

# A Collaborative University-Wide Communication English Curriculum Development Project

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## Abstract

A comprehensive curriculum for first-year English was developed by all five teachers of Nagoya University of the Arts' Communicative English Course starting in the Spring Semester of 2022. The goal was to develop and share a range of activities that were both paper-based (using the textbook, handouts, or no handouts at all) and digital-based (including activities from Google Classroom and websites) for the 20 units of the selected textbook, *The English Gym*. Teachers were free to use both the textbook and the accompanying digital version of the textbook, *The English Gym Digital Workbook*, as they wished. After describing the *Communication English* course and relating how the collaboration came about, we describe the process we used and continue to use to create and share materials (including Google Spaces, Google Classroom, Google Forms, Sheets, and others), along with websites to support language learning we found and shared (Adobe Express, Flippity, Quizlet, AnswerGarden, and others). In the next section, each author describes their approach and how they incorporated their own and the shared activities into their classes. Finally, we will share a group reflection on the program so far and discuss how to improve next year's materials.

## Introduction

While it is true that a number of Japanese universities have assigned textbooks and curricula for English teachers to follow, it is also true that at many institutions teachers choose their textbooks and develop their courses guided by a statement of goals or even just a class title provided by the university. Until the onset of the COVID pandemic, Nagoya University of Arts (NUA) English teachers followed a general statement of goals to adapt each course to their own individual teaching styles using their own materials.

However, during the pandemic, in addition to the growing perception of the benefits of having a more structured curriculum, it also seemed prudent to have a textbook and materials that would provide structure for online courses but would also allow a shift between on- and offline courses if necessary. After some research and discussion, the teachers chose *The English Gym* (TEG) and its companion digital workbook, *The English Gym Digital Workbook* (TEG-DW). Together these materials seemed to offer a lot of teacher support whether used online or off. Finally, on the institutional level, it seemed beneficial to have a repository to provide continuity even as staffing changes.

Currently, most Japanese universities rely heavily on part-time teachers who are rarely at the university on the same day, which means that there is rarely a framework to include part-time teachers in curriculum development. There is even less often a budget to pay part-timers to come in on additional days to collaborate, even if their schedules allowed it. In the case of NUA we were fortunate that the part-time teachers saw a benefit in collaboration for their own teaching, but this left the need to find a means through which teachers, despite their varied schedules, could easily share, evaluate, and adapt their materials without adding to their workload and without requiring a lot of additional time. The system would need to allow sharing of a wide variety of materials on a varied of platforms, such as Google Classroom, *Adobe Express*, *Quizlet*, *Flippity.net*, *Answergarden.com* (a web-based WordCloud app), and others.

## About the Communication English Course

The Communication English course is a one-year course required for graduation for first-year students. Students are not English majors but are majoring in art, design, music, and child development. Class sizes range from 30 to 60. Students are not grouped by major but are leveled to some extent by a placement test, but there is still a wide variation in English ability between and within each class from complete beginners who have experienced little or no formal English education to students who have done

homestays or short study-abroad trips and can hold a basic conversation in English.

### **About *The English Gym* Textbook**

*TEG* has 20 units each related to different themes that are of potential interest to young college students, such as *Getting to Know You*, *Food and Drink*, *Your Neighborhood*, and so forth. Each unit starts with a CLOZE task using the 10 questions from a recorded interview between a native speaker and a Japanese speaker of English. Vocabulary is provided for the CLOZE along with some follow-up questions students can answer as they listen to the interview. The second page offers additional vocabulary relevant to that unit in Japanese and English, and then often a grammar-based activity for errors that Japanese learners of English often make. At the bottom of the right-hand page, there is a “rearrange the words” exercise with 10 answers that are different from the ones given in the interview. The third page is a transcript of the audio with idiomatic words in red and the questions from page 1 in blue. The fourth and final page in each unit is called the *Classmate Conversation Interview* in which students are to work in pairs to create a new dialog based on their answers to the questions on the first page of each unit.

Among of the useful features of *The English Gym* for teachers is it offers PDFs for the first three units of the text for the students but additionally all of the units are available as PDFs for the teacher and students can listen to all the audio on their own time. It also offers teachers free Quizlet quizzes and Kahoot activities. Finally, there are activities at the back of the book such as crossword puzzles.

### **About *The English Gym Digital Workbook***

*The English Gym Digital Workbook* is an online companion for the textbook that follows the textbook precisely. *TEG-DW* does not link directly to *Google Classroom*, but it does offer a grade book that is relatively easy to use and that can be exported as a comma-separated file.

Generally speaking, *TEG* is a good fit for our students’ levels, but as we discuss below, none of the teachers use all of the activities or use them as is, instead they often adapt them, especially for example Chris Huang’s *Conversation* activity.

### **Development of the Shared Curriculum System**

Because NUA has opted for Google Classroom, many of our shared ideas have been based on the apps available through Google Workspace, especially Google Sheets, Docs,

and Forms. The remaining activities were developed exclusively on “freemium” sites that offer free access to basic services, such as Quizlet, Kahoot, and others. These additional activities and ideas should be adaptable for use with software usable with other LMSs (such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft Forms).

In considering our options for sharing ideas and materials, we quickly realized that email would be inefficient because although email applications such as Gmail are making it easier to mark messages for later retrieval and easier to search through previous earlier messages, both would require keeping track of what has appeared or otherwise knowing there is particular material to find and knowing the keywords to do so. Additionally, newer teachers would not have access to emails that were exchanged before their employment started.

In the end, we selected three main methods for connecting, consulting, and carrying out our plan. The first method was for communication: we have been using Google Spaces, which allows threaded chats, the ability to share files, and the ability to set tasks, which is a good way to ask others for help and is also useful for carrying out longer, more involved projects, such as writing this journal article (it is possible to use the “@” sign to direct a particular individual’s attention to a comment. The second method was actually two things working together: we created a Google Form and a shared Google Drive folder with separate subfolders for each unit. The Google Form includes the name of the creator of the task, a title, the date of submission, a description of the task, the unit for which it was developed, where a particular file could be found, and where possible, a direct link. As mentioned above, each chapter of *TEG* is on a different theme but is arranged in the same format for similar tasks, so each of the activities developed for a particular unit can be adapted for other units. And finally, the third method we created was a shared Google Classroom just for the teachers with topics divided by units: this allows Google Assignments to be shared directly to individual teachers’ classrooms. There is a free service called Schoolytics that makes use of Google Classroom much easier and that provides shared workspaces, but at a cost, so we are still evaluating whether it might meet our needs.

### **The Sharing System in Action**

The sharing system was developed and implemented in the second semester of the 2022 academic year. Each teacher came to the table with different backgrounds and approaches and preferred ways of classroom teaching, so we have seen paper-based interview tasks that were subsequently digitized to be used on smartphones, we’ve seen

some great Flippity “locked room”-type tasks, and most recently a shared *Kahoot* activity. *TEG* also offers free Quizlet quizzes and Kahoots for each unit.

In the following sections, each of the authors describes their views regarding their approach to teaching, their use of *TEG* and *TEG-DW* in their classes, their experiences with the collaboration, and how they incorporated the shared materials into their teaching. This section was written using a shared Google Doc which acted as an interactive discussion, with teachers reading, reacting, and responding to the other authors’ comments and incorporating that into their own sections. The individual self-reflections will be followed by a group reflection summarizing our views of the benefits of this collaboration and some discussion about where we go from here.

### **Self-Reflections: Steve McGuire**

#### **My Approach**

When I first started teaching as a teaching assistant in a graduate program in the United States there was a strong sense of teamwork. Teachers shared copies of their handouts in notebooks (it was that long ago) searchable by level, topic, skill, and type of task. New teachers could find activities to help them get started and experienced teachers could get new ideas both from their peers and from the new teachers as they started contributing themselves. I have rarely had that experience since then but have longed to recreate it.

One of the benefits of collaboration is the synergy of a group of people contributing their own unique experiences and approaches to a task. I seem to be the one most active in converting paper tasks into digital ones. Additionally, after two years of teaching online and on-demand during the pandemic during which I was focused on ways to keep track of student activity, suddenly I’m back in the classroom. I was lucky as the full-time teacher that I was able to interact personally with all of the part-time teachers. I was energized by their creativity and the energy they applied to their teaching. The journal was a way for the teachers to share the individual face-to-face interactions I enjoyed.

I was reminded of such simple things as having students take a picture of their paper-based task and upload it to a Google Classroom assignment, to the *Classmate Interview Worksheet* activity Chris describes in his self-reflection below. I adapted Chris’ interview activity as a Google Sheet assignment with pulldown menus from which students could choose the 5 questions they wanted to ask. Because students’ responses are online I can easily base follow-up activities on students’ own words.

Other benefits came from coming up with solutions together. Early on, Sam asked whether it was possible to create a seating chart using *Google Sheets*. He had already sketched out how it might work and I worked on it and trialed it in my class. We also shared other online solutions. I shared Flippity with Julian and he ran full speed with a fun puzzle activity and did the same equally quickly with Kahoot. There are some additional benefits to our interactions discussed in the Group Reflection section below.

### **Using *TEG* and *TEG-DW* in Class and Online**

As some of the other teachers share in their self-reflections, one of my goals was to move some of the textbook activities online using *TEG-DW* so we could maximize interaction during class time. I have students do most of the textbook activities as homework online. With *TEG-DW* they can listen to the audio as often as they like and can then do the CLOZE activity and the other pages at their own pace and on their own time. Having them record their answers on *TEG-DW* allows me to check their individual progress using the digital grade book, which is much more difficult to do in large classes. Having students do the work online frees me up to use the communicative activities the other teachers have developed, but also to do the art-based activities I used before the pandemic: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).

In VTS students look at an image that the teacher selects and answer three questions: *What's going on in this picture?*, *What do you see that makes you say that?*, and *What more can we find?* (see McGuire, 2011, 2016 for a complete description of VTS). I have a task using a classwide shared Google Sheets in which students 5 words about an artwork in English and as they type in their words in one column they can see the Japanese translation of their words in another column, giving them feedback regarding the accuracy of their words. Students can also see their classmates' words in English and Japanese, so they get a sense of other students' ideas about each artwork. Students then share their ideas in pairs and in groups using a Google Form. I also have a Say It! activity that helps them think of answers to the VTS questions. Finally, I supplement the *TEG-DW* tasks with more speaking and listening activities that expand on the vocabulary they are learning using *Make Belief Comix*, with which they can create comics using the vocabulary and structures they have learned using *TEG-DW*. I hope to interest the other teachers in both the VTS and the other online activities.

## **Homework and *TEG-DW***

As I write above, because the digital workbook is so closely integrated with the textbook, it is a great way to use either as an introduction to the material since students can do the activity on their own time and the *TEG* online system allows the teacher to track progress and check their learning. On the other hand, either the textbook or the online study can be used as follow-up practice to check whether the students have learned the material. Again, the digital workbook frees up class time for other activities and allows the teacher to easily check progress.

## **Self-Reflections: Julian Honeycutt**

### **My Approach**

I found that, while familiar with some of the vocabulary and grammar of the book, many students had difficulty expressing themselves with abundance or with accuracy in the varied topics in the textbook. In my classroom, I tried to create activities with this understanding and we worked to build stronger communication skills and improve accuracy. In doing so, it was important to find new ways to approach each lesson to keep the lesson exciting for both the teacher and the students.

### **Using the *TEG* in Class**

For my use of the textbook, I concentrate on using the vocabulary presented, practice the formatted interview questions, then foray into having students adapt their answers and give creative responses. While each week presents a different theme, each lesson follows a similar structure.

#### **1. The Textbook's Unit Vocabulary.**

The vocabulary section at the beginning of each unit offers me an opportunity to open with a creative activity or game to introduce the unit. Each lesson begins with the textbook closed and an activity like *Pictionary*, *Hangman*, or a guessing game. These brief activities, carried out in a team environment, encourage students to work together and act as warmups for the lesson.

#### **2. Conversation Interview Questions**

In this section, I encourage students to work together to plug the warmup vocabulary words into the formatted questions. Many students chose to work alone, but I encouraged the students to collaborate to check their answers. To prepare students to

practice using the *Conversation Interview Questions* and to check answers, I selected students to ask *me* the *Conversation Interview Questions* to which I gave my own answers.

### **3. Useful Vocabulary**

While many students were familiar with some of the vocabulary presented, some were not. I would often do a short paired activity, such as a three-round reading drill: 1) first round, with books open, Student A reads the Japanese word and Student B reads the English translation; 2) second round, Student B closes book, Student A reads the *English* and Student B recites the correct Japanese translation; and 3) third and final round, Student B's book remains closed while Student A reads the *Japanese* and Student B gives the correct English translation. This activity provided students a short guided practice to reinforce the unit vocabulary. If more reinforcement was needed I would do a longer and more collaborative activity.

### **4. Exercises & Pair Work**

I had the students work together to solve the *Exercises*, then practice in pairs the *Question & Interview*. The students would then do a longer collaborative and/or competitive activity as described in the next section.

### **Collaboration and Competition**

For each unit, I focused on using collaborative and competitive tasks as needed to enhance the students' attention, focus, and excitement. I used the tasks in the book's *Useful Vocabulary* section as well as the *Conversation Interview Questions/Exercises* sections. The book provided some examples of these types of tasks with a question game and a *Communication Crossword* at the back of the book—both useful activities. In addition to the activities provided in the book, I adapted other games into language acquisition activities such as *Connect Four*, *Sugoroku*, and a *Pictionary*-style game. Using activities that encouraged participation and communication through teamwork and an incentive to win placed a clear structure and goal that kept the activities fun and exciting for both students and the teacher. In addition to paper-based activities, I was able to adapt and create many new activities into a digital format, using such online software as Kahoot! or Flippity. Activities on these digital platforms can be easily shared and reused.



### **Homework and the *TEG-DW***

Near the end of each class, I use the remaining minutes to have students do the *TEG-DW* quizzes. The quizzes reinforce the instruction from the day's lesson and students can also ask any final questions while others are finishing their quizzes. While I encouraged students to use their books and work together if they needed extra support, I found that most students worked independently and quickly finished the unit quizzes, and often no further instruction was needed. After class I sent a link for the *TEG-DW* tests: this was their assigned weekly homework.

### **Self-Reflections: Chris Huang**

#### **My Approach**

My goal for the course is to have students get to know each other and build new relationships through the use of English communication. As most of the students are first-year students, I wanted to create an abundance of interaction opportunities for students to learn about each other. The two main activities which I used consistently throughout the course include classmate interviews and group presentations about various topics. During these interactive activities, I have students focus on communication and originality. I do this by telling students to avoid one-word interactions but instead to communicate in complete sentences and provide extra details. For example, I tell students that answering questions with just a “yes” or “no” is prohibited—instead they must answer questions with a complete sentence stating their reasons with “because.” Students are not asked to make sentences with perfect grammar but they do need to focus on disclosing more information in their responses to make the interaction interesting and engaging. With these expectations set for English communication, students were able to communicate with each other on a deeper level which allowed them to build new relationships with their classmates.

#### **Using *TEG-DW***

I only had students do the quizzes and tests from *TEG-DW* in class and I assigned the other sections as homework. The quizzes and tests usually only take about 10 minutes and serve as a useful tool to evaluate students on their learning after completing each unit. I usually have students take the quiz and test at the beginning of the class to get all the students settled down and welcome any late students without disrupting the class. I find that having students do the *TEG-DW* quizzes and tests in class motivates students to review what they learned in the previous unit. While

students are occupied with the quizzes and tests, it is easier for me to walk around and help any students who are struggling with access to *TEG-DW* or to answer any other questions.

### **Use of *TEG***

For my use of the textbook, I prioritize having students completely understand the meaning of the interview questions first before moving on to repetition and production. After the initial listening exercise, I had students check the Japanese translation of the English questions in the back of the book to figure out the meaning of any unknown words or grammar structures. Once students have grasped the meaning of the questions, I have them work on repetition. First, I have the students repeat the questions after me before having them read the questions one more time by themselves. Lastly, for production, I put more emphasis on communication rather than on accuracy. I have students take turns asking each other the interview questions and answering the questions with their own personalized responses. For all production exercises, I tell students to avoid one-word answers and to focus on answering the questions in complete sentences with as much information as they can in English to maximize communication.

1. I usually start the unit with the listening exercise by playing the audio track in every unit. I have students listen to the conversation and fill in the blanks for the conversation interview questions. The audio conversation can get long and difficult at times, so I usually have students prioritize their listening on the 10 questions featured in each unit.
2. Once the audio has finished playing, I have students check the Japanese translations in the back of the book to fill in any missing blanks and understand the meaning of the questions.
3. I then have students practice their pronunciation of the questions by having them repeat after me.
4. I put students into pairs and have them take turns asking each other the interview questions. I tell students to answer the questions in English to the best of their ability. I tell them to answer in sentences and avoid one-word answers such as “yes” or “no.”
5. The next section is the useful vocabulary section so I have the students repeat after me to practice the pronunciation of the words. I put students into pairs

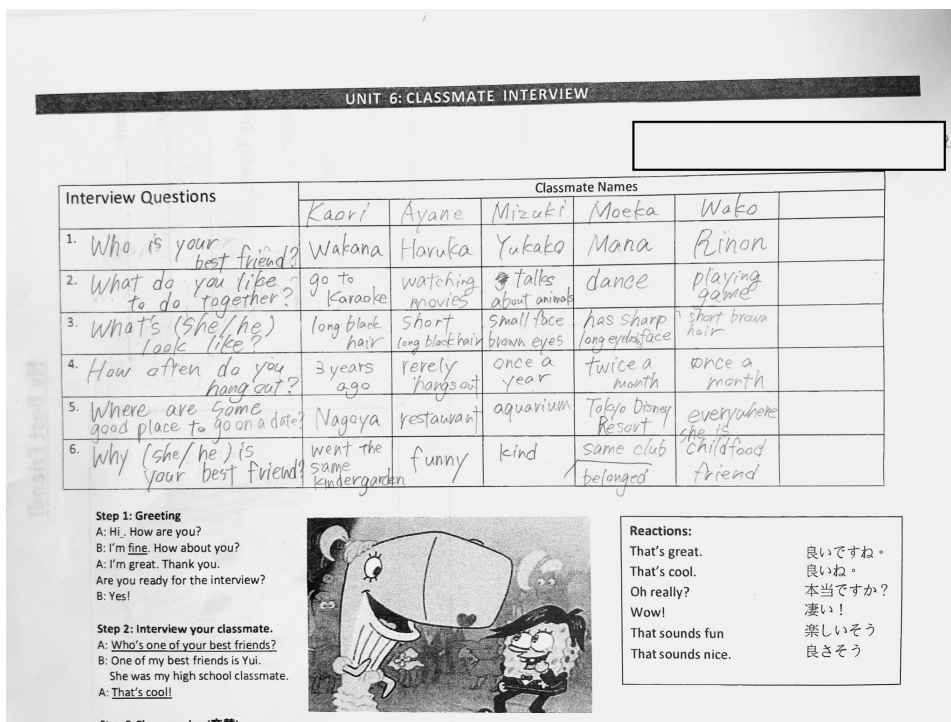
again for a vocabulary practice activity. One student would read the Japanese meaning of the word and the other student would answer with the English vocabulary.

6. Once this activity is finished, I have the students try the useful vocabulary section in the digital workbook.
7. I then move on to the exercise section using the digital workbook. I have students work in pairs or groups of 3 to fill in the blanks for the possible answers to the interview questions.
8. Once students have finished I go over the answers and have students repeat after me for pronunciation practice.
9. I have students practice reading the interview questions and the answers to the interview questions in pairs. I tell the students that they must try to answer the questions with their own original answers. They can use the sentence structures provided in the exercise section but they need to change the information in the sentences.

### **Integrating In-Class and Digital Tasks for Communicative Language Teaching**

Since the course is focused on communicative English, I believe that maximizing English communication in the classroom between all students is a top priority. The communicative activity in *TEG* suggests that students write an interview in pairs and present it to the class. However, I believed the activity would lead to very limited communication as it only allows each student to communicate with one partner, and most of the students' time would be spent only on writing rather than on speaking. In addition, once students finish they only have practiced reading the interview rather than having a natural conversation. Therefore, I created what we are calling the *Classmate Interview Worksheet* where students had the opportunity to walk around the classroom and interview each other. Figure 1 shows an example of a student's submission for the worksheet for Unit 1. The format of the worksheet is a table consisting of 7 columns and 7 rows. In the first column, students could choose and write 6 questions from the unit. I encourage them to customize some of the questions for some originality. The second to seventh columns are for students to record the answers of their classmates. In other words, the activity provides an opportunity for students to communicate with up to 6 different classmates.

The worksheet was distributed in paper format and students would walk around the classroom with the paper and a pen. Steve adapted this as a digital activity, but I



**Figure 1. Classmate Interview Worksheet for Unit 1**  
 Note. As filled in and submitted by a student (anonymized).

prefer to use a paper version because I wanted students to focus on their interactions with their classmates and not be distracted by their smartphones.

Having students walk around and interview 6 different classmates allowed them to communicate in a low-pressure environment as they didn't have to make a presentation in front of the class. A comfortable speaking environment motivated students to interact more, making it an enjoyable process.

After students were finished interviewing each other and had completed the worksheet, I had them take a picture of their worksheet and submit it to Google Classroom. This was a very smooth process that allowed me to check the students' work for completion and it also served as an extra attendance tool that made sure students attended the class and participated. It also gave students in a large class the sense that their work is being evaluated.

**Incorporating Interactive Activities Relating To Each Unit Theme**

As mentioned above, each unit of the TEG had a specific theme, so I thought creating communicative activities where students could share their hobbies, interests,

and daily life was important for authentic communication. There were two types of communicative activities that I implement frequently for each unit. The first type of activity is an interview activity and the second type is a group presentation interview.

### **Presentation Activity Related To Unit Themes**

Towards the middle of the semester I created classmate presentation activities that allowed students to talk about their experiences, favorites, and daily life. I created three presentations which were about these topics: *My Favorite Clothing*, *My Celebrity Crush*, and *My Travel Experience*. These topics were inspired by three different units in *TEG: Fashion, Dating, and Travel*. Students seemed to have really enjoyed interacting in those activities as they were realistic topics that they would talk about outside the classroom. It was a great opportunity for them to talk about those topics in English.

### **Group Presentation Interview**

I created group presentation activities where the students would present in groups of 5 or 6. Having students present in small groups rather than in large groups or in front of the class worked well because students felt less pressure and therefore more comfortable during the presentation. This was a great activity to help students practice English presentations in a casual manner. I was able to make this activity even more interactive by having the students in each group ask one question to the presenter after their presentation. To simplify this activity I made a presentation template for the students. The template provided students with an example presentation that included basic sentences required for the presentation. All students had to do was fill in the required information about the presentation topic. For lower-level students, I encouraged them to follow the example presentation and plug in their information. For higher-level students, I encouraged them to add additional sentences to make their presentations more creative. Figures 2 and 3 are two examples of presentation templates as they were filled in and submitted by my students.

## **Self-Reflections: Sam Keith**

### **My Approach**

My goal for this course is to cater to all ability levels and create standards that give all students a chance to pass the course regardless of their English proficiency without boring the more advanced students. In order to achieve this, I made a basic set of

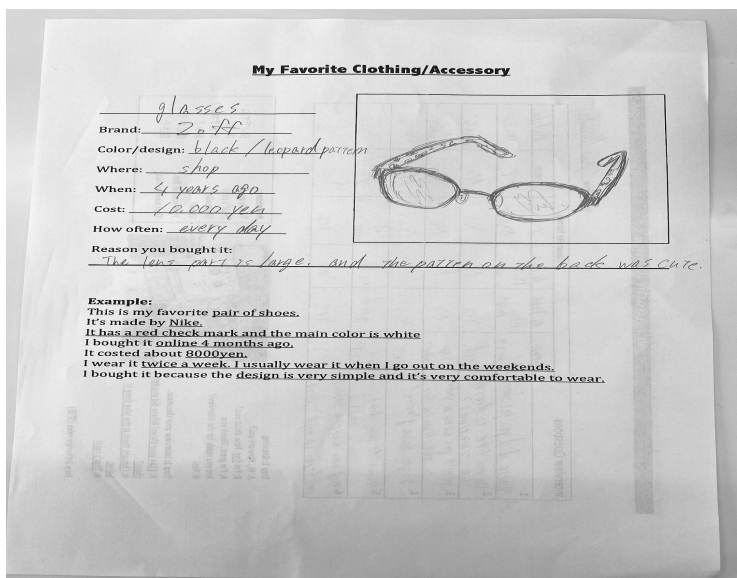


Figure 2. Sample Presentation Template #1

Note. As filled in and submitted by a student (anonymized).

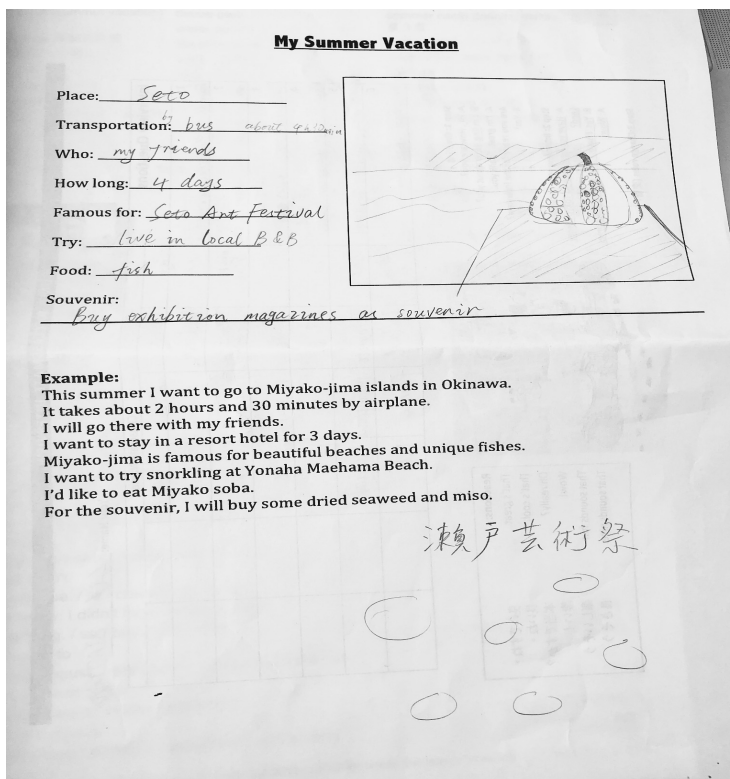


Figure 3. Sample Presentation Template #2

Note. As filled in and submitted by a student (anonymized).

requirements, such as weekly homework and quizzes, but also mixed in occasional projects that focus on creativity and group work. Lower-level students can easily understand what is required for them to pass the course and higher-level students can express themselves through creative projects and be leaders during group activities.

### ***Using TEG and TEG-DW in Class***

The following is a typical class flow that details how I use *TEG and TEG-DW* to conduct class. I typically cover one unit per week. Generally I first introduce the topic of the unit. For example, Unit 1 is *Getting to Know You* and Unit 2 is *Food & Drink*.

1. I start every week by giving them the vocabulary quiz in the digital workbook before starting the lesson despite not having covered anything yet. This way they can see how their prior knowledge compares with what they're about to cover. Scores can be seen immediately by both me and the students and almost every student scores 80 to 100%.
2. I have students open the textbook and go over the vocabulary they were just quizzed on (there are 10 vocabulary words at the beginning of each unit). Typically there are one or two words that are difficult for them to understand. I explain by using example sentences.
3. Then I play the audio for the listening section and have them fill in the words. I usually play the audio twice since there are slightly more difficult questions in blue text off to the right (I call these "bonus questions"). I then go over the answers and ask them to write their score at the bottom. Most students get 100%.
4. I skip directly to the exercises section after this. Since most of the material is focused on question and answer, it works best for me to do the answers immediately after covering the questions. I allow them to work in groups to complete the exercise and also walk around the room to assist anyone who is struggling.
5. I pass out the *Classmate Interview Worksheet*. They must ask six of the questions (which were covered in the listening section) to six different classmates using only English and record their answers. This allows them to immediately utilize what they just learned from the textbook. When they finish, they must submit a picture of the worksheet to Google Classroom. Occasionally I use different activities during this section, but everything is geared toward getting the students to speak with their peers.

6. With the remaining time, I will assign homework and assist anyone who has questions. This is where I really use the digital workbook. Any of the material from the digital workbook makes for great homework assignments, but especially the listening activities and tests work well. Since all student work is recorded, it's very easy to check which students are consistently getting high scores on the homework and which ones need more assistance during class time.

One part of the curriculum that I do not use much is the *Classmate Conversation Interview* in the textbook in which students are asked to write a dialog between two people. It is potentially a good activity for interaction, but the activity generally takes a lot of time and students do not seem to enjoy this as much as the speaking activities. However, I do use the *Classmate Conversation Interview* for what I call *evaluation days*. On these days, I give tests from the digital workbook and assign some of the writing assignments. Since the course is communicative, I allow them to work in groups during evaluations as long as they try to use only English with each other.

Overall, I think *TEG* and its accompanying digital workbook are excellent tools for this type of course. It provided plenty of material to choose from in order to conduct the class and offered a lot of flexibility.

### **Self-Reflections: Chizuru Shiraishi**

The COVID-19 pandemic led to completely online courses at NUA, and this has continued to have an impact on teaching as teachers have continued to use online resources in their classes. I believe this Communication English team as well as NUA have been using this situation as an important opportunity to improve teaching styles through the acquisition of cyber skills. Especially the native English-speaking teachers in this team have a very high level of computer skills to create games and activities for English learning, Google Slides to explain how to register for *TEG-DW*, and so on. As the only Japanese teacher teaching Communication English this year, I have appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with the other teachers. I have been glad to make the most of my Japanese ability in supplementing the English explanations with Japanese as necessary since it is sometimes difficult for students to understand how to use online tools even in Japanese. I also have to say, however, that it is also a good chance for the students to improve both their English and computer skills.



### **My Approach**

My aim in this course is to boost students' motivation to use English as a communication tool by giving them a lot of opportunities to listen to and speak English. Generally speaking, Japanese students tend to be good at reading English, which is, of course, an important skill, but they are prone to hesitate to use English because of a lack of experience and confidence. I think that the conversation-style interviews in the *TEG* textbook provide our students with many good examples of using English.

### **Using *TEG* and *TEG-DW***

I conduct my classes with *TEG* and *TEG-DW* to enhance the students' ability to respond to the questions by focusing on basic grammar as well as building their vocabulary, because based on my experiences of teaching English and learning it as a foreign language, I think it is essential for the English learners to notice the grammatical structure in English sentences. I always add grammatical explanations as needed during my class. I have found some grammatical mistakes in the conversation sections as well as incorrect Japanese meanings in the vocabulary sections within the *TEG* textbook, which the publisher says will be corrected in the next proof. I am going to contribute by listing those mistakes in our next academic year, which I see as another way I can contribute as a Japanese member of the Communication English team.

### **Homework with *TEG-DW***

I use the speaking activities in *TEG-DW* for homework, since students need a quiet environment in which to record. As preparation for their homework, I have my students brainstorm answers to the interview questions based on their own version, which makes it easier to speak.

### **Group Reflections**

The individual self-reflections above show a common thread but also a great deal of variation in how teachers adapted their courses to meet students where they are in terms of their backgrounds, language ability levels, and interests, and how the teachers integrated the shared ideas from each other. We hope that the varied approaches will help readers find their own way to use a textbook, but also that the intercommunication between us will inspire others to collaborate. In the following section, we reflect more as a team on the benefits of collaboration and where we see it going in the future.

### **Benefits of Teacher Collaboration in The Same Program**

During the semester, all teachers of the Communication English course were using the same curriculum. This gave us an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast how everyone was using this textbook to conduct their class. Together we created a lot of supplemental material (such as the aforementioned *Classmate Interview Worksheet*) that we were able to use in our classes as we felt best fit our students' needs. The system we set up to share docs, sheets, PDFs, and assignments made it easy to adapt material to fit our own perceived needs. Teacher collaboration is important and solves a number of issues. Here are a few examples:

- 1) *Student expectations.* Students may be shocked when they find out their friend who has a different teacher for the same course has a substantially greater or lower workload than theirs. When teachers collaborate and share ideas, the class flow and difficulty of the course become more standard. Students don't have to feel "unlucky" because they unknowingly enrolled or are placed with a tougher teacher (at NUA students are generally placed based on level and on the schedule for their main courses of study). This feeling of equality becomes very important at large institutions such as universities.
- 2) *Evaluation of student performance.* This is very similar to the first point. When teachers collaborate, they get a better understanding of how other teachers evaluate students. Again, this reduces the chance that a student feels like they received a poor grade only because they had a stricter teacher.
- 3) *Reduced burden on the teacher.* If teachers collaborate and share activities, they share the workload in coming up with new activities every week. Of course, not every idea will work for every teacher, but sometimes it is more efficient to tweak someone else's idea into something that will work for you rather than coming up with completely new material. This leads to our fourth point.
- 4) *Increased teacher creativity.* When one teacher has a great idea for an activity or a way to improve class flow, another teacher can offer a different perspective and enhance that idea even further.

While we do feel that teacher communication and collaboration are important, we find that the system works best when the method by which the class is conducted and how the teacher plans to lead the students is decided by each individual teacher. Even at NUA with its focus on the arts, there is a wide variety of abilities, needs, and

motivations across the classes. The greatest advantage of teacher collaboration is having the opportunity to align your evaluation system with your colleagues in order to best meet the needs of the students. All external collaboration should be optional but always available when teachers are looking for new ideas.

## **Conclusion**

The greatest benefit to our collaboration is we have created a framework in which we can work together to improve English learning at NUA. We already have a large number of activities available as ideas (as evidenced by Chris Huang's examples shared above) but we continue to contribute and continue to learn from each other. This article in itself has led to a greater awareness of what we are doing.

As of press time we have learned that the *The English Gym* textbook and *The English Gym Digital Workbook* will be sold as a combined set which will alleviate some of the problems in getting students registered and will make it more obvious that the two sets of materials go together. The author of the materials is open to input and we hope to make *TEG-DW* more useful as an add-on and not as a replacement for the text, but we have already started discussing how we can supplement each unit with our own quizzes and activities.

## **References**

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