

First-Year English Courses for Nursing Students at Mahidol University

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Background

Mahidol University, like other universities in Thailand which provide an ESP program for their students, faces the problem of providing instruction in the kinds of English required by students in different disciplines. Our department is small with only 12 instructors to serve approximately 700 students from different fields of studies e.g. medical science, science, nursing science, dentistry, pharmacy, health science, medical technology, etc. We have been using the same general ESP materials prepared by our department for students in different disciplines for many years. However, some groups of our students found the materials quite easy. Also some groups of students had particular needs. For example, our nurses needed to be able to describe about a patient's condition, to take notes, to abbreviate and to use specialized instructions and measurements in nursing science (blood pressure, temperature, pulse rate etc.). Therefore, we started to prepare new materials for our nursing students 2 years ago.

Purpose.

Reading comprehension was chosen as the primary skill to be developed since few textbooks in science are available in Thai and students are obliged to read textbooks, articles, and journals in English. So the purpose of the course is essentially to develop the reading comprehension skills of students. Therefore, reading strategies (e.g. word building, reference terms, guessing meaning from context, finding main ideas, etc.) are included in each unit to help our students read effectively. Besides reading aids, we also centre on the linguistic abilities which students require in order to enable them to read and write at the sentence level effectively.

Materials.

We base our materials on "Nucleus: Nursing Science", omitting some parts we feel unnecessary or too easy for our students and expanding some parts which need to be emphasized. Some reading passages in "Nucleus" are changed; some are expanded but mostly new reading passages are added. We also include other relevant structures at the word and sentence levels for our students, e.g. stems and affixes

at the word level, the main sentence patterns essential for nursing students at the sentence level (e.g. relative clauses, “V-ing” clauses, patterns explaining differences, sentences beginning with introductory “it”, definition, etc.) Lexical items are included because of their usefulness as describers and definers (e.g. words for dimension, colours and shapes), because they are members of a set (e.g. names of parts of the human body, and because they are groups of describing (e.g. describing position or structure—posterior, anterior, inferior, exterior). Besides the lexical items in nursing science, word frequency in general science is also taken into account.

An auxiliary material on dictionary usage is given before starting the first unit of the course because we found out that most of our students did not know how to use a dictionary.

Each unit of our materials consists of:

1. A writing section

Each unit of a writing section is based on “Nucleus: Nursing Science” from units 1–5 in the first-semester course and units 6–10 in the second-semester course. Thus we will divide the topic of each unit according to its function e.g. unit 1 is focused on property and shape, unit 2 is on structure, unit 3 on purpose etc.

2. A reading aid section.

Each unit contains:

- a. Word analysis and signal markers.
- b. Guessing meaning from context.
- c. Finding topic sentences.
- d. Finding main ideas.
- e. Finding supporting sentences.
- f. Skimming and Scanning.
- g. Note-taking from reading.

3. A reading section.

Each unit requires no more than 350 words. The reading passage must be relevant to the topic of the writing section in each unit (e.g. shapes and properties, structure, measurements etc.) Thus, the subjects chosen for reading are those concerned with the above topics in medical and nursing sciences.

4. A word study section.

This reviews and extends the vocabulary, structural words and word-building devices which occur in the reading passages.

5. A structure-study section.

This gives brief explanations of the main structures and some minor structures which are essential for the students (e.g. definition, classification,

etc.) presented in the passage and provides appropriate exercises and substitution tables, both of which represent some of the items appearing in the word-study section. Revision in context is thus going on all the time.

Presentation of Materials.

Integrated skills are used in each unit of the course. That is, all the activities in the course are not necessarily covered by only one of the traditional macro-skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Most activities involve a variety and combination of skills. The main activities contained in each unit are:

- a. writing linguistic patterns emphasized in each unit.
- b. recognizing the linguistic patterns in the reading passages.
- c. reading for total understanding.
- d. reading for specific information.
- e. reading for the main points only.
- f. identifying stems and affixes.
- g. finding references for referent terms.
- h. answering questions on reading passages.

Conclusion

In the further development of this course, we plan to put more of discussion and problem-solving exercises which encourage students to think and go beyond the passage itself. We believe that this will make our materials more interesting and perhaps stimulate or motivate our students and give them an opportunity of exercising habits of thought which would be useful to them in the future.