



Essentials of Acceleration

What makes the ENA 101 course at LaGuardia different from other courses? How do we best serve emerging writers in our accelerated courses? What pedagogical theories and practices are best suited for this course? The following framework, developed by a working group of faculty at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, over the past two years focuses on two aspects: what helps students in the classroom and what helps faculty in approaching the course.



In the Classroom: Student-Focused Practices

The first section of this framework isolates 8 practices and considerations important for success in ENA 101: deceleration; integrating reading & writing; habits of mind; improving thinking skills; responding to affective issues; introducing academic discourse; improving self-editing; and working towards a multilingual paradigm.

Curriculum Design & Faculty Support

For faculty, backwards design, shared lesson plans, and professional development are key means of support for successful accelerated learning classroom.



In the Classroom



Deceleration: Slow and Focused

Rather than speeding up and covering more material, students benefit greatly from slowing down and focusing on material already covered in the ENG 101 course. Heidi L. Johnsen's study of accelerated learning benefited from reading about particle acceleration in physics. She explains that deceleration is part of the overall process of acceleration. Slowing down is part of an eventual speed-up.

Examples may include revisiting texts and themes previously covered in class, previewing course material in the ENA 101 hours, and focused hands-on writing, editing, or reading.



Integrating Reading & Writing

While reading instruction has traditionally been built into the lower-level developmental courses at LaGuardia, it seems to make great sense to continue integrating support for students as readers in ENA 101 writing instruction. This doesn't require major revision of the syllabi for this course. Rather, it means that instructors do not assume that all their students are proficient and engaged readers and that faculty are ready to provide assistance with reading when appropriate.

Examples may include reading texts as a class and/or modeling close reading strategies.



Habits of Mind

Although covered in the first year seminars at LaGuardia, many faculty find that using Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick's *Habits of Mind* can be a helpful resource in the ENA 101 course. Focusing on habits such as persistence, managing impulsivity, listening with understanding and empathy, metacognition, question and problem posing, creativity and innovation are helpful ways to support student growth in thinking and writing.



Improving Thinking Skills

While writing is a key focus of ENA 101, we believe that the most important component of strong writing is strong thinking. Therefore, built into our ENA 101 courses are discussion, group activities, and writing assignments that encourage students to think more deeply as they read and write.

Examples may include discussion of current events and critical thinking exercises.



Responding to Affective Issues

At LaGuardia, faculty recognize that the most common difficulty for students who do not succeed in credit-bearing composition classes is not merely with writing, but the rest of their often complicated lives. Students frequently drop out of school because they become discouraged, stressed, or because problems in their lives become overwhelming. They may experience extreme financial difficulties, get evicted, lose their jobs, they or their children get sick, they find themselves in an abusive home situation, or some combination of such factors.

While very few English teachers have professional preparation in responding to these affective or life issues, we have discovered that the low-stakes nature, small-class size, and theme-oriented discussion of ENA 101 courses can, nevertheless, effectively make our classrooms safe places where students can discuss problems and receive advice (often from other students). When the situation requires it, instructors can also connect students with outside support. In addition, we can try to structure our classes in ways that will improve our students' chances of successfully completing their composition courses and continuing on to their degrees.



Introducing Academic Discourse

Many LaGuardia students come into ENA 101 with writing skills that they have learned in previous English Language courses in a variety of contexts. Students may have taken English in another country, in local high schools, or in ESL courses. Many students also arrive with literacy skills gained in other languages and other literary and academic traditions. We suggest that faculty discuss differences between the types of writing they have learned previously and U.S. college-level writing style expectations.

For example, if a student has learned to write narrative essays, the professor can help this student examine how to adapt aspects of their narrative writing and integrate analysis to create an argumentative essay in the American style. Or similarly, students new to first-person narrative in academic contexts, can be guided to develop an authoritative literary voice.



Improving Self-Editing

Previously, we expressed our view that ENA 101 should not feel like a grammar class to the students. We do not recommend that students arriving in these courses face weeks of exercises in identifying parts of speech and choosing the correct forms of verbs. This does not, however, mean that we do not recognize an obligation to help students become more effective at editing their writing to reduce the frequency and severity of sentence level errors. The goal of any form of “grammar” instruction is to help our students become, not grammarians, but more effective editors of their writing. In most cases, this means a de-emphasis on learning grammatical terms and concepts and increased emphasis on effective communication and editing their own writing.

We believe as educators, that whatever grammar we teach will only be effective if it is applied to the students’ own writing; “practice editing” what they have written is a more productive use of class time than doing grammar worksheets.



Working Toward A Multilingual Paradigm

Considering the wide range of languages and varieties of English spoken on campus as assets to be understood and valued, we believe it important to work from a multilingual paradigm in our approach to ENA 101. This involves a shift in perspective and a willingness to engage in learning ourselves. Generally, lack of standard American English should not be equated with lack of academic or communicative skills. Building off scholarship in composition studies, language acquisition, and linguistics, we wish to move away from this deficit model and develop instructional practices that encourage students to use all their linguistic resources in the classroom and build upon prior communication skills.

For example, faculty can invite students to speak, write, or translate from other languages or English dialects and sociolects as part of the exploration of a text or the scaffolding of formal assignments. Frequent comprehension checks, creative writing exercises, multiple prompts/genres of assignments, and more time for completing in-class work can also be useful.

Curriculum Design & Faculty Support



Backwards Design

To start, we take the “target” course, for which the developmental portion of the course prepares students, and ask: what is required of students in that course? For ENA 101, the required credit bearing target courses are ENG 101, “An Introduction to Composition and Research,” and subsequently ENG 102, “Writing through Literature”. Students in these courses are expected to read challenging texts and write mature essays in response.

We therefore design the learning outcomes and curriculum for ENA 101 courses “backwards.” We do not simply break the tasks down into decontextualized skills like grammar exercises, paragraph writing, or reading short passages and identifying main ideas. Rather, in ENA 101 we ask students to continue working on their reading and writing skills and to discuss any difficulties they are experiencing with the writing process both individually and as a class.

The major difference between this work and ENG 101 work is that students do their writing and thinking more slowly, with more scaffolding and more individual support. We also encourage faculty flexibility and creativity in ENA 101 courses, in order to adapt the course to individual student needs.



Model Lesson Plans

We have found that it is important and helpful for faculty to share tested, successful examples of lesson plans and course models that they have tested in ENA 101. Our goal is not to dictate to faculty how they must teach ENA 101, but rather to give faculty concrete examples of how the extra three hours of weekly instruction can be best put to use. Sharing lesson plans and discussing best practices at ENA 101 meetings and norming sessions can ultimately help faculty to better understand the goals of the ENA 101 course.



Professional Development

To meet the needs of our student population in ENA 101, we believe there is benefit in providing opportunities for continuing professional development. Faculty may wish to learn about specific linguistic or academic contexts or explore ways to understand and accommodate for learning issues from experts in these fields. In addition, we support workshops, curriculum sharing, and pedagogical readings for ENA faculty based on the ALP model. In this regard, we agree with the CCCC’s recommendation to offer workshops on relevant theory, research, and instruction concerning the full spectrum of English users.



Team Credits:

Allia Abdullah-Matta, Olga Aksakalova, Ece Aykol, Evelyn Burg, J. Elizabeth Clark, Rochell Isaac, Jason Hendrickson, Heidi Johnsen, Jacqueline Jones, Jayashree Kamble, Marisa Klages-Bombich, Irwin Leopando, Lucy McNair, Neil Meyer, Joy Sanchez-Taylor, Lilla Toke, Dominique Zino

Interested in more? Please see the Teaching ENA 101 portion of the Department of English Composition Handbook for additional readings & resources.
https://lagcc-cuny.digication.com/teaching_writing_at_laguardia/teaching-ena-101

