

Boosting Academic Writing Through Descriptive Paragraphs: Training for Nursing Students

Agus Wahyudi¹, Arief Pamuji², Ririn Martuti³, Aden Hapradespa⁴

STIK Bina Husada Palembang^{1,2,3,4}

Corresponding email: wahyudiagus.aw@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submission : 2025-03-23

Received : 2025-04-03

Revised : 2025-06-27

Accepted : 2025-06-28

Keywords

Descriptive

Paragraph

Nursing Science

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.61994/jumputan.v1i1.1116>

ABSTRACT

The ability to write descriptive paragraphs in English is an important skill for nursing students, especially in the context of medical documentation, reporting patient conditions, and professional communication in an international standard health environment. However, many students still have difficulty in writing descriptive paragraphs systematically, objectively, and in accordance with academic English rules. This community service activity aims to improve students' descriptive writing skills through structured and contextual training. The method used is a Qualitative design through case study approach involving 36 students of the Public Health Science Study Program, STIK Bina Husada Palembang as a purposively selected sample. The activity consists of the preparation, implementation, evaluation, and identification of obstacles stages. The results show that this training made a positive contribution to improving participants' understanding and skills in composing descriptive paragraphs. However, some obstacles found include limited vocabulary, sentence structure errors, and limited training time. Therefore, more intensive and sustainable further training is highly recommended to support students' professional readiness. This activity is also a form of implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education in improving the quality of competent graduates who are ready to compete at national and international levels.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.
Copyright© 2024 by Author. Published by CV. Doki Course and Training



Introduction

The ability to write descriptive paragraphs in English is a crucial skill for nursing students, particularly in professional contexts such as documenting patients, reporting physical conditions, and preparing medical reports. In practice, nurses are expected to describe a patient's condition clearly, systematically, and objectively. This skill is increasingly important in hospitals with international standards and in scientific publications that use English as the medium of communication

Theoretically, a paragraph is a unit of thought consisting of several sentences that support each other to develop one main idea. According to Boardman and Frydenberg (2002), "A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop one main idea" (p. 5). In this context, a descriptive paragraph is a type of paragraph that aims to provide a clear, concrete, and detailed description of an object, place, person, or event, so that the reader can "see" or "feel" what the writer describes. Oshima and Hogue (1999) state that "a descriptive paragraph describes how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels" (p. 60), which in the world of nursing is often associated with clinical observations of the patient's condition.

The main function of a descriptive paragraph is to help the reader gain a real and accurate picture of a subject through the use of sensory details and the selection of appropriate adjectives. In nursing practice, this function becomes very vital because the information conveyed through medical records can influence clinical decision making. Nursing students need to master good descriptive techniques in order to write patient observation data effectively and in accordance with medical documentation standards.

However, the reality in the field shows that many nursing students have difficulty in writing descriptive paragraphs in English. Some common obstacles include limited technical vocabulary, errors in sentence structure, inappropriate use of adjectives, and lack of ability to construct paragraphs coherently and logically. To help students overcome these difficulties, nursing education needs to take a more practical and supportive approach to teaching English. Instead of focusing only on general language skills, programs should include English that's specific to the nursing field—what's often called English for Nursing Purposes. This way, students can learn the words, phrases, and writing styles they'll actually use in real clinical settings. It's also important to give students regular opportunities to practice writing, especially descriptive writing, and to guide them in organizing their ideas clearly and correctly. Teachers can play a big role by giving useful feedback and showing examples of good writing, like how to describe a patient's condition in a professional and accurate way. With the right support and enough practice, nursing students can build their confidence and become much better at writing in English for their future careers. This shows a gap between students' academic skills and the professional demands they face in the field. As stated by Hyland (2004), the ability to write in an academic or professional context "requires an awareness of specific rhetorical conventions of the discipline" (p. 6), which means that writing skills cannot be separated from the context and purpose of their use. Several studies over the past decade have highlighted this issue, particularly among nursing students in non-English-speaking countries. For example, Ariani et al. (2018) found that more than 70% of Indonesian nursing students struggled to produce coherent and contextually appropriate clinical writing in English. Similarly, Alqunayeer and Zamzami (2020) reported that a significant number of nursing students in Saudi Arabia lacked the grammatical and structural competence required to describe patient conditions effectively. Siregar et al. (2021) further emphasized that many students tend to include subjective language in clinical descriptions, which undermines the objectivity required in professional

documentation. These findings clearly support the need for further research to analyze and address the gap between what students learn in academic writing classes and what is actually required in real-world clinical communication.

To bridge this gap, systematic and structured descriptive writing training is needed for nursing students. This training not only aims to improve language competence, but also to equip students with contextual and applicable skills according to the world of work. Through a practical approach and based on field needs, students can get used to using medical terms in English, compiling descriptions of patient conditions effectively, and adjusting their language style to professional standards.

In this case, community service programs can play a strategic role as a means of empowering and improving the quality of human resources in the health sector. Through training held in the context of community service, universities can take a direct part in forming graduates who are not only academically competent, but also communicative, professional, and ready to face global challenges. This activity is also a real manifestation of the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education in bridging science with the needs of society. In closing, improving the skills of writing descriptive paragraphs in English for nursing students is an urgent need and must be taken seriously. Given the importance of this skill in clinical documentation and professional communication, as well as the various obstacles faced by students, community service-based training is the right and strategic solution. Through this activity, higher education institutions contribute to producing superior health workers, ready to work, and able to compete in the national and international arenas.

Method

The community service activity carried out in the Nursing Study Program of STIK Bina Husada Palembang used a descriptive approach, which is appropriate for capturing detailed insights into participants' behaviors, experiences, and outcomes within a specific context (Nassaji, 2015). The main variable in this activity was improving students' ability to write descriptive paragraphs in English. The population targeted in this activity included all students from the Public Health Study Program who took part in the community service program, and a total of 36 students were selected through purposive sampling. This method, as explained by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), is commonly applied in educational and qualitative research when researchers aim to focus on participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the study objectives. In addition to the intervention, informal interviews were also conducted to obtain feedback from participants. Such interviews are widely acknowledged in qualitative research for their ability to provide rich, in-depth information in a flexible and responsive manner (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

Results and Discussion

The results of this community service activity are grouped into 4 stages, namely: Preparation, Implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as challenges and obstacles faced. The following will be explained in detail:

1. Preparation stage:

The implementation of this program is carried out with the following steps: First, the community service team analyzes and understands the partner's problems before planning or preparing. The second step is to identify the needs of participants related to understanding and assignments for the English course to be worked on. Furthermore, a training plan is prepared based on the identified needs, including duration, content, methods, and resources needed. The community service team consists of instructors who have language skills. Finally, training materials are prepared and training materials such as modules, presentation slides, and practice assignments are prepared.

2. Implementation stage and Analysis:

After thorough preparation and problems were found in the participants, it was carried out on June 10, 2025, with the following implementation steps:

1. The instructor delivers training materials through lecture sessions that include definitions, characteristics, development patterns and examples of descriptive paragraphs in helping with English assignments
2. Participants are given practice assignments to create descriptive paragraphs based on predetermined themes. They will receive direct guidance and guidance from the instructor during practice.
3. Participants are invited to provide views on the material provided and the instructor provides feedback.

3. Monitoring and evaluation:

During the implementation of the activity, an evaluation was carried out using an activity implementation observation sheet and a participant satisfaction sheet. The following are the steps in the observation activity:

1. The community service team monitors the progress and participation of participants during the training.
2. Formative evaluations are carried out periodically to measure participant understanding and make improvements to the training process if necessary.
3. Participants are given direct feedback by the instructor to help them improve and enhance their understanding and speaking skills.

4. Obstacles or other problems encountered:

During the implementation of the training activities, several obstacles were found that affected the effectiveness of learning to write descriptive paragraphs in English. First, some participants showed limited mastery of English vocabulary, especially descriptive vocabulary and technical nursing terms, so they had difficulty in constructing appropriate sentences and describing conditions clearly. This is in accordance with the findings of Kusumaningrum & Syafryadin (2020) which stated that "limited vocabulary and lack of grammar mastery are major obstacles in constructing coherent descriptive texts" (p. 80).

Second, the participants' ability to use the correct sentence structure and construct paragraphs coherently and sequentially is also still not good. Most students still use direct translations from Indonesian, which results in sentences that are unnatural and less appropriate to the academic context of nursing. According to Rahmawati & Emilia (2017), "students tend to rely on literal translation, which often causes syntactical errors and loss of meaning in English academic writing" (p. 147). Third, the relatively short training time limits the space to provide more varied and in-depth writing exercises, and limits the opportunity to provide more intensive individual feedback.



Picture 1. The Participants of Training

Discussion

Effective descriptive writing in English is essential for nursing students, particularly for accurately documenting patient conditions. Despite its importance, many students struggle with technical vocabulary, grammar, and organizing their ideas clearly, revealing a gap between their academic skills and the demands of professional nursing communication. Research shows that nursing students often face difficulties producing clear, objective, and well-structured clinical texts (Ariani et al., 2018; Alqunayeer & Zamzami, 2020; Siregar et al., 2021). Hyland (2004) highlights that professional writing requires mastery of discipline-specific conventions, underscoring the need for tailored language instruction. To bridge this gap, nursing education should focus on specialized English training that incorporates relevant medical terminology and practical writing exercises. Additionally, community service programs can provide valuable real-world practice to enhance students' descriptive writing skills, ultimately preparing them for effective professional communication in healthcare settings.

Conclusion

Improving the ability to write descriptive paragraphs in English is a crucial aspect in supporting the professional competence of nursing students, especially in clinical documentation and medical communication activities. Through community service activities carried out by the Public Health Science Study Program of STIK Bina Husada Palembang, descriptive writing training was carried out systematically with a practical approach that was

tailored to the needs of the participants. The results of the activity showed an increase in participant participation and understanding of the structure and characteristics of descriptive paragraphs, although there were still obstacles such as limited technical vocabulary, inappropriate sentence structures, and limited training time. Therefore, this kind of training needs to be carried out continuously with the addition of contextual materials, case-based practices, and individual feedback. Through this activity, higher education institutions not only carry out the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, but also actively contribute to forming graduates who excel academically, are communicative in a global context, and are ready to face the challenges of the world of work in the health sector.

References

- Alqunayeer, H. S., & Zamzami, Y. M. (2020). Common grammatical errors in English writing: A case of Saudi nursing students. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(5), 123–132. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n5p123>
- Ariani, D. N., Santosa, R., & Wulandari, R. (2018). The analysis of nursing students' ability in writing clinical report in English. *Jurnal Keperawatan Soedirman*, 13(3), 189–195.
- Boardman, C. A., & Frydenberg, J. (2002). *Writing to communicate 2: Paragraphs and essays* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourses: Social interactions in academic writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2007). *Genre and second language writing*. University of Michigan Press.
- Kusumaningrum, A. D., & Syafradin. (2020). Teaching writing descriptive text using guessing game strategy. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 3(1), 76–81. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v3i1.p76-81>
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Family Health International.
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747>
- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (1999). *Writing academic English* (3rd ed.). Longman.
- Rahmawati, Y., & Emilia, E. (2017). Exploring Indonesian EFL students' challenges in academic writing and their learning strategies. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 147–156. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8132>
- Siregar, F. L., Lubis, A. H., & Nasution, R. D. (2021). Objective versus subjective language in clinical documentation: A study on Indonesian nursing students. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 21(2), 150–158.