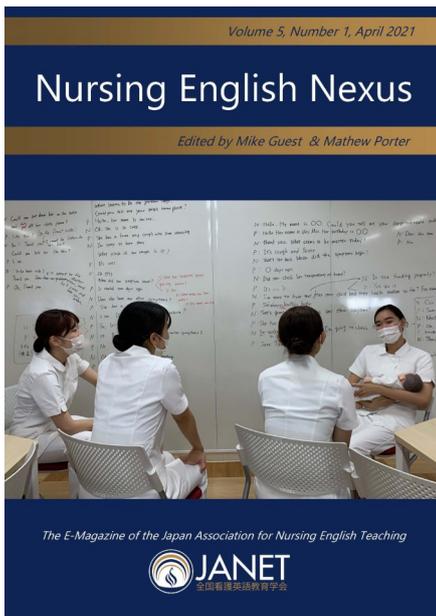


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The Top Ten: A Helpful Course-Final Assignment

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What exactly are your nursing students learning in your English classes? What do they find most memorable, helpful? In fact, it may not match exactly what you thought you were teaching or intended to teach but need that be a problem? In order to gain feedback on what my students are absorbing in my lessons I have long used a closing assignment entitled 'My Top Ten'. This has provided me with extremely useful feedback which has guided my teaching materials and classroom manner in subsequent years. In this short article, I will explain how this activity works.

Procedures

The basic idea of this assignment is simple. I ask my first-year nursing and medical students to list and explain the ten most important, interesting, memorable or helpful things they have learned during my class (of course this can easily be expanded to 15 or even 20 items, should the teacher wish). A form is provided (see Appendix 1) which contains basic guidelines and the sections they are to fill in and submit. However, in order to make this exercise productive for both students and teacher, following the guidelines is important. Here, I will explain the guidelines.

The students are to write down the items that they have chosen and then add a comment or explanation in English as to why they consider each memorable, important, or interesting. It is important that students give due consideration for this exercise so I emphasize the following guidelines:

1. Do not just choose new words. Students should also include a variety of clinical content, expressions, cultural notions, social/interpersonal ideas, grammatical points etc. All items chosen must have arisen during this course.
2. The items should not come from one or two lessons alone, nor merely from a single source, such as a textbook. They should be gathered from numerous sources (book, handouts, teacher explanations, activities, other media, personal insights) based on the entire length of the course.
3. The list should include not only completely "new" items but also new insights and clarifications of English form and/or content.
4. The explanations should indicate not only that the student understands the content well but also indicate clearly how or why the student considers it helpful, memorable, important etc.
5. The explanations should utilize a variety of patterns, not merely, "This is important for my future as a nurse" or, "This is new for me because I didn't know it before."
6. A few representative samples should be given in advance by the teacher so that students might have a better understanding as to what type of items or explanations are desirable or not.

Evaluation, criteria, and feedback

In my case, I grade this assignment, largely to ensure that students take it seriously and give due consideration to both the items chosen and the quality of their explanations. Of course, it is difficult to grade the quality of what are, largely, students' subjective choices regarding what they found memorable. However, there are certain standards that can be applied. The breadth of variety of items is one criterion and the quality/depth of thought expressed in the explanation is another. Students are penalized for choosing minor and peripheral items, if the choices of which they can not adequately defend (the

inclusion of such items often indicates that the student might merely have scanned their textbook or handouts for words that they didn't know, even though such items may have little or no long-term value—and may have been duly explained as such by the teacher).

I also provide explicit feedback to each student post-submission. Sometimes, I will add a comment to further expand the student's grasp of the item. In some cases, it may be apparent that the student hadn't correctly understood the intended teaching point. In other cases, the explanation may be vague and I request greater clarity or specificity. If a student simply lists 10 words (particularly 10 new clinical items or specialist terms, as some are prone to do) I will ask for a revision requiring more variety of content. If the explanations all follow the same pattern, or only a small number of lessons/activities are represented, I also ask for revision.

Benefits

One bonus of this activity is that this assignment can easily be carried out online or as homework. More fundamentally, the greatest benefit for the students is that it serves as a type of review of the year's contents—a conscientious student will be reminded of a number of learning points. Moreover, the cognitive act of choosing representative items and adding a considered explanation in English for each can serve to consolidate these items in the students' minds.

The other major benefit is for the teacher, who now has an opportunity to see how effective his or her teaching intentions have been absorbed or understood by the students. If several students display an incomplete or incorrect understanding of a key point the teacher will know that some adjustment may be needed when teaching it in the future. Teaching points that the teacher had considered minor may be emphasized by students—such that the teacher may want to expand on these items in the future. Teachers

may become more aware of those areas that require further explanation or a more concentrated teaching focus. Finally, as the reader may have suspected, this activity can be applied to almost any type of English course.

In short, the 'My Top Ten' activity is able to perform that which formalized classroom surveys often fail to do: provide students with an opportunity to show what they've learned and teachers with helpful insights that can positively impact future teaching.

Authentic samples

Below, I display three authentic well-written and well-considered entries collected from among my student submissions as examples:

1. Item: The correct usage of "more than x" does not include the given number X.
Comment: *I have been ambiguous about whether or not to include the given numbers so I could understand it accurately in the class.*
2. Item: "breathe deeply" or "take a deep breath"
Comment: *Use "breathe deeply" for repeated deep breaths. Use "take a deep breath" when taking a deep breath only once, such as auscultation.*
3. Item: He/She is allergic to ~
Comment: *Before I learned it, I had thought "His/Her allergy is ~". This phrase is essential not only in the medical field but also daily life. And "be allergic to ~" can be applied when I want to tell my allergy. This phrase is a must to protect myself and other people.*

Appendix 1: Sample 'My Top Ten' form

MY TOP 10!

Ten English words, phrases, ideas, and points I remember best from this class



Name (in Romaji) _____

**Try to use items from different lessons; don't just list individual words. Also, try to vary your comment patterns. Show me that you understand what you are writing.*

1. _____

Comment:

2. _____

Comment:

3. _____

Comment:

4. _____

Comment:

5. _____

Comment:

6. _____

Comment:

7. _____

Comment:

8. _____

Comment:

9. _____

Comment:

10. _____

Comment: