

= CHAPTER 13 =

When Speaking  
and Writing  
English Is a  
Challenge

*Isabella bought her books during the first week of class and was frightened by the size of the books and how small*

# Medical Terminology and Lay Language

First, it is important to understand that physical therapist assistant students are learning a new language, using *medical terminology*, abbreviations, and terms that have meaning to those only in the health professions. Everyone who is learning the language of a profession struggles initially to communicate using both *lay language* with patients and clients and *medical terminology* with colleagues.

Be aware that there are terms that are appropriate for use in health care communication and terms that would not be appropriate. For example, compare the following statements that both describe the same event:

- *Medical terminology*: The patient consulted the orthopedic sur-

geon for treatment of his left ulnar fracture.

- *Lay language:* The patient went to the doctor to get a cast on his broken arm.

## Reading

There are strategies that students can use to improve both their vocabulary and comprehension of reading assignments.<sup>1</sup> It may help to also review the active learning strategies suggested in [Chapter 8](#).

### *Survey and Skim First*

Determine a structure of the material. Before you read, look for the main ideas and points. Examine how a chapter or article is organized. Look at the headings and points of emphasis, which are often in italics or bold print. Look for

summaries. Try to identify a few main ideas. Before you read thoroughly, write a sentence that expresses the main idea of what you will read.

Look for words like *first*, *second*, and *finally* to indicate a progression and sequence of topics and transitions between different ideas.

## ***Identify Your Purpose***

Why do you need to read this? Is it for the general idea or for details? You should adjust your reading strategy accordingly.

## ***Assess Difficulty and Choose What to Read***

How difficult is this material? Do you know the vocabulary? Choose a few sentences to read thoroughly. If it will be too time consuming to read word by word, look for the sentences that start

and conclude a section of text. Some additional strategies for reading difficult material are shown in [Table 13-1](#).

TABLE 13-1

## HOW TO READ A DIFFICULT BOOK<sup>2</sup>

- *Study the table of contents* to get a general sense of the book's structure. Note the subtitles and other indications of the content of the chapter.
- *Look at the title page of each chapter.* Often, the first few paragraphs create a structure for the chapter.
- *Read the conclusion of the chapter.* There is often a summary that will denote key terms and concepts in the chapter.
- *Check the glossary and index of the book as you encounter new terms.* This will give you an idea of the relationship of concepts, and it may help you to see its application later in the book. Use

your English and medical dictionary to assist you.

Adapted from How to Read A Difficult Book. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State Cook Counseling Center Web site. <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhelp.html>. Accessed August 11, 2003.

## TABLE 13-2

### **TIPS FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH READING SPEED<sup>3</sup>**

- *Do not pronounce words as you read.* If you speak or whisper as you read, you will be able to read only as fast as you can speak. Your speed will be 2 to 3 times faster if you read silently. Focus on speaking only key terms as you try to improve your reading speed.
- *Avoid rereading the same material.* If you have skimmed the material first, then you have looked for the key phrases in a paragraph or section. If

you do not understand a passage, then find some material later that you do understand. Most writers make a statement and then give examples and then restate the information in a conclusion. Try to pick up the main idea in what you read, not every detail.

- *Read in phrases, not word by word.* Meaning is conveyed by a phrase in a context, not by the definitions of individual words.

Adapted from Cultural Difference and Its Impact on Rhetoric: An Overview. English as a Second Language. Institute for Writing and Rhetoric. Dartmouth College. Multilingual Writers Web site. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/problems/esl.html#overview>. Accessed December 29, 2012.

## ***Choose What to Read in a Systematic Way***

Identify the statements, definitions, and formulas that you must understand completely and remember

precisely. Look for definitions, highlighted areas, and text that accompanies figures, graphs, and tables. These usually summarize the major ideas and facts of a chapter. Check the strategies for improving your reading speed in [Table 13-2](#).

### ***Build Your Vocabulary of Medical Terminology at the Same Time***

Use a medical dictionary. Write down unfamiliar terms and phrases and their definitions on a separate sheet as you work on your assigned reading. Review these terms later. Look for these words in your reading. Write down questions that arise as you are learning new terms. Make it a point to use these words in a new sentence or question.

### ***Test Your Comprehension***

Make up questions about the ma-

*the writing was. Although she had studied in an intensive English as a Second Language course last semester, she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to keep up with her reading assignments.*

## Common Issues for Second-Language Speakers

Non-native English speakers face a double challenge. Students must not only master the physical therapy content but they must do so in English—comprehending and learning what they read—and using this new vocabulary in written and spoken communications.

There are many strategies for learning that may help the non-native English speaker cope with the challenges of physical therapist assistant education.

terial. Write the question. Answer the question in writing. Talk about the material with others. These steps in thinking about the material after reading it are the key to remembering it.

## Listening

There are many strategies that will improve your listening comprehension.<sup>1</sup>

### *Become Familiar With the Material First*

Skim the assigned reading. Look for key words and ideas. These phrases will be very important to recognizing the topic being discussed and keeping up in class.

## ***Choose a Good Seat in the Classroom***

Sit in the front of the classroom. There will be fewer distractions, and it will be easier to hear and see. Arrive early so that you have your choice of seats.

## ***Attend All Classes and Take Notes***

Never miss a class. Take notes in the classroom and review your notes later. Organize your notes by date and keep them in one place. Do not try to write down everything the instructor says. Leave spaces in your notes so that you can add to them later.

It may be helpful as well to audio record lectures and use the recording to help you to review and edit your notes. Be sure to ask the instructor or any guest speakers if you have their permis-

sion to tape their lectures to help you study the material later.

## ***Use Outlines and Course Syllabi***

Use outlines, handouts, and other materials that the instructor provides to orient you during a lecture. Do not worry about what you have missed if you do not understand all of it. Listen and write what you can. You can fill in the details after the lecture.

## ***Identify the Most Important Points***

Listen for cues of important points, transitions from one point to the next, repetition of points for emphasis, changes in voice inflections, or lists of a series of points. Most instructors present a few major points and several minor points in a lecture. Much of the rest of the material explains those points.

## ***Write Down What Is on the Board***

Write down *everything* that the instructor writes on the board. This is a good way to prioritize the key concepts and vocabulary related to the subject.

## ***Use All of Your Senses***

Use all of your senses (seeing, hearing, feeling) to learn. Focus on visual materials and demonstrations, in addition to what is in writing. Practice skills by moving about and saying the instructions out loud.

## ***Eliminate Distractions***

Focus 100% of your attention and concentration during lectures and while studying. Take a break when needed to revitalize and refresh your mind.

## ***Express Yourself***

You should use a writing style that will improve the reader's understanding of your thoughts and ideas. English writing styles change with the type of writing and purpose of the assignment.

Professional writing tends to be goal directed, concise, and clear. Writing assignments in the physical therapist assistant program may differ considerably from a student's past experience. Some guidelines are presented in [Table 13-3](#). You may find it helpful to review [Chapter 8](#) as well.

## ***The Voice of Your Writing***

The active voice is simpler and more effective in conveying your ideas. However, many cultures and languages commonly use the passive voice. Consider the differences between the pas-

sive and active voices presented in [Table 13-4](#). How does the active voice improve your understanding of what has been written?

## Essentials of English Grammar

An inexpensive, classic reference is *The Elements of Style*.<sup>5</sup> This is a key resource for your library. This simple book contains rules of grammar and provides the key requirements of English writing style. It concentrates on the fundamental rules of usage and principles of composition that are most commonly violated.

TABLE 13-3

**GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL  
WRITING IN ENGLISH<sup>3,4</sup>**

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>EXPLANATION</i>
Outline and organize your ideas before you begin writing.	Review the assignment and establish a writing outline that follows the directions of the assignment.
Provide connections between your ideas or indicate a progression of points.	Use words that indicate similarities and differences, such as similarly, in contrast, or next.
Give examples and evidence of the statements you make.	Follow an introductory sentence with 1 or 2 sentences that demonstrate the initial idea of the paragraph. Use statistics, facts, and outside references to support the points you make.
State your purpose.	Identify the purpose of the paper in the first few paragraphs. "The purpose of this paper is to examine the evidence that supports the use of ultrasound as a therapeutic modality."
Use headings and	Help the reader to



# Writing

It is often helpful to see samples of work that previous students have submitted. Ask the faculty member for good examples of the kind of work he or she expects.

Ask for feedback prior to submitting your final paper. Many faculty members are willing to review your written work in a draft form and give you feedback. In fact, this type of feedback is frequently the most helpful in revising your writing.

Use on-campus writing resource centers to assist you in presenting your ideas. Your writing style will be concise, directed toward a specific purpose, and will often follow a predefined format. Review [Chapter 8](#) for examples of the requirements of different types of writing assignments.

<p>subheadings to orient the reader.</p>	<p>follow your ideas by making brief titles to describe the sections of your paper (eg, APTA Position, Interview Findings).</p>
<p>Use the active voice.</p>	<p>Avoid passive verbs. Identify an actor for the actions you present in your sentences. (See <a href="#">Table 13-4</a> for more examples.)</p>
<p>Use appropriate language; avoid slang.</p>	<p>Use phrases such as "many" instead of "a lot of"; "I must go to work" instead of "I've got to go to work."</p>
<p>Take a stand. Be clear about why you have made a decision, have an opinion, or have taken a position.</p>	<p>State your decision or position and the reasons and rationale that support your position. Indicate your thought processes. "It is important to monitor blood pressure because nonweight-bearing ambulation puts a much higher demand</p>




## SAMPLES OF PASSIVE AND ACTIVE VOICE

<i>PASSIVE VOICE</i>	<i>ACTIVE VOICE</i>
The patient was interviewed before beginning the treatment.	The instructor interviewed the patient before beginning the treatment.
We were given the assignment on Thursday.	The instructor gave us the assignment last Thursday.
The students were asked to complete a 3-page questionnaire.	The students completed a 3-page questionnaire.
I was told that you called yesterday.	Janet, our receptionist, told me that you called yesterday.



TABLE 13-5

	on the cardiovascular system.”
Follow referencing styles.	If there is not a referencing style indicated in the instructions, inquire as to what style the faculty prefers that you use.
Make sure that your work is free of spelling and grammatical errors.	Use a spell checker to check your work. Refer to <u>Tables 13-5</u> and <u>13-6</u> for examples of common grammatical errors.



Adapted from Cultural Difference and Its Impact on Rhetoric: An Overview. English as a Second Language. Institute for Writing and Rhetoric. Dartmouth College. Multilingual Writers Web site. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/problems/esl.html#overview>. Accessed December 29, 2012 and Holt S. Responding to Non-Native Speakers of English. University of Minnesota, Center for Writing Web site. <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/responding/non-native.html>. Accessed July 20, 2013.

TABLE 13-4

## COMMON ENGLISH ERRORS FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS<sup>7,8</sup>

<i>TYPE OF ERROR</i>	<i>INCORRECT FORM</i>	<i>CORRECT FORM</i>
Absent determiners (the, a, an)	She is good physical therapist assistant. What is answer?	She is a good physical therapist. What is the answer?
Incorrect choice of preposition (in, on, with, over, above, below, beside)	My lab coat is stained in coffee.	My lab coat is stained with coffee.
Incorrect verb sequences, especially involving tense agreement	The patient should have recover by now.	The patient should have recovered by now.
Incorrect choice of verb to use with the infinitive	I wouldn't mind to take a vacation.	I would like to take a vacation.
Disagreement between determiners and nouns	He ate many tomato on Wednesday. She identified some abnormal neurological finding yesterday.	He ate many tomatoes on Wednesday. She identified some abnormal neurological findings yesterday.
Sentence fragments	Sending the letter yesterday.	She sent the letter yesterday.
Irregular verbs, nouns, and adjectives, such as go/went/gone, drive/drove/driven, think/thought, send/sent, and child/children	He send the report of the evaluation to the physician. I think about that answer for a long time during the test.	He sent the report of the evaluation to the physician. I thought about that answer for a long time during the test.
Subject-verb agreement errors	The results of the test was negative.	The results of the test were negative.
Commonly confused words, such as to/too/two, except/accept, effect/affect, which/that, then/than, piece/peace, and its/it's	Their are to many patients. Everyone is turning there work in on time accept for John.	There are too many patients. Everyone is turning in their work on time except for John.

Adapted from Edupass! The Smart Student Guide to Studying in the USA. Common Usage Errors. <http://www.edupass.org/english/errors.phtml>. Accessed July 20, 2013 and Gocsik K. Common ESL errors--The Top Ten List. Dartmouth College, Dartmouth Writing Program, English as a Second Language Web site. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/problems/esl.shtml#topten>. Accessed December 30, 2012.

# Proofreading

*Jiro received his paper back, and it was covered with red ink. How could it be possible that he had made so many errors? He felt embarrassed and went to the see the instructor during office hours to discuss the grade on his paper.*

Proofreading is essential for all writers. All writers make errors. Using the following strategies may help to find those errors.[6](#)

## ***Read Very Slowly***

Read out loud if possible, one word at a time. Read what is actually on the page. Proofread more than once and, if possible, have someone else check your

work. Repeat this process after you have finished.

## ***Identify Common Mistakes and Look for Them***

Look for common spelling errors using a “spell-check” function in your computer word processing program. It will be more difficult, but not impossible, to find common errors in usage that are spelled incorrectly.

English is a complicated language with many irregularities. The grammatical errors that non-native English speakers make fall into several common categories ([Table 13-5](#)). Be careful of these errors.

An excellent online resource is available from Purdue University Online Writing Lab (*ESL Resources for Instructors and Students* at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslstudent.html>).

common problems ([Table 13-6](#)) that are particularly difficult for non-native English speakers.<sup>9</sup>

## Cultural Adjustments for International Students

*On the first day of class, Katrina was surprised when her instructor told the class to call him by his first name, “Tom.” She thought to herself, “I want to treat my instructors with respect. I just don’t feel right about doing that.”*

International students may find that teaching and learning methods and social customs in the United States are very different than those practiced in their home country. International students are often surprised about the differences in relationships between students and instructors and the ex-

TABLE 13-6

## COMMON TESTING ERRORS FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

ERROR	HOW IS THIS ERROR MADE?	EXAMPLE
Missing a double negative in a question	Words such as <i>not</i> , <i>lack</i> , or <i>absence</i> are easy to find, and these indicate the negative condition. It is more difficult to find whole words that indicate the negative condition, such as <i>illogical</i> or <i>uncertain</i> . Remember that these words also indicate a negative condition. Two negative words together indicate a positive condition.	Which of the following situations are NOT illegal? a. Not having the patient sign the consent form b. Offering to change the dates on the insurance claim c. Lack of consideration of the patient's request for an appointment in the morning d. Leaving an unsupervised aide in the clinic treating patients while the rest of the staff goes out for lunch To correctly answer this question, the test-taker must look for the only situation that is <i>not illegal</i> . The only situation that does not violate the law is (3).
Missing a qualifying word	Single words, such as, <i>always</i> , <i>never</i> , <i>just</i> , <i>only</i> , <i>except</i> , change the meaning of a phrase (and may also indicate an unlikely correct choice); extreme words ( <i>always</i> , <i>never</i> , <i>totally</i> ) are frequently associated with incorrect answers	A patient with a blood pressure of 90/60 will always complain of dizziness upon standing. (FALSE) Although it is true that a patient with a blood pressure of 90/60 might feel dizzy, the word <i>always</i> is an important clue in this question.
Confusing look-alike options	Be careful to read all of the options, as a phrase may be repeated in a similar way, with the intent to mislead you. Be aware of details.	The most reliable sign of hypertension is: a. Resting systolic blood pressure over 90 b. Resting diastolic blood pressure over 90 c. Resting heart rate over 90 d. 90-point difference between systolic and diastolic blood pressure Don't be fooled! Look for the correct term ( <i>diastolic</i> ), which matches with the repeated value (90).

## Test Taking

Non-native English speakers face some particular challenges while taking examinations. Often, a single word may change the meaning of a question. Review [Chapter 6](#), as test-taking strategies apply here as well. Be careful of some

pectations of students. In addition, differing social customs, such as dress, informality in relationships, and what is acceptable behavior in many academic and work situations may differ considerably. This is a predictable and common reaction to immersion in a different culture where the behavior and values seem to be so different.

In addition, international students often observe behaviors such as competitiveness, materialism, or hurrying in American culture. Some of these behaviors may seem rude. It may be difficult to adjust to different standards of behavior.

Sociologists define this as *culture shock*. Students often feel lonely, alienated, and exhausted. They may feel frustrated and angry. They may withdraw and hold back from participating fully in the new culture.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

# Coping With Culture Shock

Coping with such feelings is essential to progress with your education. Try some of the following strategies<sup>10</sup>:

- *Avoid stereotyping.* Try not to stereotype the characteristics of “Americans” based on your experiences with a few individuals. Try to look at each situation as new and each individual as unique.
- *Express your feelings.* Talk about your feelings and observations with others in the same situation. Ask others if they have experienced similar feelings at some times.
- *Open yourself to the experience.* Try to learn about the history and culture of community in

which you live. Think of this experience as an adventure. Focus on “now,” not yesterday or the future.

- *Use humor.* Maintain a sense of humor and a friendly outlook. Find amusement in your observations. You may feel better if you try to maintain a positive outlook.
- *Join the group.* Group activities that involve your classmates will be very helpful to develop the kind of friendships that will help you to overcome culture shock.
- *Relax and be patient.* This is a common reaction. Assume that these feelings will pass and don't dwell on them. You are not alone and you will find it easier if you remind yourself that this is not permanent.

# What's the Hurry?

Time is highly valued in physical therapist assistant education programs. Tardiness is often not tolerated and may be interpreted as a sign that a student does not value the time of others.

Always strive to be early or on time for both your classes and clinical experiences. Be careful to turn assignments in when they are due and to write down deadlines and appointments in a calendar or appointment book.

## Web Resources for International Students

Another useful website for tips on living in the United States is Edupass!, the Smart Student Guide to

Studying in the United States (<http://www.edupass.org>).<sup>11</sup>

## Summary

International students often face unique challenges in struggling through the educational program in a second language (English). Non-native English speakers will benefit by using strategies for reading and taking notes that maximize attention to key concepts in the written material. Proofreading is an essential step in the writing process, as non-native English speakers are likely to make errors that must be corrected prior to handing in the assignment. Student–instructor relationships and expectations of students may be quite different in the US higher education system. Students should take active measures to cope with culture shock so that it does not cause problems in their academic pursuits.

Minnesota, Center for Writing Web site. <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/responding/non-native.html>. Accessed July 20, 2013.

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# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Identify a reading assignment in one of your classes. Give yourself only 5 minutes. Skim the assignment. Write down all the key words and phrases you can find in that time.

2. Correct the following sentences:

<i>INCORRECT</i>	<i>CORRECT</i>
I can to give her the assignment tonight.	
Many student talked to me after class today.	



I go to the clinic yesterday.	
He want more exercises to practice.	



3. Many international students are surprised about various aspects of life in US higher education. Write down an observation that was surprising to you. How have you coped with this difference? Have you changed your expectations? Do you look at this differently now?

