

## **SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ESP AND STANDARD ENGLISH TEACHING**

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### **ANNOTATION**

The most important difference lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English. ESP students are usually adults who already have some acquaintance with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions. An ESP program is therefore built on an assessment of purposes and needs and the functions for which English is required.

**Key words:** English, Specific Purposes, general English, teaching grammar

How is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) different from English as a Second Language (ESL), also known as general English?

ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from accounting or computer science to tourism and business management. 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, ESL and ESP diverge 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. An ESP program, might, for example, emphasize the development of reading skills in students who are preparing for graduate work in business administration; or it might promote the development of spoken skills in students who are studying English in order to become tourist guides.

As a matter of fact, ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. Such a combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of study, whether it be accounting, business management, economics, computer science or tourism. Being able to use the vocabulary and structures that they learn in a meaningful context 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. In the ESP class, students are shown how the subject-matter content is expressed in English. The teacher can make the most of the students' knowledge of the subject matter, thus helping them learn English faster.

The term "specific" in ESP refers to the specific purpose for learning English. Students approach the study of English through a field that is already known and relevant to them. This means that they are able to use what they learn in the ESP classroom right away in their work and studies. The ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts.

ESP assesses needs and integrates motivation, subject matter and content for the teaching of relevant skills.

The responsibility of the teacher

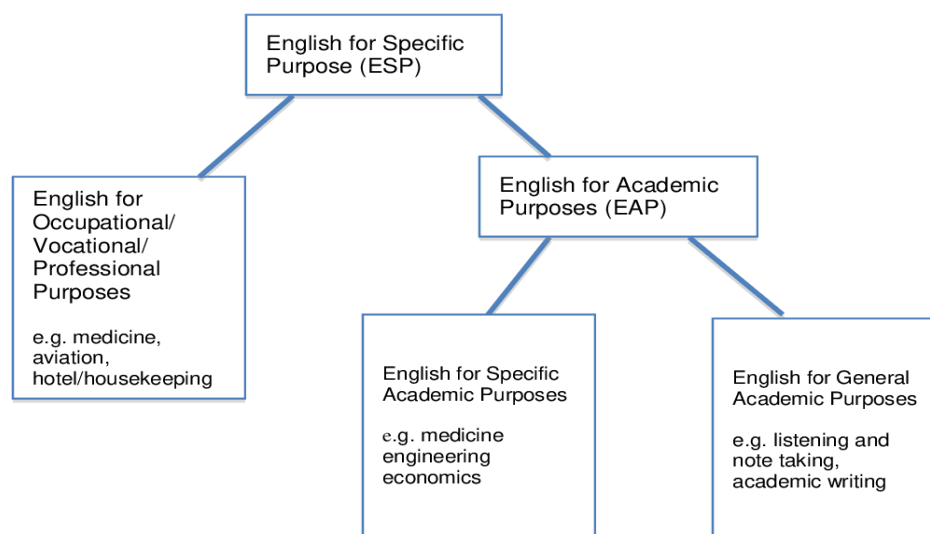
A teacher that already has experience in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), can exploit her background in language teaching. She should recognize the ways in which her teaching skills can be adapted for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. Moreover, she will need to look for content specialists for help in designing appropriate lessons in the subject matter field she is teaching.

As an ESP teacher, you must play many roles. You may be asked to organize courses, to set learning objectives, to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom, and to evaluate student s progress.

### Organizing Courses

You have to set learning goals and then transform them into an instructional program with the timing of activities. One of your main tasks will be selecting, designing and organizing course materials, supporting the students in their efforts, and providing them with feedback on their progress.

You arrange the conditions for learning in the classroom and set long-term goals and short-term objectives for student’s achievement. Your knowledge of students' potential is central in designing a syllabus with realistic goals that takes into account the students' concern in the learning situation.



### Creating a Learning Environment

Your skills for communication and mediation create the classroom atmosphere. Students acquire language when they have opportunities to use the language in interaction with other speakers. Being their teacher, you may be the only English speaking person available to students, and although your time with any of them is limited, you can structure effective communication skills in the classroom. In order to do so, in your interactions with students try to listen carefully to what they are saying and give your understanding or misunderstanding

back at them through your replies. Good language learners are also great risk-takers, since they must make many errors in order to succeed: however, in ESP classes, they are handicapped because they are unable to use their native language competence to present themselves as well-informed adults. That's why the teacher should create an atmosphere in the language classroom which supports the students. Learners must be self-confident in order to communicate, and you have the responsibility to help build the learner's confidence.

### Evaluating Students

The teacher is a resource that helps 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. You will serve as a source of information to the students about how they are progressing in their language learning.

### The responsibility of the student

What is the role of the learner and what is the task he/she faces? The learners come to the ESP class with a specific interest for learning, subject matter knowledge, and well-built adult learning strategies. They are in charge of developing English language skills to reflect their native-language knowledge and skills.

### Interest for Learning

People learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting. In this view, ESP is a powerful means for such opportunities. Students will acquire English as they work with materials which they find interesting and relevant and which they can use in their professional work or further studies. The more learners pay attention to the meaning of the language they hear or read, the more they are successful; the more they have to focus on the linguistic input or isolated language structures, the less they are motivated to attend their classes.

The ESP student is particularly well disposed to focus on meaning in the subject-matter field. In ESP, English should be presented not as a subject to be learned in isolation from real use, nor as a mechanical skill or habit to be developed. On the contrary, English should be presented in authentic contexts to make the learners acquainted with the particular ways in which the language is used in functions that they will need to perform in their fields of specialty or jobs.

#### Subject-Content Knowledge

Learners in the ESP classes are generally aware of the purposes for which they will need to use English. Having already oriented their education toward a specific field, they see their English training as complementing this orientation. Knowledge of the subject area enables the students to identify a real context for the vocabulary and structures of the ESP classroom. In such way, the learners can take advantage of what they already know about the subject matter to learn English.

English for specific purposes (ESP) is a subset of English as a second or foreign language. It usually refers to teaching the English language to university students or people already in employment, with reference to the particular vocabulary and skills they need. As with any language taught for specific purposes, a given course of ESP will focus on one occupation or profession, such as Technical English, Scientific English, English for medical professionals, English for waiters, English for tourism, etc. Despite the seemingly limited focus, a course of ESP can have a wide-ranging impact, as is the case with Environmental English.

English for academic purposes, taught to students before or during their degrees, is one sort of ESP, as is Business English. Aviation English is taught to pilots, air traffic controllers and civil aviation cadets to enable clear radio communications.

ESP is taught in many universities of the world. Many professional associations of teachers of English (TESOL, IATEFL) have ESP sections. Much attention is devoted to ESP course design. ESP teaching has much in common with

English as a Foreign or Second Language and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Quickly developing Business English can be considered as part of a larger concept of English for Specific Purposes.

ESP is different from standard English teaching in the fact that the one doing the teaching not only has to be proficient in standard English, but they also must be knowledgeable in a technical field. When doctors of foreign countries learn English, they need to learn the names of their tools, naming conventions, and methodologies of their profession before one can ethically perform surgery. ESP courses for medicine would be relevant for any medical profession, just as how learning electrical engineering would be beneficial to a foreign engineer. Some ESP scholars recommend a "two layer" ESP course: the first covering all generic knowledge in the specific field of study, and then a second layer that would focus on the specifics of the specialization of the individual.

English language learners who take ESP classes do so for a very specific purpose. They have a particular language goal in mind, related to their lives and often their jobs. ESP students already have some foundation of the language and are usually adults with higher levels of English. These students are usually highly motivated because their goal is clear. Many times, their work will depend on their English proficiency. As a result, their motivation and dedication levels are high.

Examples of ESP classes are English for Aviation (for air traffic controllers or pilots), English for Hospitality (for hotel staff), English for Tourism (for travel agents and tour guides), English for Medicine (for nurses, doctors and other medical staff), English for Banking, and Legal English. Business English and English for Academic Purposes are ESP courses but they are mainstream so have their own categories.

The first need that is important in an ESP class is a needs analysis. A needs analysis will tell the teacher exactly what language and skills the students need to know and why they need to know it.

It will provide a background for the teacher so they have a better understanding of the necessity of the classes for their students. ESP classes will often focus on a particular language skill or particular language points, which is in contrast to General English classes which will be sure to include all four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

In contrast, ESP classes are more focused on specific language and contexts rather than grammar and language structures. In other words, instead of teaching the present perfect for past experiences, or phrasal verbs, an English for Hospitality teacher will focus on functional language such as greetings or dealing with customer problems. Any language work that comes out will be a result of necessity rather than focus.

One important aspect of teaching ESP which you must remember is that these lessons are essential for the learners for their daily lives. While they will naturally be highly motivated, they will expect you to be professional and knowledgeable. They will want to enjoy the learning situation but they will not want to do activities without a clear purpose or without a direct relation to their goal. They will also expect to see results. In other words, ESP classes are generally more serious than other classes – but that doesn't mean they have to be boring.

Teaching ESP is a bit of a juggling act; it's not the same as teaching a General English class. For the most part, you won't be familiar with the content, which means you will have to do loads more research and preparation before your classes. The language is really important and, in some cases, can mean the difference between keeping and losing a job (in hospitality, for instance) or even life and death (in medicine or aviation). So it is vital that your students walk out of your classes with high levels of accuracy. Also, there might not be as much support in your institution with regards to your ESP classes, because there is a chance no one has taught that particular class before.

Again the onus is on you as the teacher to find the resources that you need and prepare as best you can.

The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language. Mackay and Mountford clearly illustrate the difference between restricted language and language with this statement:

the language of international air-traffic control could be regarded as 'special', in the sense that the repertoire required by the controller is strictly limited and can be accurately determined situationally, as might be the linguistic needs of a dining-room waiter or air-hostess. However, such restricted repertoires are not languages, just as a tourist phrase book is not grammar. Knowing a restricted 'language' would not allow the speaker to communicate effectively in novel situation, or in contexts outside the vocational environment (pp. 4-5).

The second type of ESP identified by Carter is English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. In the 'Tree of ELT' (Hutchinson & Waters, ESP is broken down into three branches: a) English for Science and Technology (EST), b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and c) English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). An example of EOP for the EST branch is 'English for Technicians' whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is 'English for Medical Studies'. Hutchinson and Waters do note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP: "· people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job" (p. 16). Perhaps this explains Carter's rationale for categorizing EAP and EOP under the same type of ESP. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one in the same: employment.



However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed. I contend that EAP and EOP are different in terms of focus on Cummins' notions of cognitive academic proficiency versus basic interpersonal skills.

The third and final type of ESP identified by Carter is English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions.

The classification of ESP courses creates numerous problems by failing to capture fluid nature of the various types of ESP teaching and the degree of overlap between “commoncore” EAP and EBP and General English - e.g. Business English can be seen as mediating language between the technicalities of particular business and the language of the general public, which puts it in a position between English for General Purposes (EGP) and specialist

English. Therefore, some authors suggest the presentation of the whole of ELT should be on a continuum that runs from General English courses to very specific ESP courses.

“English for specific purposes is a term that refers to teaching or studying English for a particular career (like law, medicine) or for business in general.” There is a specific reason for which English is learned.

Pauline C. Robinson describes ESP as a type of ELT (English Language Teaching) and defines it as: “Goal-oriented language learning.” that means student has a specific goal that is going to be attained. The origin of ESP and its development is closely linked with learners’ interest in various specific disciplines e.g. ‘Law English’, ‘English for Hotel Industry’ or ‘English for Tourist Management’.

Students learn English for a specific purpose, represented by studying subject matter, to gain and develop appropriate knowledge and skills through English. That is why English language is not seen as the main goal in the process of learning, but rather a vehicle for its acquirement. “Students study ESP not because they are interested in the English language as such but because they have to perform a task in English.

Their command of the English language must be such that they can reach a satisfactory level in their specialist subject studies.“

The fact that “learners know specifically why they are learning a language” is a great advantage on both sides of the process.

The group of ESP learners is going to achieve the same goal in the field of studying branch, so learners’ motivation, in a form of the same aim, enables teacher to meet learners’ needs and expectations easier. Learner and the way of learning (‘acquiring language’) are considered to be the main factors in the whole process. Hutchinson and Waters emphasize

ESP to be an approach not product that means language learning not language use is highlighted. They draw the attention to a ‘learning-centred approach’ “in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”.

Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John divided characteristic features of ESP in two groups according its ‘absolute’ and ‘variable’ attributes.

Concerning the absolute characteristics (according to Dudley-Evans and St John):

- ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
- ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres

appropriate to these activities;

- The variable characteristics are seen in five points;
- ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from

that of general English;

- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation;

- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students

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