from:**

Josie Taylor - University English Scheme, Sheffield Hallam University

Viv Thom - Education Developer, Student Experience Team, QESS, Sheffield Hallam, University

Dawn Leggott - Principal Lecturer English Language Teaching, Leeds Metropolitan University

Liam Bullingham - Learning & Information Services, Sheffield Hallam University

Yorkshire and Humberside University Librarians’ International Student Support Group (see their blog at [http://yhuliss.wordpress.com/](http://yhuliss.wordpress.com/) )