

Tutor and S.I. Workshop: Basic Skills Sensitivity Training



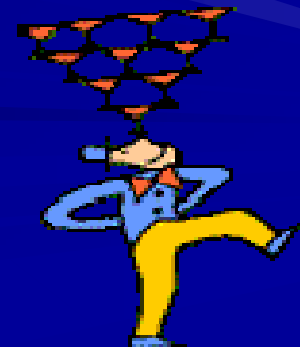
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What is a Basic Skills student?

Why do we use “Standard
English”?

What is a Basic Skills student?

These students are often referred to as “remedial” because they are all “struggling to acquire successful study skills, flexibility in their use of strategies while reading, fluency in writing Standard English, and a better understanding of grammar, syntax, and appropriate social roles in college” (“Helping the Basic Skills Student” 1).



What does the word “remedial” suggest?

The word “remedy” comes to mind, so it’s no surprise that the word means



“the correction of faulty study habits and the raising of a pupil's general competence” (www.merriamwebster.com).

The second part of the definition is helpful, but the first part is what usually comes to mind and is neither helpful nor useful.

What do the following excerpts imply:

From an essay called “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan: “I . . . [am] conscious of . . . the English I do use with her [my mother] . . . It has become our **language of intimacy**, a different sort of English that related to family talk, the language I grew up with.”

From an essay called “Aria” by Richard Rodriguez: “. . . as a socially disadvantaged child [,] I considered Spanish to be a **private language** . . . What I did not believe was that I could speak a single **public language**.”

Standard English, from “Helping the Basic Skills Student” page 1

Standard English refers to "the variety of English language which is normally employed in writing and normally spoken by 'educated' speakers of the language. It is also, of course, the variety of English that students of English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) are taught when receiving formal instruction. . . [and] refers to grammar and vocabulary (*dialect*) but not to pronunciation (*accent*)" (Peter Drudgill and Jean Hannah 1). An easy way to remember the meaning of Standard English is to think of the kind of language instructors expect students to use when writing academic essays, so that the standard I was expected to use as a student in Canada was called 'British English' while I expect my own students at Ventura College to use what is referred to as 'North American English' (NAmEng).

What Amy Tan refers to as “perfect” English and Richard Rodriguez refers to as “public” English is the same language that students are expected to be proficient in (or work on mastering) in college.

However, a person needs to use and practice Standard English in order to understand it (not just study it). Becoming competent in a language is about trial and error, and Basic Skills students need encouragement to make mistakes.

From a book called *Lives on the Boundary:
The Struggles and Achievements of
America's Underprepared* (1989) by Mike
Rose:

“My students needed to be immersed in talking, reading, and writing, they needed to further develop their ability to think critically, and they needed to gain confidence in themselves as systematic inquirers. **They had to be let into the academic club.** The fact that they misspelled words or wrote fragments or dropped verb endings would not erect insurmountable barriers to the benefits they would gain from such immersion” (142).