

ENGLISH AND ESL -- WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

FACT SHEET

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Many ESL students have trouble deciding whether to take ESL classes or English classes.

There are many differences between English and ESL professors -- differences in how we have been trained, what we teach, and what we expect from our students.

English and ESL professors are trained in the following:

ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING

1. Literature
2. Literary criticism/theory
3. Rhetorical argumentation
4. Composition (writing paragraphs, essays, research papers)

ESL TEACHER TRAINING

1. Linguistics/language acquisition
2. Teaching languages
3. Bilingualism/Cross cultural issues
4. Grammar and Composition
(writing sentences, paragraphs, essays, research papers)
5. Listening and speaking skills
6. Reading skills

What happens in the classroom? What kinds of things are taught?

IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

1. Composition (writing essays)
2. Critical thinking skills
3. Rhetorical argumentation
4. Vocabulary (advanced)
5. Grammar for native speakers
6. Literature
7. Literary criticism/analysis
(in literature classes)

IN THE ESL CLASS

1. Grammar, basic through advanced
2. Composition skills, basic through advanced
3. Spelling and punctuation
4. Reading skills, basic through advanced
(Some literature in advanced classes)
5. Critical thinking skills
6. Pronunciation
7. Vocabulary, basic through advanced
8. US culture

If you are a native speaker of English, or a bilingual English speaker who has a strong command of English grammar, English classes are for you.

If you are a bilingual English speaker who needs help with grammar, take ESL classes, especially grammar and writing.

If you are a bilingual English speaker who needs help with pronunciation and understanding native English speakers, take ESL listening and speaking classes.

LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE
FACT SHEET

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Learning a second (or third) language is a long and difficult process, which is often misunderstood.

Misconceptions about learning English as a second language:

It is NOT true that:

1. Children and adults learn English the same way.
2. Adults only need a couple of classes to become proficient at English.
3. Adults can figure out English grammar or vocabulary all by themselves.
4. Adults can "get by" with a minimal English vocabulary.
5. A good English speaker is necessarily a good writer.
6. Anyone who speaks English can teach the English language.

FACTS

1. Children learn their first language intuitively. They are like fresh sponges that soak up whatever language they are exposed to. Babies and toddlers do not analyze their first language; they merely absorb it.

Most adults, on the other hand, need formal instruction in order to become proficient in a second language.

2. It takes 5-7 years for children to learn the grammar of their native language. It takes an *additional* 5-7 years (10-14 years total) for children to master the complexities and subtleties of grammar, and to gain adult vocabulary. In the US education system, 13 years are allocated for this purpose (grades K - 12). Additional vocabulary learning continues throughout college and afterwards.

While adults can learn many things faster than children can, it nevertheless takes five or more years for ESL students to achieve *college level proficiency* in English.

The ESL program at SCC is divided into six levels spanning three years. This is less than half of the time actually required for the average adult to become proficient in *college level* English.

See over

3. English grammar or vocabulary can be very puzzling to ESL students. Often, English learners misunderstand words or sentences in ways that would never occur to native English speakers.
4. English has a huge vocabulary. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., contains over 600,000 words. It has been estimated that college educated individuals know about 100,000 words. ESL students need time and assistance in learning English vocabulary.
5. Speaking English well does not mean that the speaker can also read and/or write well. Reading and writing are skills that need to be learned and developed.
6. Teaching English as a Second Language requires special training in linguistics, language acquisition, phonology, grammar, and language teaching methodology. ESL teachers at SCC must have at least a master's degree in the field.

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