

Translanguaging: Using Your Native Language to Read and Write in English



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Do you speak/read/write in more than one language? This resource encourages you to use your native language(s)—or any other language that you feel comfortable writing in—as a resource when reading, writing, and responding to assignments in English. Practice with one or more of the following strategies.

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1. If you are just getting started with an assignment

Start by identifying the topic or assignment you are working on. Next, write down some initial ideas that come to mind in any language. You'll notice that there may

be words or concepts that you can only think of in your first language. Allow yourself to jot down these ideas (don't worry about translating for now). By the end, you can imagine your sheet of paper being a mix of words, phrases, and/or questions in one or more languages. (You may want to use the **brainstorming visual aid** below.)

2. If you're drafting, and are not sure how to express an idea in English

1. **Come back to it later.** If you get stuck while writing in English, put down your idea in your native language and keep writing. Postpone finding the English phrase until later. For now, just focus on getting your meaning on the page.
2. **Annotate your draft in your native language.** As you draft in English, write your key ideas and claims in your native language too. Using track changes in Word, create marginal comments to write out the same idea in multiple languages. This will help you to remember the meaning you originally had when you come back to your draft later.
3. **Translate the "big idea" back into your first language.** If you get too fixated on correct English grammar and syntax while drafting, you lose sight of the big picture. Choose one paragraph to re-read, and as you do, translate the key ideas from that paragraph back into your first language in your mind. Do this for each paragraph, asking yourself: Is my overall idea interesting/compelling? What ideas do I want to add or develop further? What can I eliminate? As you ask these questions for yourself, jot down next writing or revision steps next to each paragraph.
4. **Go "around" the idea.** If you can't find the exact word or phrase you're looking for in English, use the English vocabulary you do know to say the same thing. It may not be as precise as you had hoped, and you may have to use more

words, but there is *always* more than one way to express the same idea. Make sure you are drawing on all the language you have learned.

3. If you have a partner who speaks the same language

Invite someone who speaks your native language to work with you. Take turns discussing each other's writing in your shared languages. As you work with your partner, choose one of the following ways to record your ideas:

- Take your own notes, as you discuss your ideas for your assignment with your partner.
- Have your partner take notes. As you talk through your ideas, have your partner transcribe what you are saying and then have them read these notes back to you after. Switch positions (taking turns being the speaker and the writer.)

4. If you need to do research for your assignment

1. **Study the background or context in your native language.** If you are researching a subject that is unfamiliar to you., start by researching it in your native language. You may not use these sources in your actual assignment, but doing this preliminary search in your first language will help you understand the academic sources you read in English later. If you're more comfortable speaking in your native language, find a recording, video, or podcast about your topic before turning to reading the research in English.
2. **Choose a topic that is somewhat familiar to you.** If your assignment allows, choose a research topic or question that connects to your own linguistic, cultural, or national background. If you grew up in another country, you may feel more closely connected to the controversies, policies, and practices there.

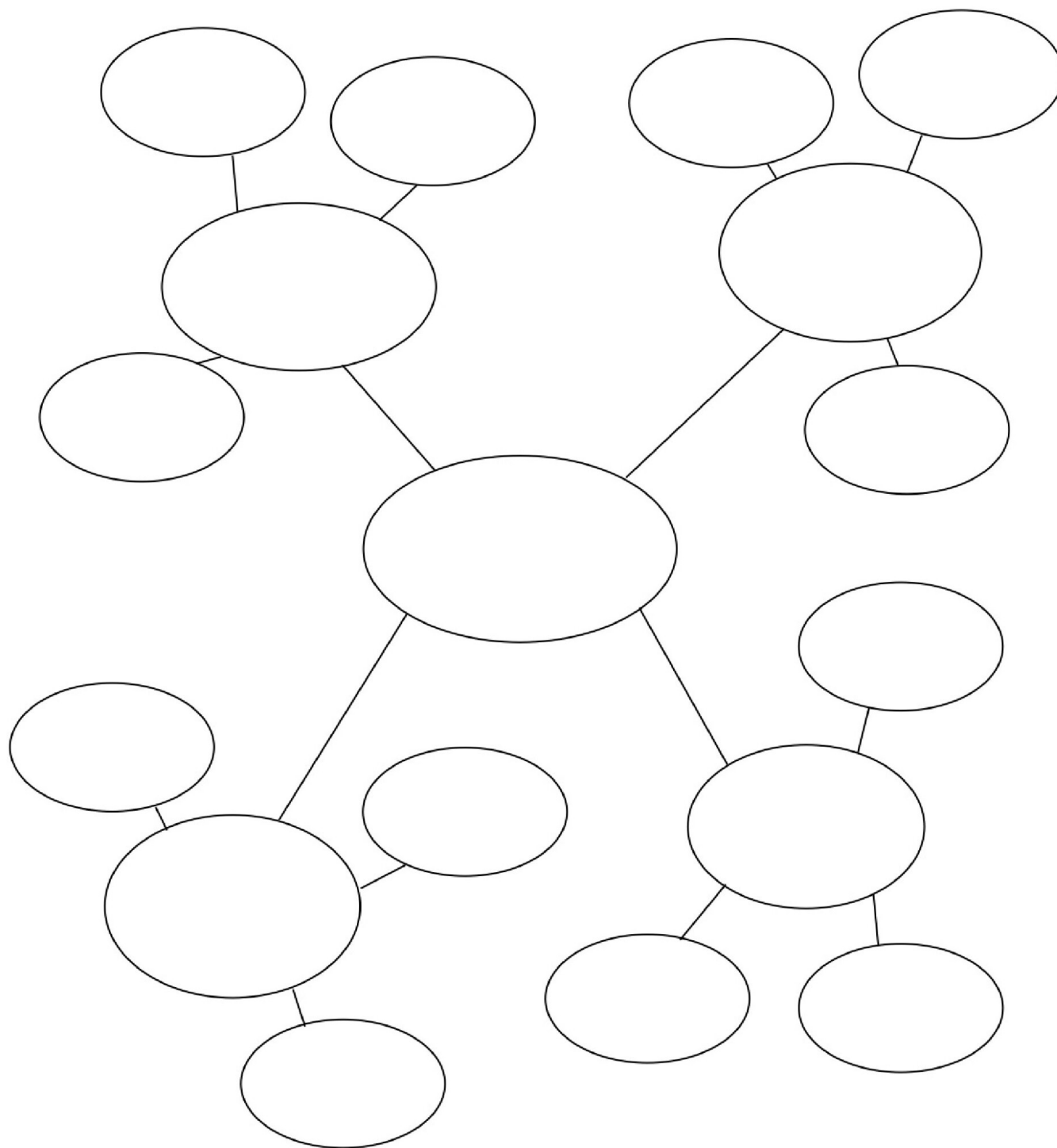
These are good starting points when you are stuck, or feel less confident about U.S.-centered topics.

5. If you have a difficult text to read

1. **Read without stopping to look up every word.** For a challenging reading, you may be tempted to look up every single English word you don't understand. This will slow you down considerably, and will likely make your experience much less enjoyable. The first time you read the text, try stopping less, and mark the phrases, sentences, or even paragraphs you don't understand. You'll come back to them later. For now, focus more on understanding the main idea of what you are reading.
2. **Annotate the reading in your native language.** Even though you are reading in English, you can use your native language to help you process and understand a text. These strategies will also help you prepare for a class lecture or discussion about the reading.
 - Formulate questions you have about the reading in your first language
 - Briefly note down your feelings, thoughts, and/or responses to the reading in your first language
 - Identify key words or phrases from the text and translate them into your first language, noting the differences in meaning that may emerge
 - Look up a reading in your first language about the same topic to help build your understanding

Visual aid for brainstorming

If you'd like a visual aid for brainstorming, print this image so you can write directly on the paper:



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