What does an IELTS 6.0 student look like … and how can we help support these students?

Laura Haseley, Centre for Languages

The IELTS band 6.0

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is a test of English language proficiency. The test is used in education, employment, and immigration. The IELTS band 6.0 is considered as an intermediate level of English proficiency. This band level is often required by tertiary institutions for admission and by employers for certain positions.

Reasons why students do not understand what is required

- No previous contact with higher education so not familiar with the conventions of academic life (e.g., what an essay is, deadlines, attendance, critical thinking, time management, etc.)
- Different academic conventions in different institutions
- Different academic conventions in different areas (e.g., referencing, layout, academic writing style, and use of vary from subject to subject)
- Even the same subject can be taught differently.

Be explicit about assessments

- How much time should you take to do the assignment?
- When should you start?
- What is the marking criteria?
- Are there examples of good assignments?
- What will cause you to fail (e.g., plagiarism, and so on)?
- Be explicit about how you mark English

If we can do one thing, what should it be?

Be explicit

- Are you marking English? i.e. will a student be marked down for poor English?
- Is the competence of a sentence greater than the competence of plagiarism or cheating?
- Is there a marking English, what are you marking?
- Do you want assignments to be proof read?
- Do you want students to improve their English during the programme?

Be explicit about your course expectations and learning

Many students don’t understand where the information is supposed to come from, or indeed that they need to learn information and think critically, not just complete assignments.

What do you want from me? Explicitness unpacked

Could you also ...

- Work to ensure that all students have a full management session in their first week or two, where they may see their assessments and feedback and discuss them
- Commit to setting aside a small proportion of your departmental library budget each year that can be spent on English as a second language reference books for the library
- So that students have the resources to study

Could you …?

- Explain to students that you mark on content, but the better a student’s English is, the easier it is to see whether they understand the content.
- Give the student a guide to improving their English in their first class (see band 6.0)
- Tell them that you expect to see an improvement in their English as they go through the programme.

References

www.atlin.org