

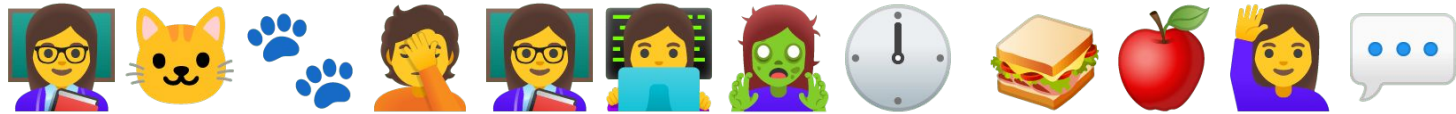
Linguistic Bias in Grading

Friday, November 5th, 2021

Eric VanDemark
Lauren Anderson



Welcome! While People are Arriving...



What have you done today? How are you feeling?

Write an emoji story in the chat! No text.

Copy+paste if you don't have the keyboard:

<https://getemoji.com/>

Agenda

- Welcome / Emoji Stories
- Introductions, Objectives, & FPE criteria
- Language Acknowledgement
- What is College Writing?
- Define Linguistic Bias
- Introduce a Process
- Practice the Process
- Challenge / Next Steps - Try with your own content



Introductions



Lauren Anderson

Assistant Professor of
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Objectives

Content	Language	Professional
Reflect on our own language bias in relation to grading written work	Determine which aspects of language are essential to our assignment/content	Analyze our content through the lens of language

Things we're going to do...

- Discuss: What is college writing?
- Define linguistic bias
- Practice a process for grading to reduce linguistic bias
- Discuss next steps & resources for further work



Goal Connection

This workshop aligns with the following Professional Practice rubric criteria:

1.1 Develops a knowledge-base of culturally relevant teaching practices that are asset-based, supportive, and inclusionary of our diverse student body.

1.2 Investigates and experiments with innovative approaches to teaching and learning - for example evidence-based instructional strategies, educational technological applications, inclusive practices, and student-centered pedagogies.



Language Acknowledgment

- [Bodwéwadmimwen \(Potawotami\)](#)
- [Illinois \(Kaskaskia and Peoria\)](#)
- [Kickapoo](#)
- [Ho-Chunk Winnebago](#)



College Writing vs. Writing in College

What comes to mind when you think of college writing?

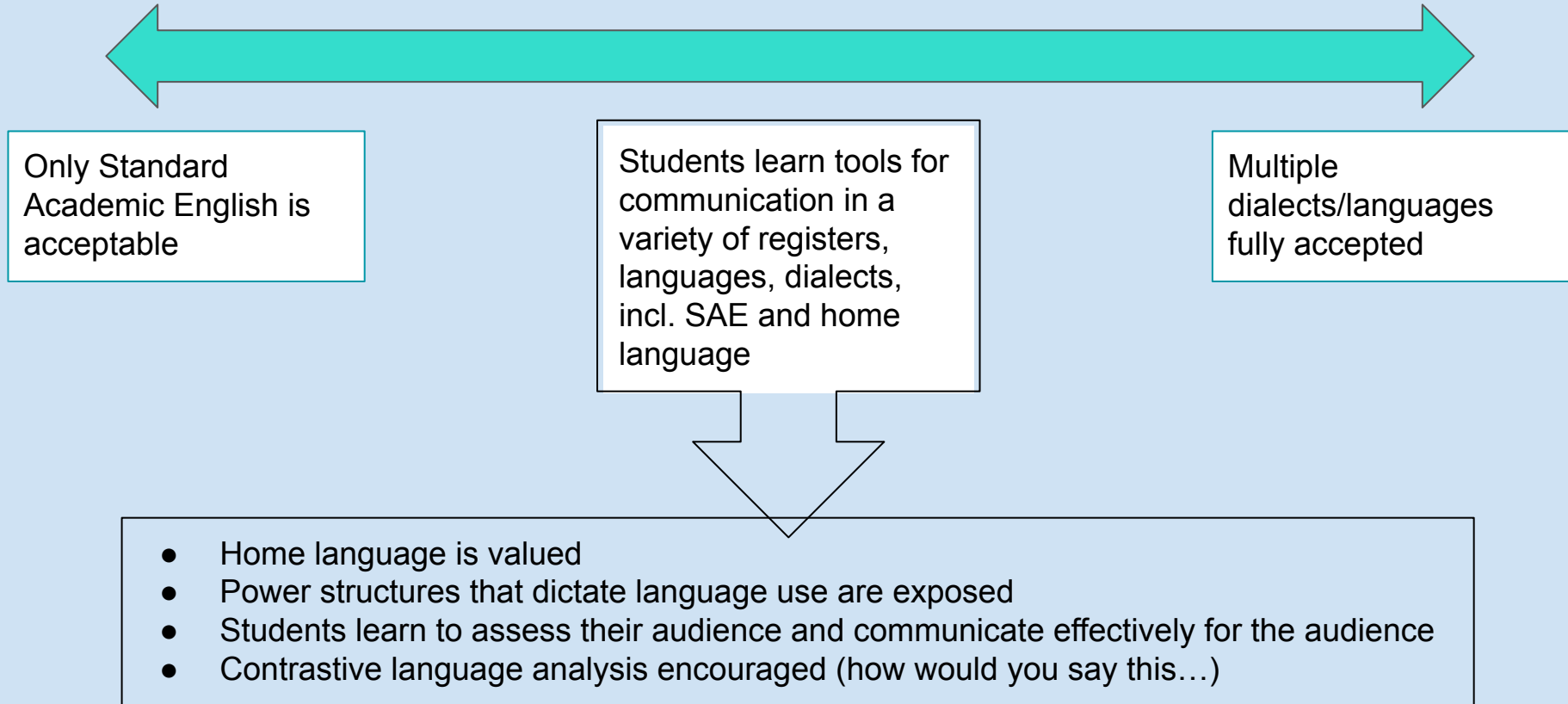
Enter thoughts on [this jamboard!](#)

What expectations do our students have about what college writing is?

Where do these expectations come from?



Common Linguistic Stances on College Writing



What is linguistic bias?

Linguistic bias: The typically implicit reaction of ascribing negative (or positive) qualities to someone because of the sound of their voice, their use of grammar, or other distinguishing language features. (Barros et al., 2018)

People attribute negative stereotypes to people based on their language

“So much sounded like **white trash**”

“**caveman** speak i typically rated low”

“Seems very **southern** and makes me feel a bit **gross** to hear. I would not want to be associated with a person who speaks this way.”

“This group [of sentences] had more “**urban**” slang.”

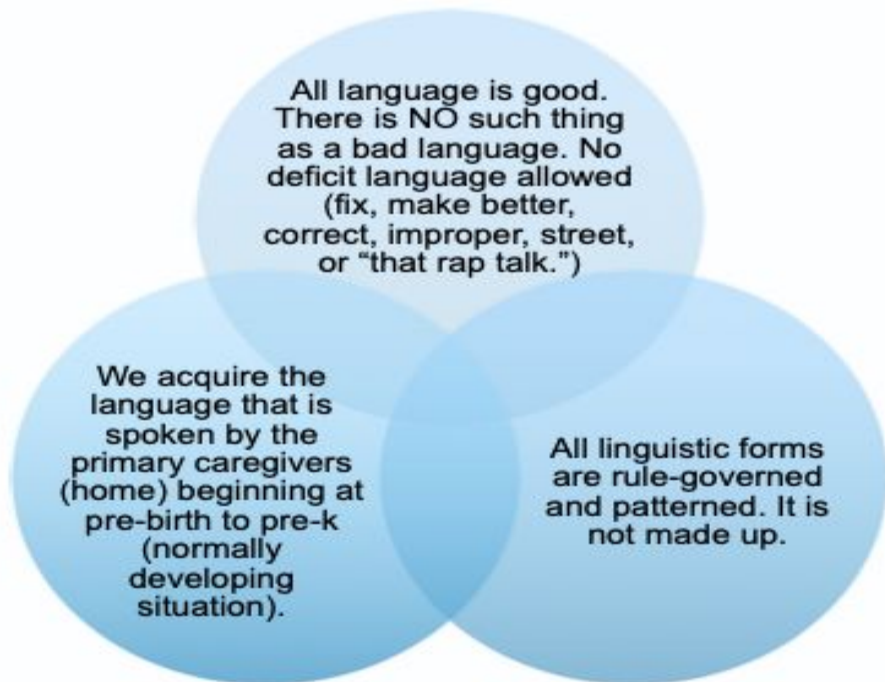
“Many of [these sentences] are common **on the streets**.”

(Barros et al., 2018)





Three Linguistic Absolutes



Linguistic Bias and Grading

- Language--and in particular writing--is a primary way we assess student learning
- Assessment is particularly susceptible to linguistic and cultural biases
- How can we mitigate this?
- How can we identify the aspects of language that are needed to express ideas about the content, the aspects that support in expressing ideas, and the aspects are extraneous (and can be minimized and removed)?



To Sum Up...

We are NOT saying...

- That you should lower expectations for student writing
- That you should ignore rubric criteria
- That you need to be an expert writing instructor

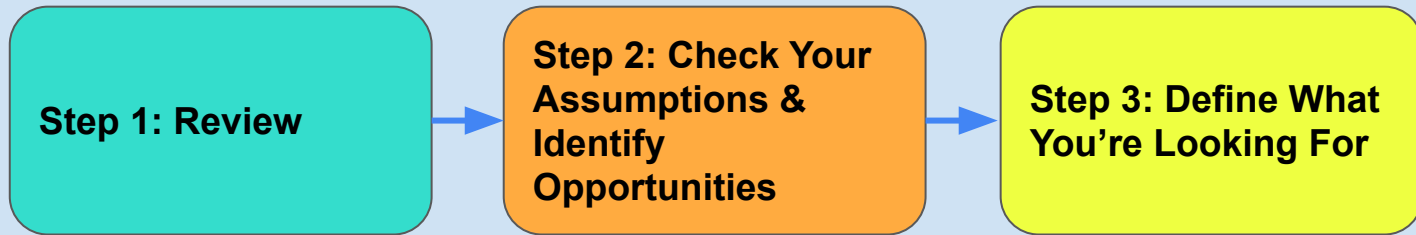
We ARE saying...

- You can expand what you celebrate & reaffirm
- You have a choice of where you focus your feedback
- You are a teacher of the language your content



Minimizing Linguistic Bias: A Process

1. Review
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities
3. Define What You're Looking for



Review

Step 1: Review

Review the following:

- Assignment instructions
- Rubric criteria
- What aspects have been taught? What has not been covered?
- If there was a norming session, review the notes

Also reflect on:

- Course goals
- Audience, purpose, & context of the assignment

Check / Identify

Step 2: Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities

Check Your Assumptions

- What are my conscious or unconscious expectations?
- What is explicitly required by the assessment criteria? What is ambiguous?
- Where might my preferences or the status quo impact the assessment?

Identify Opportunities

- Within this assignment & it's criteria, what is the range of acceptable responses (moving beyond the status quo and preferences)?
- How might I shift my assessment focus to be more equitable & inclusive?
- How could I open the assignment to accommodate (and ideally celebrate) a diverse range of language & culture?

Define

**Step 3: Define What
You're Looking For**

Consider the previous steps and define:

Content

- What is the specific content knowledge that I need to see demonstrated?
- What is the range of ways that a student could demonstrate this?

Language

- What discipline- and context-specific language do I need to see?
- Discourse, syntax, vocabulary (what is most important to this assignment?)

Example: Psychology Milestone B2Y [Sample linked here](#)

1. Review	• Write a one to three page (500-700 word) developmental analysis of the book you chose to analyze. • Assignment instructions: Linked here	
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities	• My expectations: Formal language - looks like a “college paper” • Required: Fairly brief, APA template, developmental analysis (connect the text to specific phases of childhood development) Ambiguous: Style • Impact of my preferences: Might get focused on the language, style, & citation to the exclusion of larger content issues	• Alternatives: Need to see required aspects, but style could be more open • Shift: Focus my feedback on the content & share “connecting” language, look for connections even if they aren’t written as expected; allow a revision • How to open up: Meet the language where it is and build from there
3. Define What You’re Looking For	Content: lifespan development and culture; developmental issues; connection between this text & concepts of lifespan development	Language: analysis- complex sentences, complex/compound sentences, explicit connections

Grading Writing for Content

Practice!

We'll split into groups and review student examples.

Focus on: step 2 of the protocol -- checking assumptions and thinking about opportunities in the assignment

- ★ Room 1 > History F2Y
- ★ Room 2 > Career B2Y
- ★ Room 3 > English F2Y

Materials/instructions in following slides

Focus on step 2

Read the first paragraph

Room 1: History Milestones F2Y [Sample linked here](#)

1. Review	• Assignment instructions • Rubric criteria	
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities	• What are my conscious or unconscious expectations? • What is explicitly required by the assessment criteria? What is ambiguous? • Where might my preferences or the status quo impact the assessment?	• Within this assignment & it's criteria, what is the range of acceptable responses (moving beyond the status quo and preferences)? • How might I shift my assessment focus to be more equitable & inclusive? • How could I open the assignment to accommodate (and ideally celebrate) a diverse range of language & culture?
3. Define What You Are Looking For	Content	Language

Room 2: Career Milestones [Sample one](#) [Sample two](#)

1. Review	• Assignment instructions • Course goals • Audience, purpose, & context of the assignment	
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities	• What are my conscious or unconscious expectations? • What is explicitly required by the assessment criteria? What is ambiguous? • Where might my preferences or the status quo impact the assessment?	• Within this assignment & it's criteria, what is the range of acceptable responses (moving beyond the status quo and preferences)? • How might I shift my assessment focus to be more equitable & inclusive? • How could I open the assignment to accommodate (and ideally celebrate) a diverse range of language & culture?
3. Define What You Are Looking For	Content	Language

Room 3: English [Student sample linked here](#)

1. Review	• Assignment instructions • Course goals • Audience, purpose, & context of the assignment	
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities	• What are my conscious or unconscious expectations? • What is explicitly required by the assessment criteria? What is ambiguous? • Where might my preferences or the status quo impact the assessment?	• Within this assignment & it's criteria, what is the range of acceptable responses (moving beyond the status quo and preferences)? • How might I shift my assessment focus to be more equitable & inclusive? • How could I open the assignment to accommodate (and ideally celebrate) a diverse range of language & culture?
3. Define What You Are Looking For	Content	Language

Reflection

- What is something everyone seemed to **agree** on?
- What challenged your **assumptions**?
- Taking into account your group reflection, what will you **aspire** to do differently in the future?
- Anything else that you want to **acknowledge**?

Template! Your assignment:

1. Review	• Assignment instructions • Rubric criteria • Course goals • Audience, purpose, & context of the assignment	
2. Check Your Assumptions & Identify Opportunities	• What are my conscious or unconscious expectations? • What is explicitly required by the assessment criteria? What is ambiguous? • Where might my preferences or the status quo impact the assessment?	• Within this assignment & it's criteria, what is the range of acceptable responses (moving beyond the status quo and preferences)? • How might I shift my assessment focus to be more equitable & inclusive? • How could I open the assignment to accommodate (and ideally celebrate) a diverse range of language & culture?
3. Define What You Are Looking For	Content	Language

Many Thanks!



Feedback from participants

[Survey link](#)

Please fill out this short survey to help me gather information about practices around language at NLU. I will use it for the purpose of my research as well as advising on future PD offerings. Thank you in advance for your help.

Content	Language	Professional
Reflect on my own language bias in relation to grading writing	Determine which aspects of language are essential to my assignment/content	Analyze my content through the lens of language

References

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[Click here for a resource-filled interactive Padlet](#)

