

VANDERBILT English Language Center

English Language Center Guide:
The Culture and Language of Immersion Vanderbilt
(text-only version)

created by

The Vanderbilt University English Language Center

2023

updated December 5, 2023

vanderbilt.edu/elc/

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What is the ELC Guide to the Culture and Language of Immersion Vanderbilt?

The English Language Center (ELC) team, experts in linguistic and cultural expectations in U.S. academic and professional settings, have prepared this guide to assist you as you prepare for, work on, and submit your Immersion Vanderbilt project. This guide will also connect you with additional ELC resources and demonstrate how the ELC can help you throughout the various stages of your Immersion project.

The "ELC Guide: The Culture and Language of Immersion Vanderbilt" resource was developed to provide you with the strategies to more fully participate in Immersion Vanderbilt by:

- increasing your understanding of the purpose and benefits of Immersion Vanderbilt
- understanding linguistic and cultural concepts for more effectively navigating Immersion Vanderbilt
- applying language and academic skills for completing Immersion Vanderbilt successfully

This text-only version of the resource series was developed to be accessible to screen readers. View the original resource here.

Use the tool pictured below to help as you read:



Expand your knowledge with links to additional resources in these boxes.

Introduction to Immersion Vanderbilt

Continue reading to see answers to the following questions:

- 1. What does "Immersion" mean in Immersion Vanderbilt?
- 2. What is Immersion Vanderbilt's purpose?
- 3. Who organizes Immersion Vanderbilt?
- 4. How do I complete Immersion Vanderbilt?
- 5. How can the ELC support me during Immersion Vanderbilt?

What does "immersion" mean in Immersion Vanderbilt?

Although you may have heard "immersion" in the context of language learning, it means something a bit different in this context. The word "immersion" has multiple definitions, according to Oxford Languages on Google. The definition you may be familiar with is "a method of teaching a foreign language by the exclusive use of that language." For example, while attending Vanderbilt University and living in the U.S., you are immersed in the English language. However, in this context, immersion means a "deep mental involvement." ¹

For Immersion Vanderbilt, you will complete tasks to achieve a "deep mental involvement" in 2 parts:

Part 1 is Experiential Learning in one of your academic interests. The result of this "deep mental involvement" will be **Part 2**, a Culminating Project you pursue beyond the classroom.

These two parts come together to satisfy your graduation requirement. Your Immersive Experience will inspire your Culminating Project.

¹ Oxford Languages definitions of "immersion" on Google: t.ly/_absT The Vanderbilt University English Language Center

Your Immersive Experience may include one of the following:

- an internship
- research
- study abroad
- a creative showcase
- and more!

You can propose your own ideas for your Immersive Experience to the Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt (EL&IV).

What is Immersion Vanderbilt's Purpose?

When planning for Immersion Vanderbilt, think about how you will show your peers, professors, and future employers and colleagues what you are capable of!

- 1. Beyond being a graduation requirement, Immersion Vanderbilt gives you the opportunity to explore your interests more deeply. What have you always wanted to try?
- 2. When you graduate from Vanderbilt and start to apply for jobs, graduate school, or other opportunities, your Immersion project can demonstrate that you have the resources, skills, and experience to succeed.
- 3. With support from the university, you can develop a network for your future career. When you are seeking your first job interview, you can already build on these valuable connections.
- 4. Vanderbilt can offer a grant for your immersive experience so you can travel, work, research, and create affordably. Apply for this funding to gain experiences that might otherwise be outside your budget. <u>Click here</u> to learn more from the Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt (EL&IV) about funding your immersive experience.

Who Organizes Immersion Vanderbilt?

Immersion Vanderbilt is organized by the Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt (EL&IV) and is responsible for supporting students' progress throughout their Immersion experience and project.

EL&IV is eager to help you at any stage of the process, from brainstorming ideas to planning and completing your experience and culminating project.

There are concrete steps you can take each year at Vanderbilt to facilitate your Immersion Vanderbilt journey, and some of these milestones have deadlines. If you have questions about deadlines, be sure to ask at the EL&IV office.

Making appointments with EL&IV will show your dedication, responsibility, and interest in completing Immersion Vanderbilt. To make an appointment, click here or send EL&IV an email at immersion@vanderbilt.edu.

How do I complete Immersion Vanderbilt?

Looking at examples of past immersive experiences, you may notice that they are all quite different. This is partly why "immersion" may be difficult to define and understand, but it's also why the process has been individualized: so each immersion experience and project fits your unique needs, interests, and aspirations.

- 1. **Reflect on what is important to you:** The first deadline you will see is submitting your Immersion plan before the end of your second year at Vanderbilt. We recommend spending time in your first 3 semesters reflecting on what subjects, tasks, and challenges excite you.
- 2. **Submit your Immersive Experience Plan:** Throughout the Immersion plan, you will submit forms to EL&IV through the Immersion Portal to share information about your Immersion experience ideas. Your

- timeline to complete Immersion Vanderbilt may differ from other students; however, as of this writing, all students must submit the Immersive Experience Declaration Form before the end of their second year.
- 3. **Find a Mentor:** You can contact professors, researchers, managers, and EL&IV staff to help you during the planning process. To find someone in your area of interest, you may want to contact the Career Center or VU's alumni network to learn more about campus connections. EL&IV can also help you find a mentor. You can find a mentor before or after submitting your Immersive experience plan.
- 4. **Complete your Immersive Experience:** Through additional forms in the Immersion Portal, you will share information about your Immersion experience before, during, and after its completion, as well as your reflections on it.
- 5. **Plan and Complete a Culminating Project:** Before you graduate, you will plan and complete a project connected to your Immersive experience. Your mentor and the EL&IV office will help guide you, and you will be asked to submit the finished project for review. Reach out to EL&IV for more information about your prospective timeline.

To log in and complete Immersion Vanderbilt forms, visit the Immersion Portal.

How can the ELC support me during Immersion Vanderbilt?

At the ELC, we dissect cultural norms to understand what's behind academic expectations and study real-world language use to help you find your academic and professional voice.

Here are 4 ways the ELC can support your Immersion Vanderbilt journey:

- 1. **Use this resource:** The resource is here for you any time. We hope you return to it for support throughout your Immersion Vanderbilt journey.
- 2. **Book a 1-to-1 Consultation:** Book consultations to work on any aspect of your immersion project. Need help outlining a plan? Need help drafting an email request? Want to practice an office hours appointment? You may make up to 3 appointments per week during the semester to focus on the written and spoken language associated with your Immersion project.
- 3. **Take a class with us:** We offer cost-free classes each semester, including *write*ELC, Academic Speaking, and Pronunciation. Look for an email invitation to register each August and December. <u>Click here to read more</u>.
- 4. **Email us:** Not sure what you need? You can always email us at <u>elc@vanderbilt.edu</u>, and we can help you find the support you need.

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The Culture and Strategies of Reflective Practices

Even though you may start learning about Immersion in your first semester at Vanderbilt, the first step of completing Immersion Vanderbilt is not due until the end of your second year. At that time, you will be asked to fill out a form online to share your initial ideas and reflections about your immersive experience and project. The information in this section will help as you think deeply and share reflections about your Immersion Vanderbilt experience and project.

As you read, we will answer the questions:

- 1. What is reflection?
- 2. How do U.S. cultural beliefs affect reflection?
- 3. Why should I reflect?
- 4. When should I reflect?
- 5. How do I reflect?

- 6. How do I get started?
- 7. How do I deepen my reflection?

The ELC created this section to help you:

- Define "reflection" in an academic context
- Evaluate what forms of reflection might work best for you
- Identify ways reflective practices can be implemented as part of your academic and career development
- Integrate reflection strategies to help you plan your immersive experience and project

While the advice here is tailored to your needs as you undertake Immersion Vanderbilt, we hope you will also come away with reflection skills that can be valuable throughout your academic and professional career.

What is Reflection?

In short, reflection is purposeful thinking. Rather than letting our thoughts wander aimlessly, we reflect when trying to plan, problem-solve, learn, or otherwise work through a complex or uncertain situation².

Devising and implementing your Immersion Vanderbilt plan invites exactly the type of complex and uncertain thinking that reflection can support. That's why reflection questions are woven throughout the online forms you will complete during Immersion Vanderbilt.

How do U.S. Cultural Beliefs Affect Reflection?

Reflecting in a U.S. academic setting is influenced by the cultural values and expectations common here. For example, individualist ideologies in the U.S. can explain the following cultural beliefs³:

- Each person has a unique "voice" that individualizes the writing and speech they produce.
- Your writing, knowledge, and background are seen as your intellectual property. That ownership is why we meticulously cite sources.
- Critical thinking skills are a cornerstone of defining learning in U.S. education: It means you are expected to share your ideas and opinions about what you learn.
- Because of this emphasis on critical thinking, students are often asked to demonstrate learning by sharing new knowledge and their opinions about that content.

When you are asked to reflect as part of Immersion Vanderbilt and/or other academic or professional endeavors in the U.S., it's because others with these cultural beliefs wish to see you internalizing new knowledge and making it your own by adding your opinion, approach, or background knowledge.

Why Should I Reflect?

Have you ever seen a project and thought to yourself, "I wish I'd come up with that!" Building complex connections and synthesizing hypotheses and brainstorms into realistic projects is a daunting task. To manage such challenges, many academics and professionals habitually use reflective practices.

As you choose your academic and career path, you are ultimately in charge of guiding your continued learning and professional development. It's not always easy to find inspiration, but research has shown that experiential learning and

² Moon, J. A. (2004). A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice. Routledge.

³ Ramanathan, V., & Atkinson, D. (1999). Individualism, academic writing, and ESL writers. *Journal of second language writing*, 8(1), 45-75.

reflection can form the cornerstone of self-motivated learning when you are outside the classroom⁴. According to Moon (2004), reflecting regularly can help you:

- 1. Deepen your learning
- 2. Review your memories from multiple perspectives
- 3. Develop theories from data or observations
- 4. Clarify emotional reactions
- 5. Make decisions and resolve issues
- 6. Discover unexpected outcomes

Building a reflective practice during Immersion Vanderbilt can help you begin a habit of intentional growth that supports your career development for years to come.



Not sure what career path is right for you? Consider contacting the <u>Vanderbilt Career</u> <u>Center</u>. They have a wealth of advice and tools to help you, and researching career paths can be a great way to help you devise a meaningful immersive experience.

When Should I Reflect?

You can reflect anywhere at any time as long as you have the time and space to think deeply. During the Immersion Vanderbilt process, reflection questions can arise in online forms, meetings with your mentors, and even in job interviews. Building a reflective practice can help you process complex information ahead of time, so you are ready to discuss your thoughts when asked.

Scholars have defined three main times you can reflect:

- 1. **Reflection-for-action** describes purposeful thinking about something in the future⁵. This is the type of reflection you can do as you plan your immersive experience and project.
- 2. **Reflection-in-action** is the purposeful thinking you activate when you are in the middle of a complex or difficult situation⁶. This is the type of reflection you can do when you are in the middle of your immersive experience or actively working on your project.
- 3. **Reflection-on-action** is purposeful thinking after an experience, allowing you to more fully process your memories, ideas, emotions, and any other information you choose⁷. You can engage in this type of reflection before filling out the online forms required to complete Immersion Vanderbilt. Beyond accomplishing Experiential Learning & Immersion Vanderbilt (EL&IV) requirements, this type of reflection can help you bridge the knowledge and skills you gained during Immersion Vanderbilt with your long-term career aspirations.



Not sure what Immersion forms we are talking about? <u>Review our Introduction to Immersion Vanderbilt here</u>.

⁴ Moon, J. A. (2004). A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice. Routledge.

⁵ Farrell, T.S.C. (2017). Research on Reflective Practice in TESOL. Routledge.

⁶ Schön, D. A. (1987). Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions. Jossev-Bass.

⁷ Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. DC Heath. The Vanderbilt University English Language Center

How do I Reflect?

Similar to *when* you should reflect, *how* you can reflect may vary. You can reflect anywhere as long as you have the time and mental energy to think deeply. Beyond silent thinking, expressing yourself through words and/or images encourages you to focus and articulate your thoughts about an experience while also giving you a practical way to collect and save your ideas for further consideration⁸. There are countless ways to capture your reflections, so we encourage you to try different approaches until you find what works for you.

Speaking

Voice notes or speech-to-text can help capture your thoughts while reflecting. This method will not slow your thoughts, so we recommend this method if you like to walk or move as you reflect, or if you like to brainstorm with a partner. If you do not have a reflection partner, you can speak into the microphone and imagine yourself explaining your ideas to a trusted friend or mentor. With transcription and speech-to-text software readily available, you can easily capture your spoken ideas in searchable text.

Video

If it is important to capture visual and audio information, video can be a powerful tool for capturing your thoughts while reflecting.

Writing

Collect your thoughts in a handwritten notebook or type them on your computer. Ideally, you can readily collect and compare your reflective writings, so some researchers recommend using a binder with movable pages for handwritten reflections⁹. Because writing while reflecting naturally slows your mind and forces you to translate your thoughts into words, we recommend this method if you struggle with racing or vague thoughts.

Visual Art

If visuals help your reflection, you can capture your thoughts in photographs, drawings, paintings, or any form of visual expression that suits you. Such images can be collected digitally or in file folders so you can gather and synthesize them conveniently.

Visual Notes

Infographics, mind maps, word clouds, and all manner of note-taking and <u>brainstorming models</u> can help capture reflective thoughts. These options are great if you are a non-linear thinker but do not like visual art methods.

How Do I Get Started?

There are countless ways to inspire reflection, but this section offers a short list of ways you can start reflecting on your Immersion Vanderbilt experience and project.

Look at Examples

You may notice that <u>other students' immersive experiences</u> vary widely. This individuality is partly why "immersion" may be both an exciting opportunity and difficult to define but consider this a chance to approach the process creatively.

Ask yourself: Do I see any experiences or projects I find inspiring? If so, try to investigate why they light a fire in you. Is it the subject matter? The tasks? The location? Exploring your excitement can help you focus on what matters to you as you chart your own path.

⁸ Huang, L. S. (2021). *Improving learner reflection for TESOL: Pedagogical strategies to support reflective learning*. Routledge.

⁹ Moon, J. A. (2004). A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice. Routledge.

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Reflect on your Coursework

Ask yourself: What inspires me in the courses I take? What do I want to know more about? What tasks do I enjoy, and how do such tasks motivate me? What would I like to do next that I may not be able to do without an immersion mentor?

Contact Experts on Campus

Reach out to individuals on campus, possibly a professor or researcher involved in your area of interest, so they can help you explore and deepen your ideas. Have you visited your professors' office hours yet? If not, you can use <u>our office</u> hours advice to help you.

Discover the 5 Learning Goals

Each student completing Immersion Vanderbilt is asked to reflect on their learning in 5 key areas. Below are definitions offered on several of the Immersion Vanderbilt forms you will be asked to complete online:

- 1. **Critical Thought:** "Methods, substance, partnerships, etc., are academically grounded in relevant disciplines, contextualized, and examined using clear and sound, evidence-based reasoning"
- 2. **Diverse Perspectives and Equity:** "Understanding one's own and a diversity of perspectives, including social/historical contexts, identities, values, beliefs, cultural contributions, and systems of power and inequity"
- 3. **Ethical Reasoning:** "Engagement and decisions demonstrate academic integrity, ethical treatment of subjects, knowledge of ethical perspectives, awareness of and ability to understand multiple perspectives"
- 4. **Integrative Learning:** "Engagement shows synthesis of experience and learning, self-reflection and assessment, and collaboration"
- 5. **Intellectual Engagement:** "Demonstration of curiosity, independence, responsibility, skill development, creativity, and risk-taking through research or engagement"



If you have questions about these definitions for the 5 learning goals, we recommend making an appointment with an immersion advisor.

How Do I Deepen my Reflection?

Have you gotten feedback prompting further, deeper, or more critical reflection? The purpose of Immersion Vanderbilt is to inspire profound insights, so mentors may ask you to revisit your initial reflections. No matter the method of reflection you choose, you can deepen your reflection by considering the following strategies¹⁰:

- Explore the signs and symbols you begin to notice around you for deeper connections to your topic
- Question familiar patterns and behaviors you do automatically as they relate to learning about new topics and ideas
- **Identify and challenge** your assumptions (about culture, people, emotions, knowledge, and more)
- Listen to others' points of view and empathize with multiple perspectives

You can always reach out for help at EL&IV and the many partner offices that support Immersion Vanderbilt.

Feeling stuck? Book a 1-to-1 Consultation at the ELC for help reviewing and deepening your reflections.

¹⁰ Moon, J. A. (2004). *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge. The Vanderbilt University English Language Center

The Language of Reflective Writing

Throughout the Immersion Vanderbilt process, you will be asked to reflect on your ideas, plans, experiences, and project as related to Immersion Vanderbilt's 5 learning goals.

- 1. Need a review of reflection in U.S. academic settings? If so, review "The Culture and Strategies of Reflective Practices" before continuing here.
- 2. Need a review of the 5 learning goals of Immersion Vanderbilt? If so, <u>read about them here</u>.

If you are already familiar with the sections above, <u>click here to read "The Language of Reflective Writing" guide</u>, which details the language and organization of several types of reflective writing.

Note: This document was developed by the Australian College of Applied Professions¹¹. The examples focus on applied psychology and use Australian English conventions, but you can adapt them to suit your needs.

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Describing your Immersion Plan: A Framework

This section will help you organize your Immersion ideas so you can write and speak confidently about your plan in a variety of settings, including:

forms required to complete Immersion	statements of purpose
Vanderbilt	 networking
grant proposals	application forms
• interviews	• resume/CV
• emails	• LinkedIn
• cover letters	

Writing is like Dancing¹²

Scholars studying texts from a variety of genres have identified patterns, or moves, that fulfill a communicative purpose.

- Like genres of writing such as introductions, cover letters, or grant proposals, dances such as salsa, waltz, or tango have moves.
- Similar to a dance, some moves in a text may repeat within a text.
- Texts in a genre may share some common moves and differ in others, just like dances.
- Individuals may add style and creativity to their moves.

We searched for a genre that would best describe an Immersion project and discovered that *grant proposals* fit the questions on several Immersion Vanderbilt forms. You can also use the grant proposal model to apply for Immersion funding or later in your academic and professional career.

¹¹ You can find the full citation here: Australian College of Applied Professions. (n.d.). Reflective writing language guide. Retrieved November 8, 2023, from https://sls.navitas-

professional.edu.au/sites/default/files/resource/reflective writing language guide faqs v1.2.pdf

¹² Hyon, S. (2016). Using genre analysis to teach writing in the disciplines. In Flowerdew & Costely (Eds.) *Discipline-Specific Writing* (pp. 91-108). Routledge.

Research Grant Proposal Moves¹³

Researchers have identified the following moves (patterns) in research grant proposals:

Territory: establish the topic and setting

Gap/niche: name a gap/problem **Goal:** define your objective(s)

Means: explain the methods, procedures, or plans of action

Achievements: describe your anticipated results, findings, or outcomes **Benefits:** predict real-world gains and/or future recommendations

But how does this model connect to Immersion Vanderbilt?

Guiding Questions for Your Immersion Description

On the left, you can see the original research grant proposal moves. On the right, you can see how we turned those moves into guiding questions for your immersion descriptions. Answer the questions on the right to describe your Immersion Vanderbilt plans clearly and succinctly.

RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSAL MOVES	GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR YOUR IMMERSION DESCRIPTION
Territory: establish the topic and setting Gap/niche: name a gap/problem	What is your Immersion project about? Why is that subject important to you?
Goal: define your objective(s)	What do you hope to accomplish during your immersive experience? In other words, what are your goals?
Means: explain the methods, procedures, or plans of action Achievements: describe your anticipated results, findings, or outcomes	How will your immersive experience help you achieve your goal(s)? Details will help here. For example: Where will your immersive experience take place? Will you collaborate with other people or departments?
Benefits: predict real world gains and/or future recommendations	How can this Immersion experience be beneficial to you and/or others? How can your immersive experience connect to your future aspirations?



Do you want to see how to implement the framework above? You can review a sample immersion description by clicking on the link for Part 2 of this document, found here.

The Language of Immersion Proposals

Tip: If you're not sure what to write in one of the sections, use the space to ask questions and request support.

Territory & Gap/Niche

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¹³ Flowerdew, L. (2016). A genre-inspired and lexico-grammatical approach for helping postgraduate students craft research grant proposals. *English for Specific Purposes*, 42, 1-12.

What is your Immersion project about? Why is that subject important to you?

- X has emerged as a powerful platform for...
- X is fundamental to addressing the issue of...
- X is a common condition which has considerable impact on...
- I became interested in X after reading...
- My interest in this area developed while I was...
- My experience working with X has prompted this proposal.
- This project was conceived during my time working for X. I witnessed...
- My background in X has inspired my interest in...
- Growing up with X has driven my focus on...

- One of the main obstacles...
- There is increasing concern that...
- X has been the subject of intense debate within the Y community.
- However, X is having a serious effect on Y.
- What is less clear is... / Much uncertainty still exists about...
- However, far too little attention has been paid to...
- However, this story has not been told from the perspective of...

Goal

What do you hope to accomplish during your immersive experience? In other words, what are your goals?

- The aim of my project is to explore the relationship between...
- My project will examine the way in which...
- I seek to examine the changing nature of...
- Part of the aim of my project is to explore...
- The purpose of my project is to contribute to...

Means & AchievementsHow will your immersive experience help you achieve your goal(s)? Details will help here. For example:

Where will your immersive experience take place? Will you collaborate with other people or departments?

- The methodological approach taken in this study is...
- This study will use X approach to investigate...
- For my Immersion experience, I will travel to...
- I will work with X to deepen my knowledge of Y.
- Prof. Z in the department of Y will support...
- During this project, I plan to...
- By the end of my Immersion project, I will have...

Benefits

How is this Immersion experience beneficial to you and/or others? How can your immersive experience connect to your future aspirations?

- I will gain new insights into...
- Understanding the link between X&Y will help...
- This project should make an important contribution to...
- This project aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring...
- In the future, I plan to explore...
- This project will provide an essential next step toward...

The Immersion Proposal Framework and this language handout were developed based on research about the structure and language of successful grant proposals. You can use this section to apply for funding in and beyond Immersion Vanderbilt.



Need help with language choices when writing or speaking about your Immersion work? Book a 1-to-1 Consultation for help whenever classes are in session.

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Summary

Our English Language Center Guide: The Culture and Language of Immersion Vanderbilt resource series was developed to provide Vanderbilt students who use English as an additional language the opportunity to more fully participate in Immersion Vanderbilt by:

- increasing your understanding of the purpose and benefits of Immersion Vanderbilt
- understanding linguistic and cultural concepts for more effectively navigating Immersion Vanderbilt
- applying language and academic skills for completing Immersion Vanderbilt successfully

If you have questions, please contact elc@vanderbilt.edu.

Find this guide and more online at: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/.