

Who Is an ESL Student?

In order to better understand ESL students, here is a list of what they are **NOT**:

- They are not a homogenous group. They may differ in languages, cultural backgrounds, previous education, levels of English proficiency, exposure to English outside of school, and the amount of time in the United States.
- They are not remedial students any more than English-speaking students are remedial in Spanish, French, or German classes. They need a different approach versus students who understand and speak English but lack skills in reading and writing, for example.
- They are not students of English in the same sense as English speakers. The latter may need to correct minor errors in usage, refine skills, and learn to appreciate literature on a higher level. ESL students, on the other hand, may be struggling with some of the basic features that their English-speaking counterparts internalized from a very young age, such as plural forms, use of negative, word order in questions, and so on.
- They are not foreign language students, though this is a much closer definition. The main difference lies in the fact that they do not have the luxury to learn and socialize in their most comfortable language while they master a new one. They are forced to communicate through the medium of an unfamiliar language, often before they feel confident in doing so.
- Finally, ESL students ARE students who acquired another language before they were exposed to English; they need to develop both communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency in English in order to survive and achieve academically.