A Five-Year English Language Program for Cadets at Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy

From General Proficiency to Specialized Maritime Engineering ESP

Prepared for the 2026 NATO BILC Professional Development Seminar
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Intake and Cohort Dynamics

Admission Assessment: Cadets are admitted based on high competitive scores in Bulgarian language and Mathematics entrance examinations.

Initial Cohorts: Class sections combine cadets from 2 to 3 different naval specialties into a single cohort, studying together.

Proficiency Variance: Large groups exhibit highly diverse levels of language proficiency due to mixed specialty backgrounds.

Strategic Solution: Instructors administer a mandatory placement test on Day 1, followed by immediate regrouping based on proficiency to optimize the learning environment.

Curriculum Architecture (Semesters 1–10)

Semesters 1 – 5: General English — Focusing on building foundational linguistic competence and general communication skills.

Semester 6: Military English — Transitioning to operational military terminology and standardized defense concepts.

Semester 7: Maritime English — Enforcing standardized seafaring vocabulary and international naval communication protocols.

Semesters 8 – 10: ESP (English for Specific Purposes) — Tailored explicitly to narrow naval and engineering specialties, taught in smaller groups and culminating in a comprehensive State Examination.

High-Stakes Assessment Structure

Core Philosophy: Preparation for the final milestones begins on Day 1 of the first year upon university entry.

Written Component (The Gatekeeper): Divided into specialized tasks. Only cadets who successfully pass the written examination are eligible to progress to the oral exam.

Oral Component: Involves drawing a syllabus topic ticket for structured presentation and an advanced text comprehension segment.

Quality Assurance: Prior to the exam, cadets attend an intensive preparatory course to fully familiarize themselves with the high-stakes format.

Written Exam Components: Marine Engineering

Component 1: Test Section (40 MCQs)

- Grammar: Verb tenses, active/passive voice, linking words.
- Vocabulary: Terms and definitions from technical and general maritime English.

Component 2: Reading Comprehension

- Features a specialized engineering text followed by 8 multiple-choice questions testing deep understanding.

Component 3: Technical Writing Task

- Enforces a 250-word formal description of a ship system based on a provided blueprint or schematic diagram.
- Must cover system purpose, main components, and step-by-step operational processes.

Oral Exam Components: Marine Engineering

Component 1: Syllabus Topic Presentation Cadets draw an examination ticket and must independently present the corresponding theoretical or operational engineering topic from the syllabus.

Component 2: Real-World Reading & Analysis An advanced reading task requiring cadets to answer 8 open-ended questions of varying cognitive complexity.

Source Material (MARS Reports): Utilizes official Mariners' Alerting and Reporting Scheme (MARS) reports. Discussions focus strictly on real-world ship accidents related to mechanical engineering and machinery failures.

Teaching Methodology: Engineering ESP

The Core Pedagogical Challenge:

How to transform dry, highly technical maritime engineering subject matter into a living, functional, and operational professional language.

Our Objective:

Employ a structured, scaffolded teaching methodology designed to transition cadets smoothly from receptive oral comprehension to high-stakes independent technical writing and operational briefing.

Scaffolding: From Schema to Sequential Flow

Phase 1: Collaborative Schema Analysis & Discussion

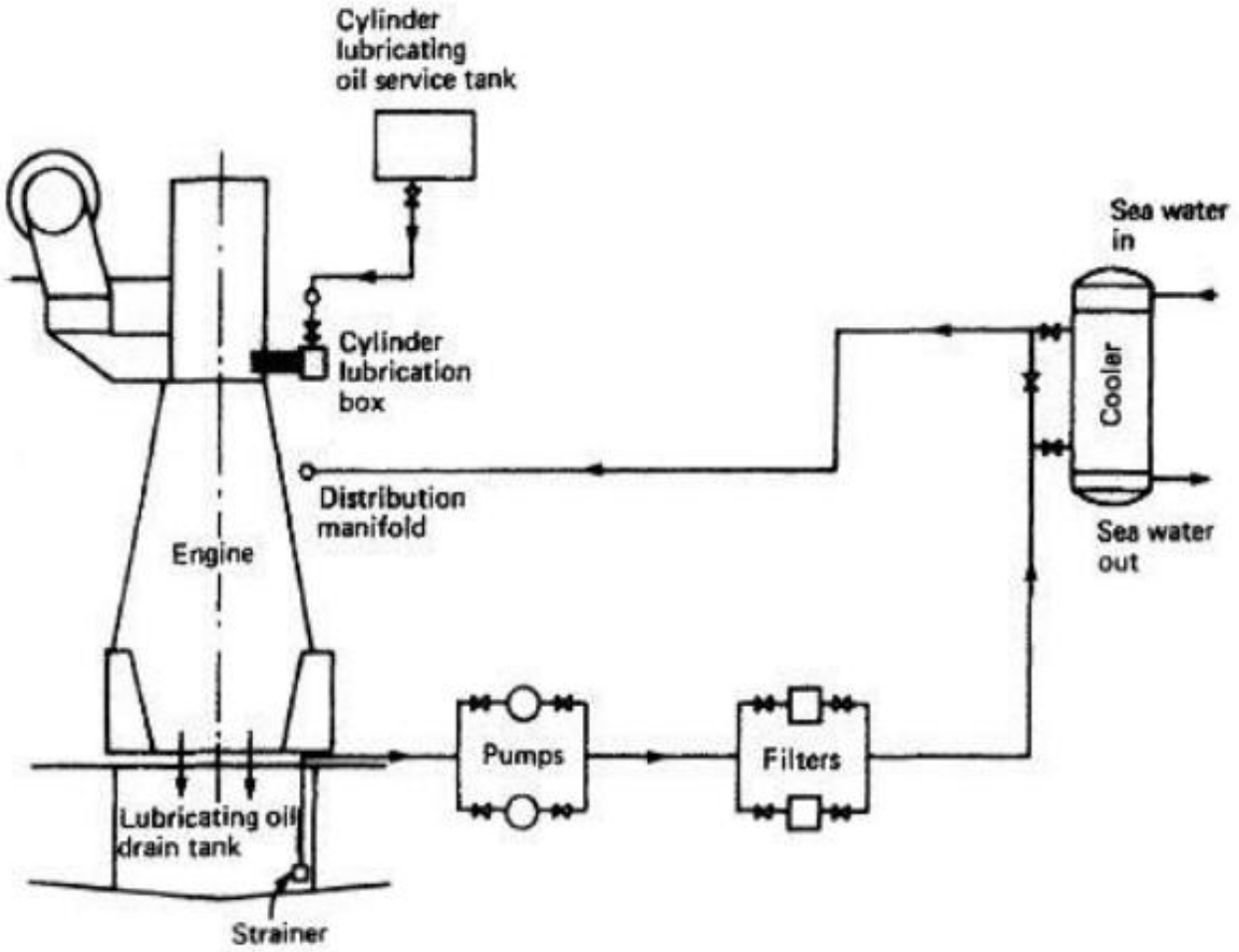
• Instructors project the technical schematic diagram (e.g., Shipboard Lubrication Oil System).

• Interactive oral breakdown to map overall purpose (storage, filtration, conditioning) and classify core components by engineering functions rather than simple nouns.

Phase 2: Oral Process Tracing (Sequential Flow)

• Cadets trace the fluid medium linearly from initial suction point to the distribution lines.

• Enforces strict usage of precise sequential markers (Initially, Subsequently, Concurrently, Following this) to articulate complex dynamic links in real time. Ex. Subsequently, the oil passes through the strainer.



From Scaffolding to Independent Production

Phase 3: Linguistic Scaffolding (Board Work)

• Building strict infrastructure: Action verbs mapped to components (pump-to circulate, to deliver; strainer- to remove, to retain; cylinder lubrication box- to meter, to supply)

• Sentence frames to guide syntax for definitions.

• Dual-mode grammar focus: Present Simple Active for operational functions, Passive Voice for objective tracking of the fluid medium.

Phase 4: Independent Productive Writing

• Cadets synthesize the visual blueprint, sequential oral tracing, and board frameworks.

• The final output requires an independent, structured, 250-word technical description of the complete system under exam conditions.

Building Operational Readiness

Thank you for your attention!

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Open for Questions & Discussion