Medical English Tests: CELBAN

Background

In the early 2000s, there was a realisation that Canada would need more international recruitment over the next 10 years to compensate for forecast shortages of nurses. At the same time, there was considerable concern over the relevance of existing English language assessments to international nurses coming to Canada to work.

The most common assessment at the time was an Academic English test, TOEFL, which has a similar content/approach to IELTS, albeit in an American Higher Education context. Many nurses were failing the test as they hadn't had the right training and didn't use this kind of English in practice. Many also felt that passing TOEFL was not necessarily an indication of fluency in the workplace.

Research Project into English Used by Nurses

The decision was taken to develop an assessment which specifically focused on the English that nurses used in practice. A research project was then launched, using a combination of on-the-job observations, questionnaires, and focus groups, which went into this question in great detail, looking at the skills mix and different language functions deployed by nurses.

Research objectives
The stated project outcomes were:

- Increased access by internationally-educated nurses to the nursing profession by clearly defining the required level of English language competency.
- Identification of the specific English language skills still needed by an applicant in order to be eligible to work as a nurse in Canada.
- A basis for the development of "English for Nursing" bridging programs for internationally-educated nurses.
- Development of task-based assessment for nursing, as an alternative to language tests that merely evaluate a candidate's academic knowledge of the English language

Research results:
1. The English used by nurses at work has its own terminology, situation-specific usage, jargon, modes of communication, eg length and type of interaction, and culture of communication, eg who takes the conversational lead or how to respond in an emergency.
2. Language usage is distributed among various definable tasks, eg explaining, describing, informing, asking for information, suggesting, persuading, and small talk.

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3. Interactions are high stakes, therefore assessment levels need to be high enough to ensure safe practice and deliver high quality care.
4. Nurses need skills at different levels, with listening coming out as requiring a higher level than the other skills and writing a slightly lower level. These can be summarised as follows:

Skill	Canadian Language Benchmark	IELTS Equivalent
Speaking	8	6.5
Listening	9	8.0
Reading	8	6.5
Writing	7	6.0

The CELBAN Test

The test was based on the research, specifically the following broad conclusions:

a. Nurses mostly speak to three different groups – patients, other professionals and families.
b. Nurses spend over half of their time participating in the following language tasks:

   o Asking for information
   o Explaining
   o Giving instructions

There are two parts to CELBAN:

1. Group Test (3 hours) – Listening, writing and reading tests
2. One-to-One Speaking Test (20 to 30 minutes) – Interview and role-play

Listening – 45 minutes
Listen to interactions between nurses and patients, family members and other professionals and answer multiple choice questions.

The listening assessment is a response to five video scenarios in various settings, such as a hospital, home, clinic or medical office, which include interactions between nurses and patients, family members and other professionals. There are also four audio scenarios, such as phone calls and shift-to-shift reports.

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Test takers are asked to answer multiple choice questions to demonstrate listening comprehension. In one section of the test, answers must be provided in a chart format where the test taker enters notes from the listening text.

Writing – 30 minutes
Complete a form and write a report similar to those required in nursing practice.

The writing assessment includes two sections:

Task 1: Filling out a form based on a video scenario (10 minutes). Scoring criteria:
- Correct spelling
- Legibility
- How well the information is recorded in point form
- Whether or not all the necessary information has been included

Task 2: Writing a report based on information provided (20 minutes). Scoring criteria:
- Effectiveness
- Grammatical accuracy
- Fluency
- Appropriate vocabulary

Reading – 50 minutes
Read or scan charts, patient notes, manuals and information texts related to health issues and answer comprehension questions.

The reading assessment includes two sections:

1. Skimming and scanning (10 minutes)
2. Reading comprehension (40 minutes)

Candidates are given various text formats – such as charts, patient notes, manuals and short articles related to health issues – and asked to answer questions. Question types include:

- Short answer questions (skimming and scanning)
- Multiple choice (reading comprehension)
- Fill-in-the-blanks (cloze exercise)

Speaking – 30 minutes
Answer questions about yourself, your work experience and perspectives and complete two role plays with two certified CELBAN assessors.

The speaking assessment includes an oral interview and two role plays. Two assessors carry out the

assessment. During the role plays the candidate is asked to interact with the standardized patient (one of the assessors) by asking questions to obtain information, and to give instructions and offer explanations.

During the role play, candidates are also asked to answer questions to demonstrate their ability to narrate, describe, summarize, synthesize, state and support opinion, and advise. Criteria for scoring:

- Intelligibility
- Organization
- Fluency
- Cohesiveness
- Adequacy of vocabulary
- Grammatical accuracy
- Use of communication strategies

Test Fees

In 2015, CELBAN test fees are CAN $375

CELBAN Recognition

CELBAN is recognised by all nursing licensing bodies across Canada. See http://www.celbancentre.ca/Resources/regulators.aspx for a full list.

For more information about the test, visit: http://www.celbancentre.ca/.

CELBAN Preparation with Specialist Language Courses

SLC designs and arranges CELBAN Preparation courses so learners can achieve the score they need. Courses can be:

- ✓ Bespoke, organisation-specific programmes delivered in-country, in-company or online
- ✓ Online course - English for Nurses: Getting the Essentials Right

Contact us for full details.

About the Author

Chris Moore is Managing Director of Specialist Language Courses (SLC), an international business and technical language training consultancy. SLC works with companies around the world to improve their language capabilities.

Please contact Chris on chris@specialistlanguagecourses.com or on +44 1273 900213 to discuss how you can best prepare for the CELBAN test.

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