
Unit I Introduction to Primary Care English

Why Do You Need This Book?

Not being able to read, write or speak in English is a serious obstacle in your career. You may be thinking of improving your English for any or all of the following reasons:

- to understand scientific literature and be up to date in your clinical practice;
- to write research articles and contribute to the general body of knowledge and advancement of family medicine;
- to attend international courses or conferences;
- to give talks or presentations in international settings;
- to train abroad in a specialty or subspecialty;
- to spend a sabbatical abroad;
- to work as a family doctor in an English-speaking country;
- to receive international visitors in your country;
- to discuss clinical, academic or managerial issues in primary care with international colleagues;
- to read primary care books and textbooks avoiding delayed and poor translations.

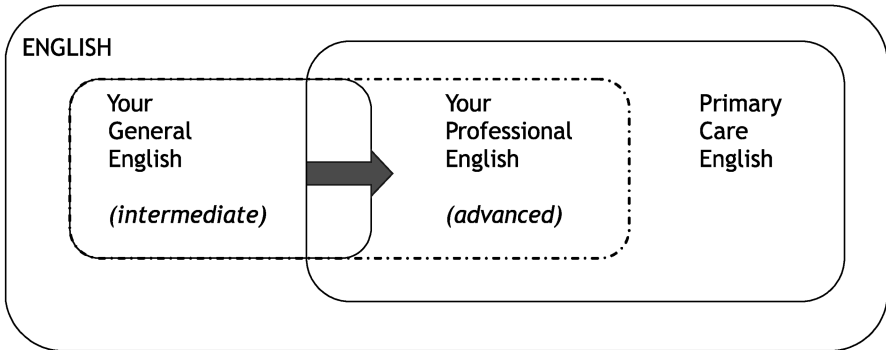
English is your key to international medicine. Only with good understanding and articulation of the English language can you be part of the international medical community and access the international body of medical knowledge – not only an exciting opportunity to develop personally and professionally, but almost a duty.

What Will It Do for You?

The starting point is your current level of *general* English, which we assume is *intermediate* or *advanced*. The end point after studying this book will be an *advanced level of primary care English*.

It is often said that doctors already need to have an advanced level of English to embark on medical English learning. Although this is the ideal

situation and it is highly recommended, unfortunately this is not always the case. It does not happen in the majority of cases. The reality is that most doctors have an intermediate level, and because their main motivation for learning English is Medicine, they are not likely to persevere towards an advanced level without incorporating Medicine into their English learning. This is why this book is addressed to both advanced and *intermediate* English speakers.



what this book expands in your English

What Kind of Book Is It?

This is not a conventional language book. It is written by doctors for doctors, not by English teachers for English students. It is a conversation between peers, from experienced professional learners to less experienced ones. We are trying to teach you what we have learned, including the ‘tricks’ and the ‘traps’ that have confused us and (hopefully) shall not confuse you.

The first six units form the general foundation, from which you will build specific primary care language using the other units.

In Units VII and IX, we have selected text and case examples that include a variety of expressions for which we give explanations and comments on the opposite page. Therefore, you won’t need to constantly consult a dictionary or your English teacher – the teacher is inside the book. This will help you learn much quicker and with less effort than you had imagined!

This book is a friendly, often informal, companion. We aspire to make your learning enjoyable. We aim to help you learn “*English without tears*” ... hopefully with a smile!

This is not an exercise book. Life is full of practice opportunities and you will probably prefer them.

Is it a reference book or a learning book? We were presented with this dilemma and have chosen a balance between the two – a balance between

easy-reading prose and easy-finding lists, between readable and useful, and between enjoyable and comprehensive.

How Should You Use It?

Choose the order

The English level required for the initial more ‘academic’ units (II–VI) is higher than the rest, as it is presumed that the interested readers would have attained this level. For learners with a lower level, we recommend reading the ‘explained’ units first (VII–IX) as an appetiser, and then going back to read the whole book from Unit II.

Read slowly

Reading is a great way to learn – probably the most realistic one for you, as it is relatively easy and most flexible. There is a lot of subliminal learning in reading, but you can enhance it by doing it *slowly* and paying careful attention to detail. This book is a concentrate, so drink it in small sips. Try to discover why each sentence is there for you. Do not rush: relax ... and read slowly, *very slowly*. Taste each word and phrase, repeat them in your mind, repeat them aloud; imagine the scene and yourself in it, be active and take part. Passive learning is good, but active learning is better!

Use dictionaries

Ideally, you would use several dictionaries for reference, including:

1. An English dictionary
2. A bilingual dictionary
3. An English medical dictionary
4. A bilingual medical dictionary

Some of the dictionaries we have used and recommend are:

- Oxford Concise English Dictionary
- Microsoft Encarta World English Dictionary (available in Word with a right click of your mouse)
- Apple Dashboard Dictionary (available on Apple Macintosh computers)
- Stedman’s Concise Medical Dictionary for the Health Professions

The first dictionary is British and the other three are American. Oxford’s Dictionary has a useful footnote on all pages as a reminder of how the phonetic symbols sound, so you can learn to pronounce any word you look

up. Computer-based dictionaries are ideal to use while you are writing or reading documents in an electronic format. Stedman's Dictionary contains an audio CD-ROM with all the medical words pronounced for you. It also contains valuable anatomy plates to learn specific anatomical terms.

Take notes

Take a pencil and mark in the book anything that calls your attention.

Create your own personal bilingual dictionary as suggested in Appendix 1. Write down anything that you would like to have to hand, either taken from *Primary Care English* or elsewhere. Use it to practise and reinforce your learning, and for future reference.

Pronounce

As you know, of course, English pronunciation has been intentionally designed to embarrass you! There are not enough rules that you can study, so you will not know how words are pronounced correctly until you hear them first hand. You will use trial and error – and often discover that you have chosen the wrong option! Well, do not worry; it is not your fault! However, do not miss the opportunity to learn the right choice by noting it and repeating it. Repeat, repeat, repeat!

Use Stedman's dictionary, the symbols included in this book (PCE), or your English teacher.

Do not forget the abbreviations. A star (★) follows abbreviations that are very commonly used in spoken form and that we recommend practising.

Express yourself

This book should help you to express yourself, not just understand. While you read it, take note of the expressions that you would like to use at the next available opportunity. Do not assume that if you understood it easily, you already 'know' that piece of language. Read each line, each sentence and each word, carefully. Even if you do understand it easily, stop and think: 'Would I have been able to write or say this myself?' 'Is anything said in a different way to how I would say it in my own language?' Include the order of words, verb tenses and use of prepositions. Sharpen your observation and learn from your discoveries. This will help you to not only understand but also be able to express yourself much better in English.

This is important because, although you would be content with 'surviving' at first, quite soon you will want to say something interesting. You will want to be able to discuss practice management or medical ethics with an

international colleague, for instance. If you live or stay in an English-speaking country, you will also want to learn how to express yourself in areas that cross the borders of medicine; otherwise, your self-esteem may suffer. So, take note of anything you find in this book that could help you to express yourself.

Practise

- Read medical books
- Phone and write to international colleagues regularly
- Watch films/TV in English
- Join medical English courses

Feedback

Books like this require a collective effort. Your feedback could help us prepare an even better second edition of PCE. If you have any ideas or comments, would like to contribute to further editions or titles of the series, or would like to be informed of PCE courses, just write to us at primarycareenglish@yahoo.co.uk.