# A WINDOW INTO ESP: TEACHING MEDICAL ENGLISH TO ITALIAN NURSES AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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In this article, I'd like to talk about my experience in teaching ESP, in particular, Medical English, to Italian nurses and healthcare professionals

We know, ESP stands for *English for Specific Purposes* . It refers to the teaching of a specific genre of mostly technical English for students with specific goals, careers or fields of study. Examples include English for Academic Purposes (students will enter an English-speaking university), English for Business & Management, or Hotel & Catering English (for hotel and tourism professionals), medical English (for nurses, doctors, other health care professionals).

ESP is different from ESL (English as Second Language or general English) and the most important difference lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English. An ESP program is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required .

The ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students' real world (or wishes); instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. However, the difference between ESL and ESP  deals not only in the nature of the learner, but also in the aim of instruction. In fact, as a general rule, while in ESL all four language skills*: listening, reading, speaking,* and *writing,* are stressed equally, in ESP it is a needs analysis that determines which language skills are most needed by the students, and the syllabus is designed accordingly. In the ESP class, students are shown how the subject-matter content is expressed in English.

I have found all these elements in my experience of teaching medical English. It has been sometimes very difficult to teach ESP in classes where there are many problems for students in approaching first of all

ESL. Then, the combination of subject matter and English language teaching is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study. Moreover, I have always started from students' need analysis trying to create some lessons that could catch their attention creating a relationship between the so called "L2" and their own medical subjects.

For my students, the most important element that must be considered when I plan a lesson, is to improve their speaking skills, as I noticed a lack of fluency and of direct approach to the language. Students need to speak, to interact with the L2, to communicate with other people, to be able to create some formal and informal dialogues, with colleagues, friends and patients. So, my ESP program emphasize most of all, the development of spoken skills, because nurses and healthcare professionals need to have a more alive contact with the L2. I often divide my lessons in almost 3 various steps, as follow:

- Step 1: Improve SS' speaking skills through role-plays, simulations of particular situations: e.g., meeting friends, people in hospital, talking with a patient reassuring him/her, etc.

- Step 2: Create a wide scientific vocabulary that is specific medical terminology, explain the roots of the medical words, so that students will better understand the relationship between the English term and the Italian correspondent. The creation of a medical vocabulary, is a very important goal my students must reach.

- Step 3: Improve SS' writing and comprehending skills, through many exercises on scientific articles in order to improve SS' capacity of *skimming* and *scanning* a text: analyzing a text in a general and deeper way.

I usually concentrate more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. Students must be able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context and this reinforces what is taught and increases their motivation. The students' abilities in their subject-matter fields, in turn, improve their ability to acquire English. Subject-matter knowledge gives them the context they need to understand the English of the classroom.

As for the evaluation, I help students identify their language learning problems and find solutions to them, find out the skills they need to focus on, and take responsibility for making choices which

determine what and how to learn. I think, the teacher will serve as a source of information to the students about how they are progressing in their language learning.

It's very important that the Faculty of Medicine inserts in the syllabus, the study of scientific English in order to give students a more complete education thus creating professional doctors, nurses, etc.

Anyway, to update the process of learning, the University should introduce more cultural Exchanges. We have Socrates and Erasmus programs, but there is a lack of real professional experiences for Nurses and Healthcare Professionals in other English speaking countries. Such exchange programs are a great opportunity for professional development. Students can gain a precious practice when working in foreign healthcare facilities, because they can share their experiences from their own hospitals and also learn of new initiatives/techniques to try their return.