



ESL STUDENTS AT OCAD

In this booklet, you will meet a number of OCAD ESL students. ESL students at OCAD come from such a diversity of backgrounds that it is hard to say anything general about their experience or needs. ESL students at OCAD may have just recently arrived from their home country or may have been in school in Canada for several years. They may be learning English as a second language or as a fifth. They may have had years of rigorous English grammar classes or may have picked up the language primarily by ear. They may be straight out of high school or may have multiple degrees. They may be away from home for the first time or may be world travellers. The stories on the next page introduce you to a small sample of the kinds of life experience ESL students at OCAD bring with them.

It's difficult even to put a number to how many ESL students there are at OCAD because speaking English as a Second Language can be defined in so many ways. Only some ESL students at OCAD are international students studying here on student visas. Most are landed immigrants or Canadian citizens. Around 28% of our students mark on their application form that they have a language other than English as a "mother tongue." Some of these students though may have learned English as children and may be completely fluent. Conversely, some who learned English "second" but in early childhood may now consider it a mother tongue.

A better question to ask, perhaps, is how many students at OCAD require special language support. We can get a rough estimate of this from the number of first-year students who opt into the ESL sections of OCAD's first-year composition course: about 9%. These are students who are working actively on improving their language skills. Some ESL students opt into other courses, so the percentage of students needing specialized language support is likely somewhat higher.

As you get to know your students, here are some questions you might consider:

How long has the student been in Canada? Some international students may have arrived directly from their home country. They may be experiencing culture shock and may be completely unfamiliar with the conventions and expectations of a North American classroom. Other students may sound like non-native speakers, but may have been here for many years and be well oriented to the North American school system.

What kind of school has the student attended? ESL students who have done some high school in Canada may have some of the same preparation and expectations as other Canadian high school students. Some, however, have been to private language schools in Toronto. These schools offer an Ontario high school diploma, but cater to students from a particular country. Students who have gone

to these schools often have been here for some years but may have remained quite isolated within their home culture and may have limited experience interacting with native speakers socially.

How has the student learned English?

Students who have recently arrived from countries where the first language is not English often have had years of grammar and writing classes, but may have difficulty applying this knowledge in a "live" English speaking environment. On the other hand, students who have spent several years in a Canadian high school have usually picked up the language primarily by ear. They may

sound quite fluent but still be facing challenges with their written grammar or formal written style.

Is the student planning to stay in Canada after graduation? Students who are planning to stay in Canada and those planning to return to their home country will bring different motivations to their learning.

ESL students at OCAD are, above all, students – and bring to their studies the same range of challenges, ambivalences, and hopes as other students. Our challenge is to get to know them.

FAQ

How are ESL students admitted to OCAD?

ESL students must meet the same academic requirements as all OCAD students. In addition, any student who does not speak English as a first language and who has studied in an English language school for less than four years must write a standardized English proficiency test. An unavoidable problem with setting such a cut-off is that there will inevitably be students who have been here longer who still face language challenges. However, four years is the cut-off generally agreed to by Canadian universities.

A list of acceptable tests is specified on our website including the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and other similar tests. These tests evaluate language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing in ways that try to approximate the kinds of tasks students will have to complete in university. This type of standardized testing, however, is far from foolproof. Test scores are not strong predictors of academic success – no controlled test can truly reproduce real world tasks in a real context. And so many factors other than language skills contribute to academic success, including motivation, maturity, dedication, and adaptability. Short of "trial by fire" when students actually hit the OCAD curriculum, test scores are the best evaluative tool we currently have.

ENGLISH AS ANOTHER LANGUAGE

At OCAD, we refer to students who are not native speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. We use the term because it's readily recognized by both faculty and students. However, it is a deeply problematic term: it ignores the complexity of the linguistic background of our students. Many speak English not as a second language, but as a third or fourth or even fifth language. In addition, many of our students spoke another first language at home but learned English as soon as they started school. These "English as a Second Language" speakers are for all intents and purposes "native speakers."

The term ESL sometimes also carries some stigma for students who entered the Canadian school system at some point during childhood and were streamed into years of ESL classes.

Some terms you might encounter elsewhere attempt to address these problems:

- English as Another Language learners (EAL)
- Multilingual Learners
- Students of English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL)
- English Language Learners (ELL)
- L2 Learners

STUDENT STORIES



I'm a student in the Material Art and Design Program. My focus in MAAD is jewelry and metal work. Since I come from South America – like the weather, we're very warm

and caring people – I'm pretty friendly and I like to communicate and it has helped me to meet new people in Canada. Before arriving to Canada I knew a bit of German, which I totally forgot. I came to Canada and I was in school for a time until Grade 8 and then I did all my high school in Chile because we went back to Chile, and

then all my university studies have been here in Canada. When I came to Canada as a kid I had no knowledge of English apart from the numbers and "door" and "window" and "hello"... the basic words. I had to build a portfolio once I came back to Canada, so before applying to OCAD I had to do a Fine Arts Fundamental program at Centennial College.

Priscila Diaz,
Material Art and Design

I'm going into Graphic Design in second year. I was born into a super-big family. There are eight kids and six adults and my grandparents and we



all live together in the same household. Sixteen people and we live together for almost twenty years. I learned to share even when I am not in the house... like when I get to school.

I came to Toronto three years ago. I went to high school here for Grade 11 and Grade 12. Actually I was in Australia for two and a half years. I was switching schools all the time. I was in Taiwan at first and when I was in grade seven my Dad had to work in China so all the family moved to China. Then after that they decided to go back to Taiwan, but I didn't want to go back to study because I felt that I was quite behind compared with other students. So I decided to go to Australia to study language by myself for two and a half years. We came here because my Dad has to work here now.

Sammy Kuo, *Graphic Design*

I'm in my second year in Sculpture/ Installation. I'm from Colombia so I speak Spanish and I've been in Canada for four or five years. I used to live in Florida. I lived there for seven years



so I finished high school over there. And that's where I learned English. I worked as an artist's assistant and learned a lot from them. But

I didn't practice my English there because it was a Latino place... I learned a lot of Cuban and Argentinian. I worked with an Argentinian artist. I used to live in Montreal and I moved here to start a new life. In Columbia I wanted to be a theatre actress.

Magda Salamanca,
Sculpture and Installation



I'm from Japan. I've been studying at OCAD for two and a half years and now I am a third year student in Jewellery. I studied English since I

was a junior high school student until college, so almost eight years I studied, but I never had a chance to speak English as a daily experience. So after I graduated college I went to English conversation school, but it was like a hobby, once or twice a week. It was helpful... that's why I could make my portfolio in English and I could have my interview because I could speak a little English. I used to have my own business. I designed jewellery, mainly beads-assembled jewellery and also I got material from overseas and I distributed to my assistants and I contacted with my clients' shops... business was very good. I started with only two assistants, but when I was really busy in 2003 I had six assistants. It was very intensive. I wanted a change... that's why I came here.

Setsuko Sanagawa,
Material Art and Design