TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING TECHNICAL ENGLISH

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Writing technical texts is not always an easy task, but using the proper techniques makes our job less burdensome most of the times. Hence, in my article, I intend to present just a few of the techniques that I personally use when preparing the courses for my students studying technical English. And after four years of searching and improving my teaching I can say that they are really useful.

Keywords: technique, concise, vocabulary, technical, motivating

Many teachers who are involved in writing technical courses undoubtedly encounter the question whether their course really offers something new or interesting to their students or it is just another one keeping his/her students busy for 2 hours and then they leave the room bearing just one or two ideas in mind which they are, anyway, going to forget as soon as they are involved in a task, activity or conversation.

Therefore, in order to make the course more interesting, we, as teachers, should focus on the needs of our students, on what is really important to them, what really helps them in their studying or future career, concentrate on that particular aspect and deliver information regarding it. Of course it is not that simple, but it is worth it!

Accordingly, in what follows, I intend to present the techniques that I use when I prepare my courses for the students studying technical English.

1. Be clear and coherent

We can use three main strategies for maintaining our sentences clear:

1. be succinct
2. always use the active voice
3. stay away from pointless *big* words

Another important feature when writing technical texts is to be brief and we can do that by trying to choose our words cautiously; unnecessary words make our sentences less easy to be comprehended, hinder the understanding of the real meaning, and often discourage our students.

Since we teach technical English for future engineers, we have one important advantage to start with: our students are trained to think logically and clearly, they bring a thorough way of thinking which is extremely useful when we have to teach new topics. Nevertheless, they are also frequently among the most dedicated and intelligent students.

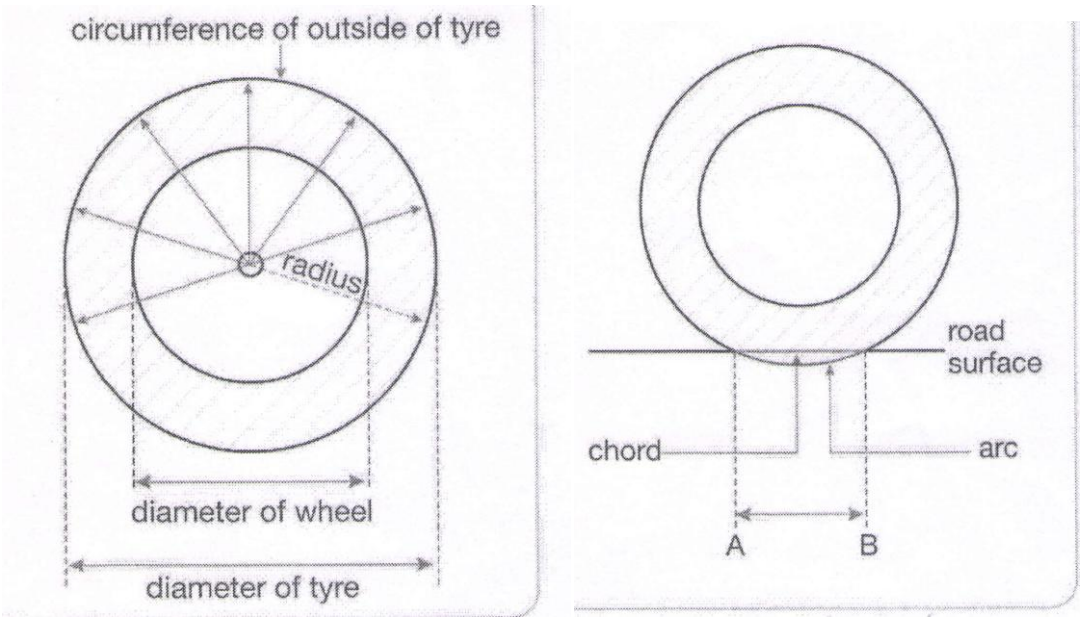
2. Concentrate on the students

The first question any teacher has to ask himself/herself, irrespective of the material, is always the following one: What can my students learn from this text, is it helpful, does it contain relevant information?

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The students studying how cars are made, for example, will have an obvious understanding of words such as *tailgate* or *chassis* and their importance for the proper function of a car. Usually, for the students in the second year, it is generally fine to use these terms without any explanation or basically use some graphs, charts or diagrams which are really illustrative for the topic under investigation:



Ibbotson, M., *Professional English in Use, Engineering, Technical English for Professionals*, page 18

So, if the information is plainly presented, the students will be able to extract the essential information and use it in suitable contexts. Our course will have served its most important purpose, which is **to communicate**.

3. Reflect on every single word

In teaching technical English we need to bear in mind that it is a specific field when the focus is not on the words themselves, but on the way they are used in order not only to render the important function of a device or of different means of transport, but to make the people reading the instructions really understand how to use or even repair, when the situation requires it, the device or the specific means of transport.

Most people who own cars, for example, come across difficulty when they have to explain or to understand certain technical words, such as *airline* or *wheel balancer* since they do not consider they have to know how to explain them only because they are drivers, and they are right. We do not have to know how to explain all the functions that our cars have or all the components of our cars, this is the job of the mechanic or of the engineer designing that particular car.

This is the moment when language plays an important role because the technical words and the functions of a car or of a particular device need to be very thoroughly

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presented and explained in such a way as to make the reader understand the many functions they have in order to be dealt with correctly.

Teachers are a very important factor from this point of view because when teaching these technical terms, it is essential how this process develops: the comprehension and the future involvement of our students in this particular field depend on that, on the way we are able to put the information into words and to make them want to be involved in this field.

What I really want to emphasize here is that we have to use the appropriate language in teaching technical English, the new structures need to be explained in not so many words, but very accurately, which is not always easy, especially when in a single group of students we need to focus on different levels of handling the foreign language.

4. Focus on being concise

When we prepare a course for our students, we need to really know them, know what we want to say and know why we say it. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves: Is it relevant to our students? If not, why do we want to make them read it or study it? And sometimes we may have spent a lot of time writing about a particular topic that we consider important, but we need to have knowledge of the students who will just look through the text. They may simply read the subheadings, so we have to make sure they obviously summarize the whole text.

5. Be dynamic and interesting

Make your writing so interesting that your students will find pleasure reading it and applying the things you teach them about. In technical writing it is recommended to use the active voice rather than the passive voice. Of course we do not have to use the active voice all the time; we just need to keep a balance between passive and active.

Conclusion

Since the status of the English language across the world as a lingua franca is so prevalent, communication skills are also significant. Unquestionably, an outstanding factor in the education of the innovative international engineer is represented by the multilingual skills. English for specific purposes concentrates the students' attention on the specific terminology and communication skills which are necessary in the international specialized area.

Language and communication skills are important features in the training of the modern engineer, as well as English for specific purposes. Also, an essential characteristic of continuous learning is the integration of language and communication development courses, and it will eventually play an important role in the improvement of life-long learning. Nevertheless, this should contribute to improvements in engineering and, undeniably, engineering education through essential communication skills.

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