

English Language Center
Preparation for Academic Life (PAL)

Course Description

This is an integrated English course, which is designed for advanced level English learners, and the class focus will be on gaining academic skills and cultural skills that can aid in your adjustment to the American classroom.

By taking this course, you will get guidance and practice in group work, cultural expectations, understanding Michigan State University and its academic resources, and learning how to manage the American classroom—socially and academically.

There will be guidance in the following areas as well: critical thinking and how that applies to and helps with academic writing, academic classroom conversations, speaking—especially how to negotiate group work and classroom discussion.

Course Objectives

The goal of the course is that by the end, you will feel more confident and/or be able to fully:

1. Communicate with colleagues and professors effectively (i.e. through email and face to face) in order to verify assignment information, get assistance, and make appointments for office hours.
2. Gain skills needed to participate fully in pair work, group work, and group projects.
3. Gain skills needed to frame questions and inquiries in the most effective and efficient way.
4. Begin to recognize and use the skills needed to read at a high level academically.
5. Begin to recognize the skills needed to understand the demands of academic writing.
6. Begin to understand, identify, and effectively avoid the different types of plagiarism.
7. Begin to recognize leadership qualities in yourself, and gain skills needed to learn how to use personal leadership skills to help with your cultural and academic adjustment.
8. Know the resources available through the Michigan State University library, and the Writing Center, including graduate writing groups.
9. Begin to be able to identify personal language weaknesses and learn how to improve oneself through individual study (i.e. grammar, pronunciation, and self-editing of assignments).
10. Gain skills needed to improve your understanding of various aspects of intercultural communication (i.e. proper cultural norms, socializing, and written and oral communication etiquette).

Evaluation

Evaluation will take a non-traditional route in this course. There will be no formal grade. There will be a lot of written and oral feedback from the instructor.

To successfully complete the course, you must do the following:

1. Attend all classes. There are no excused absences.
2. Participate in all guest presentations.
3. Participate in all group work.
4. Participate and engage in classroom work, including pre-arrival work and Padlet assignments, complete all homework assignments.
5. Come to the one-on-one conference with all the materials completed.

Topic Outline	Class Topics/Skill Acquired
<p>Week 1</p> <p>Module/Segment 1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Email: Keys for using effectively as a student. 2. Soft Skills: what are they and why do they matter? 3. MSU: Let's get to know the campus community. 4. MSU Writing Center and Graduate Student Writing Groups. 5. How to ask effective questions. Learning how to join class discussions and why it matters so much. <p>Guest Lectures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MSU Writing Center 2. Former PAL students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Course Introduction ▪ Understanding PAL goals and objectives ▪ Email Communication: traps and cultural realities ▪ Soft Skills: definition, application, and value ▪ MSU campus—academically and socially ▪ Orientation and available support from MSU Writing Center, Bessey Hall ▪ Student interaction with former PAL students ▪ The “way” we ask questions influences the type or extent of the answer we receive. ▪ Knowing what you hope to accomplish with a question. ▪ Knowing when to re-state what you understood and ask for affirmation, rather than asking a question. ▪ MSU campus exploration and group discussions

Week 2

Module/Segment 2:

- Group work
- “How to maximize your place in a groupwork setting”

- Academic writing
- “Inquiry based writing, learning to unlearn test writing strategies, and learning to write to a particular audience and for a particular reason”

- Academic Reading
- “Overview of skills needed to manage the reading load and maximize reading comprehension”

- MSU Libraries

Guest Lecturers:

1. [Dr. Cheryl Caesar](#), WRAC department, “Academic Writing.”
2. [Dr. Joyce Meier](#), WRAC department, “Academic Reading.”
3. [Stephanie Perentesis](#), MSU Library Orientation
4. Former PAL students

- Knowing what you soft and technical skills you possess and how to maximize those
- Practice with asking questions, and group work
- What our actions tell others about who we are, our motivations, etc.
- “Resilience”
- Discuss the classroom environment
- How to form relationships and trust with your classmates
- Leadership qualities within your discipline/field of study
- How to read assignment sheets, purpose, audience
- Types of academic writing
- Summary and Paraphrase
- Plagiarism: what it is, why it matters, and how to avoid
- Managing a reading load while still gaining information
- How to effectively use the library, especially remotely

Week 3

Module/Segment 3 (Review mostly):

- Judging resources: personal information or valid for research
- Leadership Qualities
- How to Frame Questions
- Effectively managing classroom discussions
- Email Correspondence
- Body Language
- Cultural Influences
- Academic Honesty/Plagiarism
- Discipline-Specific Academic Writing
- Academic Reading
- MSU Library: how to use
- *How is the MSU Writing Center different than the ELC Writing Center?*

Guest Lecture:

1. [MSU Broad Museum](#)
2. [ELC Writing Center](#)
3. [Dr. Justin Bruner](#), "Effective Teamwork and Communication"

- Groupwork
- Practice asking questions
- Class discussions
- Review of available resources
- Review of effective reading strategies
- Writing before arriving at MSU, writing skills needed now
- Personal leadership and soft skills: why they matter
- ELC Writing Center as a resource and how is different than the MSU Writing Center?
- Group presentations
- Prepare for final one-on-one conferences

*The MSU English Language Center reserves the right to make changes to this course description.