

# Communicating and Learning in a Globalized Classroom

## SCENARIO 1

Imagine yourself sitting in a classroom where your instructor is from India, your TA is from Vietnam, two thirds of your classmates are from California and other US states, and a third of your classmates are from other countries, including China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico. UC Davis isn't quite this global yet, but we are headed that direction. Are you ready?

### Set your expectations.

- You will have TAs, instructors, and classmates from different parts of the country and the world, and they may not share the same academic expectations and experiences. What will you do?
  - State your expectations and ask instructors to explicitly state theirs.
- They will have accents that may not match yours, but no accent is **better** or **right**. Are you shaking your head and saying "*That's not true*"?
  - Everyone has an accent. The one that sounds right is the one you know best. Growing up, it is normal to correct (or tease) the speech of kids who join our communities so that they learn to speak more like "us." It's part of the acculturation process.
  - At the university, the people around you aren't seeking to join "your community". Instead, at UC Davis we are all joining a community which values education and global awareness. The more accents you know, the better.

## SCENARIO 2

Now imagine that you are in a chemistry discussion section and your international TA has been speaking for almost 20 minutes. You barely understood half of what was said. What do you do?

### Understand your role.

Communication is a shared responsibility in which everyone must do their part. To communicate well with people who speak different varieties of English from yours, there will be times when you have to negotiate meaning. This is a real life skill that you will need after you graduate and enter the workforce, so don't throw up your hands and give up, and don't blame the TA.

## Learn To Negotiate Meaning

### Clarify what you think you heard.

- Restate. “So from what you said, I understand. . . . “
- Indicate where communication failed, “I understood what you were saying up until X, and then. . .”

### Ask questions.

To ensure that you are understood,

- Speak more slowly, not more loudly, and enunciate clearly.
- Phrase your question in academic English; avoid jargon and slang.
- Be prepared to rephrase your question or send it later via email.
- Pause to allow the listener a chance to decode what you have said before rephrasing or adding more information. (This may be difficult, but take a breath and wait.)
- Use the instructor’s or TA’s office hours.

### Be explicit about your learning needs.

If having more visuals, graphs or notes on the board would improve your comprehension, say so. Start with this phrase, "I think it would be easier for me to learn more if there were. . .or if I had . . . ."

Don’t expect massive overnight changes, but most instructors are truly interested in your learning and will work on reasonable adjustments.

### Train your ear.

Your comprehension of different varieties of English can and will improve with practice. If you have little exposure to other accents, seek out opportunities to expand your listening repertoire. You can get that exposure in a number of ways.

- Participate in PAL (Partners in Acquiring Language). This is a conversation program that can match you with other students, and it allows you to designate the language background of the person you desire in a partner.
- Choose to watch and/or listen to English media from that region of the world. Try the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA): <http://www.dialectsarchive.com/>

Expanding your ability to understand a range of English language speakers not only helps you gain more from your academic experience at UC Davis, but also prepares you for the reality of joining a globalized workforce.

“We affirm the inherent dignity in all of us, and we strive to maintain a climate of justice marked by respect for each other.”  
-UC Davis Principles of Community