

The Teaching Librarian: ESL and the Academic Library



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Significance of international students

- 2002 - an average 18% of all higher education students studying in Australia were international students
- Many from countries where English is not the first language (DEST, 2004)
- University of Adelaide
 - 23% international students in 2005
 - Countries of origin: China, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong





Difficulties faced by international students

- Language barriers
- Educational system
- Adapting to new country/culture
- Demands of student course load





International students and the library

- Libraries and systems may be different in their home countries
- May not participate in or gain much benefit from general orientation
- Reluctance to ask for help from library staff
- Conscious of their own lack of English language skills
- Lack English vocabulary - can have difficulty with concepts such as Boolean logic





The librarian's perspective

- May not have much previous experience dealing with ESL students
- Can find it frustrating having to deal with students whose level of English is low
- May be acting in teaching role without having had much training





What is ESL?

- Sometimes known as:
 - English as a second language (ESL)
 - Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL)
 - Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL)
- Emphasis on learner-centred, situational learning
- Functional language – importance of context





Why ESL?

- Information literacy not just about teaching skills
- Recognising importance of language: barriers, opportunities
- Teaching related areas such as vocabulary, functional language use, speaking and listening
- Using model of instruction students are familiar with





Three aspects of teaching

- Preparation
- Practice
- Post-mortem





Preparation: know your students

- Talk to:
 - University's International Office
 - Students' regular teachers or lecturers
- Find out:
 - Cultural backgrounds
 - Levels of English (IELTS band)
 - Any assignments students are working on that require library skills





Preparation: know what you're teaching

- Lesson focus
- Expected learning outcomes
- What students should have accomplished by the end of it
- A realistic goal for your time period
- Scripted dialogue/running times





Preparation: delivery modes

- Accommodate different learning styles:
 - Visual - PowerPoint, handouts
 - Auditory - verbal presentation
 - Tactile/kinaesthetic – ‘hands-on’ activities
- Cooperative, rather than individualistic, learning strategies





Practice: in the classroom

- Create a welcoming atmosphere
- Use icebreaker activity, introductions
- Be patient and enthusiastic
- Positive verbal and non-verbal communication
- One thing at a time





Practice: talking to students

- Maintain steady pace of delivery
- 'Chunk' information
- Avoid library jargon
- Write down/pre-teach new vocabulary
- Break instructions down into simple steps





Practice: learner-centred teaching

- Shift from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side'
- Experiential: learning by doing
- Students construct information in a personally meaningful way
- Use skills while still freshly learned





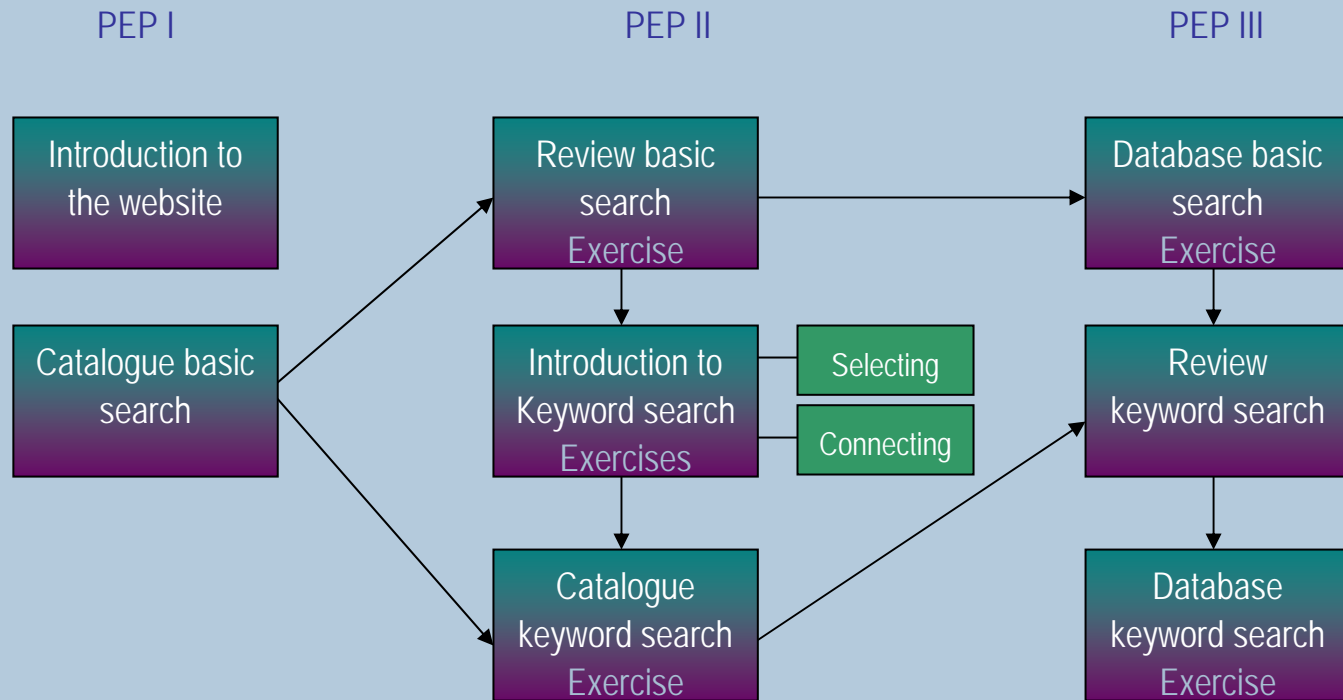
Practice: student exercises

- Clear purpose
- Small steps
- Build on existing knowledge
- Structured, especially if practising skill for first time
- Time period for completion





Example: the Pre-enrolment Program (PEP)





Practice: handouts

- Useful for allowing students to review material, check vocabulary
- If using generic handouts check language, jargon, relevance
- Consider writing handouts designed for a particular group or situation





Example: 'Basic Search' handout

Library's *Catalogue Basics* guide

Title is the default *search by:* option. Click in the *search for:* box and type in the title you want: e.g.: **lord of the ri**

Note that you need only key in the first few words of a title and should ignore leading articles such as: **The, A, An, La, De.**

Basic Search Options handout

Title	- Use when you want to find a book, film, exam paper, or database	accounting in australia
	- Type the exact words from the title with the correct spelling	apocalypse now
	- If the title begins with The, A, or An, don't type the first word	business source premier





Post-mortem: feedback

- Monitor students' progress during practical exercises
- Informal evaluation:
 - Did students grasp the point of the lesson?
 - Did they have any difficulties with the material?
 - What could need changing next time?
- Consider student course evaluation or feedback form





Post-mortem: reflective teaching practice

- Allow time for self-reflection after a lesson
- Remember that learning teaching is an ongoing process
- Consider a qualification, e.g. CELTA, Certificate IV in TESOL
- **“In teaching, instructors are constant learners”** (Sysoyev, 2000)





Conclusion

- Simple changes can go a long way to improving the quality of the library experience for international students
- We as librarians need to recognise the importance of the educational aspects of our profession

