

A Pedagogical Framework for Teaching English for Medical Purposes: Needs Analysis, Context-Based Instruction, And Clinical Communication

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Abstract. *The article examines effective pedagogical approaches to teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP) to university-level medical students. Since medical learners require English for clinical communication, academic study, and professional development, the study emphasizes the importance of conducting a detailed needs analysis prior to instruction. The paper discusses core components such as context-based medical vocabulary teaching, role-plays, simulations, integration of soft skills, and the use of authentic and technology-enhanced resources. Methodologically, the article presents sample speaking, listening, reading, writing, and vocabulary activities as well as a four-week syllabus designed to develop communicative competence in clinical scenarios. Practical assessment methods and recommendations are also provided. The findings highlight that interactive, practice-oriented, and clinically relevant tasks significantly improve students' linguistic confidence and professional communication skills.*

Key words: *English for Medical Purposes (EMP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), medical communication, needs analysis, medical vocabulary, role-play, clinical simulation, authentic materials, medical English syllabus, medical education.*

INTRODUCTION. In recent years, the demand for English proficiency among medical professionals has increased dramatically due to academic globalization, international collaboration, and the wide availability of medical literature in English. For medical students, English is not merely a foreign language; it is a professional tool that grants access to scientific knowledge, enables participation in research activities, and facilitates communication with international colleagues and patients. Consequently, the teaching of English for Medical Purposes (EMP), a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), requires a specialized, highly contextualized, and clinically oriented approach.

Traditional general English courses are insufficient for medical learners, whose goals include reading complex research articles, listening to medical lectures, writing clinical reports, and interacting in doctor–patient scenarios. Therefore, the instructional process must begin with a thorough needs analysis to determine students' academic and professional objectives, linguistic challenges, and preferred learning strategies. Medical English instruction must also focus on terminology acquisition through contextualized learning rather than memorization, integration of clinical communication skills, and exposure to authentic materials such as case reports, consultation videos, medical podcasts, and hospital documentation.

Equally important is the inclusion of interactive activities—role-plays, case discussions, simulations, and problem-based learning—which allow students to practice real-world communication.

Technology-enhanced tools, including virtual patient platforms and digital vocabulary resources, enrich the learning experience and support autonomous study. Moreover, assessment in EMP should measure not only grammatical accuracy but also functional performance in clinical tasks.

This article presents a comprehensive instructional framework for teaching English to medical students. It outlines practical classroom activities, sample lessons, and a four-week syllabus integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary development, soft skills, and professional communication strategies. The goal is to offer teachers a practical, research-based model for designing effective EMP courses tailored to the needs of medical learners.

Teaching English to medical students requires a special approach — you're not just teaching general English, but English for Medical Purposes (EMP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The key is to focus on the language, skills, and communication contexts they will actually use in their studies and future medical careers.

1. Identify their needs before starting, determine what they need English for:

Reading medical textbooks and research articles

Writing reports, case studies, and patient notes

Listening to lectures and conferences

Speaking in clinical settings or international contexts

By the help of needs analysis (questionnaire, interview, or short survey) we try to find out their current English level, their main goals (academic, professional, communication), their preferred learning styles

2. Focus on Core Language Areas

Skill	Focus Areas	Example Activities
Reading	Medical texts, research papers, patient case reports	Skimming/scanning for key terms, summarizing medical articles
Writing	Case reports, prescriptions, referral letters	Writing SOAP notes, describing symptoms, summarizing research
Listening	Doctor-patient conversations, lectures	Listening to medical dialogues, note-taking exercises
Speaking	Case presentations, giving instructions	Role-plays (doctor-patient), discussing diagnoses, presenting research

3. Teach Medical Vocabulary in Context Medical English is highly terminological. Avoid teaching word lists — use context-based learning.

Effective methods for context-based learning are :

Word formation: teach roots, prefixes, and suffixes (e.g., cardio-, -itis, -logy)

Categorize by systems (cardiovascular, digestive, etc.)

Use authentic materials: patient records, medical journal abstracts, hospital signs, charts.

Example: teach “hypertension” through a mini-dialogue about taking a patient’s blood pressure, not just as a definition.

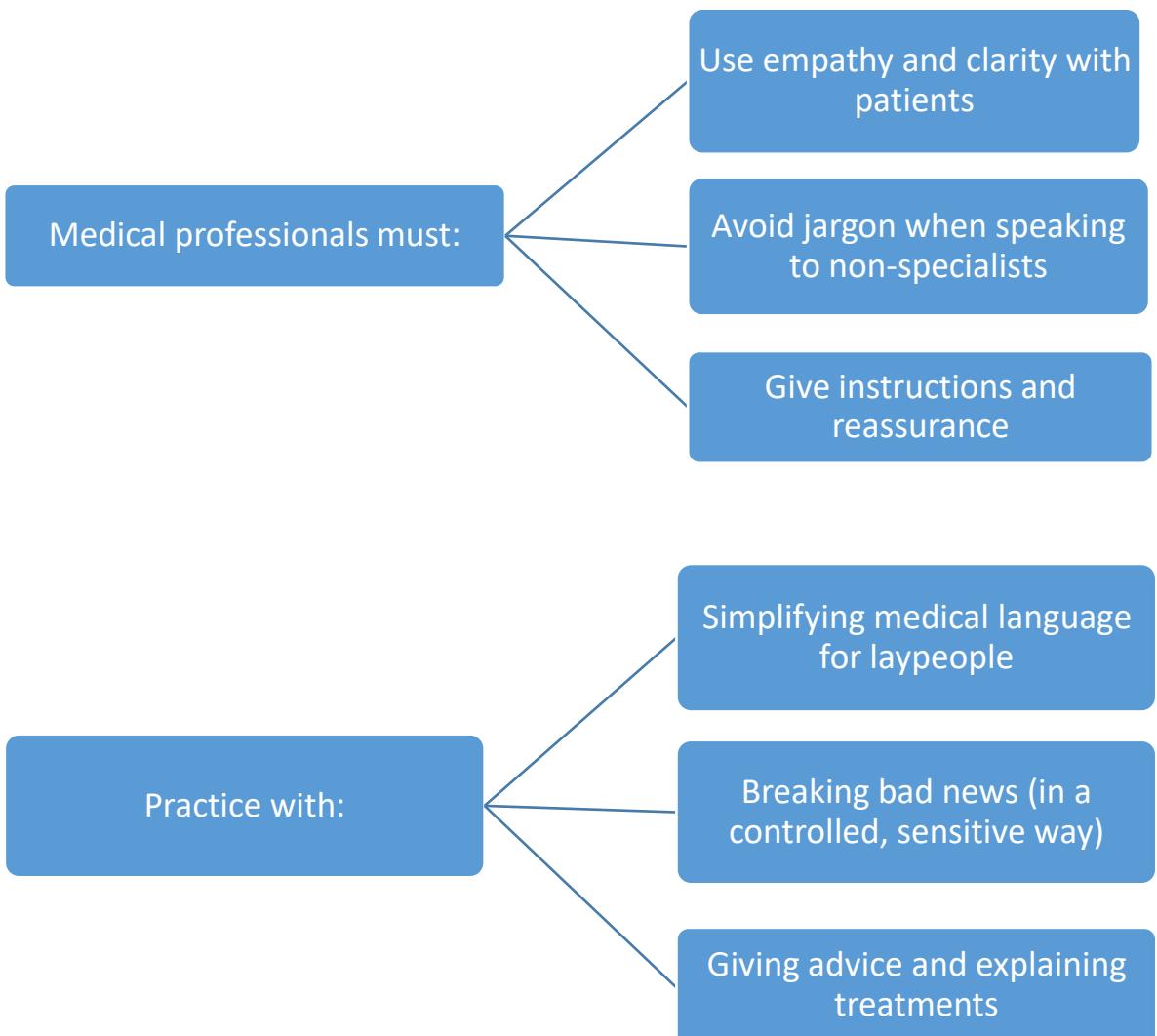
4. Use role-plays and simulations

Role-plays help develop both language and professional communication skills such as, doctor-patient interactions, nurse-doctor briefings, medical conference discussions, telephone consultations

Example Activity: Student A = Doctor, Student B = Patient

Doctor takes a brief medical history using question forms (“Do you have any allergies?”).

5. Integrate soft skills and communication



6. Use authentic resources

Incorporate real medical materials to make learning relevant:

Case reports and hospital forms

Medical podcasts or YouTube lectures

Excerpts from journals like The Lancet or BMJ

Videos of consultations (for comprehension and discussion)

7. Include technology and interactive tools

Apps/Websites: Medline Plus, Quizlet (for terminology), TED-Ed Medical Talks

Online simulations: virtual patients, case-based learning

Presentations: have students give a short medical presentation in English

8. Assess progress practically

Instead of only grammar tests, include:

Oral case presentations

Listening and note-taking from a lecture

Written patient report or summary

Vocabulary quizzes using case examples

9. Teaching tips

- Use simple explanations for complex ideas.
- Balance medical content and language focus.
- Encourage peer interaction and discussion.
- Provide feedback not only on accuracy but also on clarity and appropriateness.

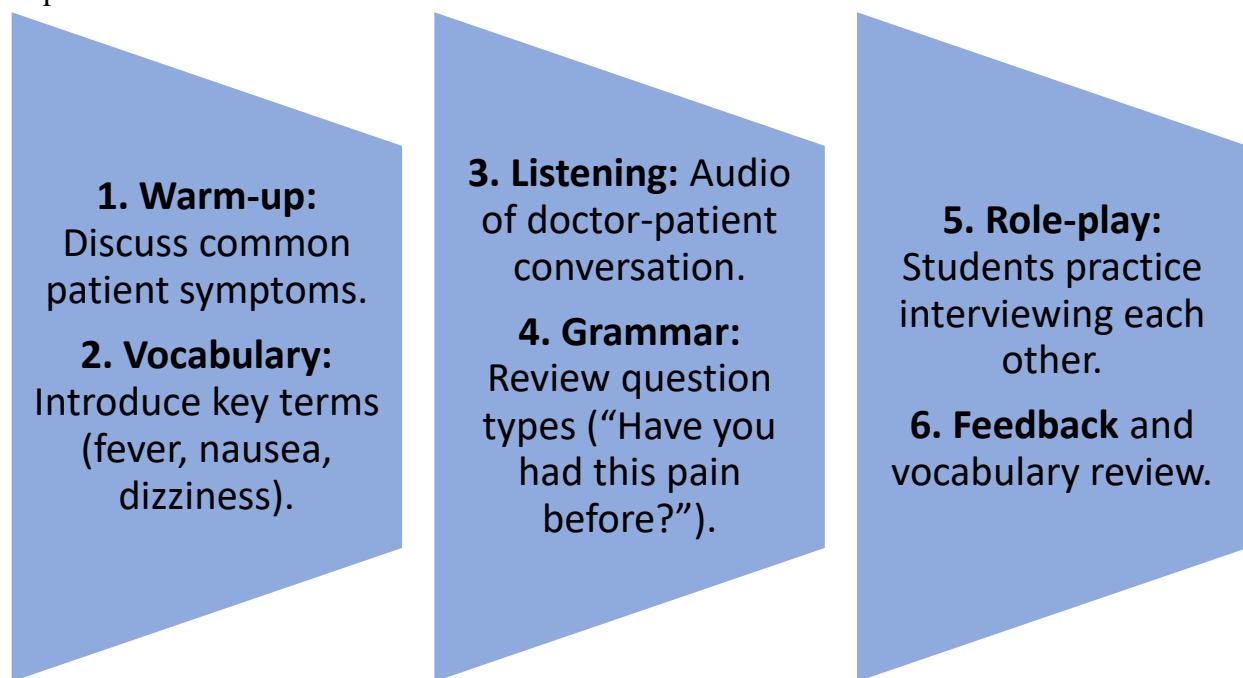
Sample Lesson Outline (for Intermediate Students)

Topic: Taking a Patient's Medical History

Objectives:

- Learn vocabulary for symptoms and illnesses
- Practice question formation
- Role-play a medical interview

Steps:



These are **interactive, context-based, and practical** — perfect for university-level medical students who need English for real-world healthcare communication.

1. Speaking activities

A. Doctor–patient role-play Objective: Practice asking about symptoms and taking a patient history.
Level: Intermediate–Upper Intermediate Time: 20–25 minutes Instructions:

1. Divide the class into pairs.
2. Give role cards: Doctor: Ask about symptoms, duration, and lifestyle. Patient: Use given symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, headache, etc.).
3. After 5–7 minutes, swap roles.
4. Discuss in groups: *What was easy or difficult to say in English?*

Example prompt: You are a doctor. A patient comes in complaining of stomach pain and nausea. Ask questions to find out what's wrong.

B. Explaining a procedure Objective: Practice giving clear, simple explanations to patients.
Level: Upper Intermediate Instructions:

1. Students choose a common procedure (e.g., blood test, X-ray, vaccination).
2. They prepare a short explanation for a patient who doesn't understand medical jargon.
3. Present it in pairs or to the class.

Example: "We'll take a small sample of your blood to check your sugar level. It might feel like a quick pinch."

C. Case Discussion Objective: Use English for clinical reasoning and teamwork.

Instructions:

1. Give a short medical case summary (e.g., a 45-year-old man with chest pain).
2. In small groups, students discuss:

What questions to ask

What possible diagnoses are

What tests to order

3. Each group presents their reasoning briefly.

2. Listening activities

A. Listening to a medical consultation

Objective: Develop comprehension of authentic speech in a clinical context.

Material: Use a YouTube audio/video of a doctor–patient consultation (many available free).

Task:

- Listen once for the general topic.
- Listen again and answer specific questions:

What symptoms does the patient have?

What advice does the doctor give?

What treatment is suggested?

B. Note-taking from a Lecture

Objective: Practice academic listening.

Material: Use a short 3–5 minute medical lecture or TED-Ed talk (e.g., "How vaccines work").

Task:

- Students take notes.
- Then compare notes in pairs.
- Discuss the main ideas in English.

3. Reading activities

A. Reading a case report

Objective: Develop reading comprehension of medical texts.

Instructions:

1. Give a short simplified medical case report (around 150–200 words).
2. Students skim for the main idea (diagnosis, treatment).
3. Then scan for details:

What were the symptoms?

What tests were done?

What was the final diagnosis?

Follow-up discussion:

“What other treatment options could be used?”

B. Matching definitions

Objective: Improve understanding of terminology.

Instructions:

- Give a list of terms and definitions.
- Students match them.

Example:

Term	Definition
Hypertension	High blood pressure
Fracture	A broken bone
Infection	Invasion of the body by harmful microorganisms

4 Writing Activities

A. Writing a Patient Record (SOAP Notes)

Objective: Practice medical writing.

Instructions:

- Give a short case.
- Students complete a SOAP note:

Section Description

S – Subjective	What the patient says (symptoms)
O – Objective	What the doctor observes or measures
A – Assessment	Diagnosis or impression
P – Plan	Treatment or next steps

Example:

S: Patient complains of sore throat for 3 days.

O: Temperature 38°C, throat red.

A: Possible tonsillitis.

P: Prescribe antibiotics and rest.

B. Writing Patient Instructions

Objective: practice writing clear, simple English for patients.

Instructions:

- Students choose a condition (e.g., cold, back pain).
- Write a short note for the patient explaining:

What to do at home

What to avoid

When to return to the doctor

Example: drink lots of water and rest. Take one tablet every 8 hours after meals. Come back if fever continues for more than 2 days.

5. Vocabulary activities

A. Medical root word game

Objective: learn how medical words are built.

Instructions:

- Give prefixes/suffixes and meanings such as: *cardio-* (heart), *-itis* (inflammation), *neuro-* (nerve), *-logy* (study of)
- Students make as many words as possible and define them.

Example: Cardiology = study of the heart

Arthritis = inflammation of joints

B. Taboo game (medical version)

Objective: Practice describing medical terms.

Instructions:

- One student explains a medical term without using certain key words.
- Others guess.

Example:

Term: *Fever*

Forbidden words: *temperature, hot, sick*

Student might say: "When your body is warmer than normal because of illness."

Bonus: mini project idea

Have students prepare a 3–5 minute English presentation on a medical topic (e.g., diabetes, first aid, the heart).

They can include:

- Basic description
- Symptoms and causes
- Treatment and prevention

Then have classmates ask questions in English.

4-Week English for medical students syllabus

Course goals

By the end of the 4 weeks, students will be able to:

- Communicate confidently in clinical situations (e.g., taking history, explaining treatment).
- Understand and use essential medical vocabulary.
- Read and summarize medical texts.
- Write simple professional medical documents (case reports, SOAP notes).

WEEK 1 — Introduction to medical English & patient interaction

Theme: Meeting patients and basic communication

Focus: Polite communication, symptoms vocabulary, question forms

Lesson	Objectives	Sample activities
1. Medical English overview	Understand course goals and importance of English in medicine	Icebreaker: “Why doctors need English”; Medical vocabulary matching game
2. Describing symptoms	Learn key symptom vocabulary (pain, fever, nausea, cough)	Flashcards; “Find someone who...” (students ask each other about symptoms)
3. Asking for patient history	Formulate open/closed questions	Role-play: Doctor–patient interview (“When did it start?” “How often?”)
4. Listening: patient consultation	Understand doctor–patient dialogues	Watch/listen to short medical video; answer comprehension questions
5. Review & vocabulary quiz	Consolidate key words and grammar	Quiz + pair dialogue practice

Homework idea: Write a short dialogue between a doctor and a patient with a headache.

WEEK 2 — *Body systems and clinical vocabulary*

Theme: Medical terminology and anatomy

Focus: Vocabulary building through prefixes/suffixes and system-based topics

Lesson	Objectives	Sample activities
1. Body Systems Vocabulary	Learn words related to major systems (respiratory, cardiovascular, digestive)	Label a body diagram; system matching activity
2. Word Formation	Understand roots, prefixes, suffixes	Build words using <i>cardio-</i> , <i>neuro-</i> , <i>-itis</i> , <i>-logy</i> ; mini “Medical Root Bingo”
3. Reading: Case Report	Practice scanning/skimming skills	Read a short simplified medical case; answer comprehension questions
4. Speaking: Explaining a Procedure	Simplify medical English for laypeople	Students explain a simple procedure (X-ray, vaccination) to a “patient”
5. Writing: Patient Instructions	Write clear, simple advice	Students write home-care instructions for a common illness

Homework idea: Create a vocabulary table with 10 new medical words (definition + example sentence).

WEEK 3 — *Diagnosing and treating patients*

Theme: Communication in clinical decision-making

Focus: Functional language for describing, diagnosing, and recommending treatments

Lesson	Objectives	Sample Activities
1. Grammar for diagnosis	Use modals: <i>might</i> , <i>could</i> , <i>may</i> for possibilities	Pair work: “What could it be?” diagnosis guessing game
2. Case discussion	Use reasoning and group talk	Group case study (patient with chest pain); discuss causes & next steps

3. Listening: lecture or TED Talk	Develop academic listening & note-taking	Listen to “How vaccines work”; take notes and summarize
4. Writing: SOAP notes	Practice writing clinical records	Complete SOAP note for a sample case (fever, cough, sore throat)
5. Review and vocabulary test	Reinforce week vocabulary	Kahoot quiz / group vocabulary challenge

Homework idea: Write a short paragraph describing how you diagnosed a patient.

WEEK 4 — Professional communication and presentation skills

Theme: Using English in professional and academic contexts

Focus: Presentations, reports, and doctor–patient empathy

Lesson	Objectives	Sample activities
1. Giving professional presentations	Organize a mini talk on a medical topic	Practice presentation skills (signposting, clear pronunciation)
2. Soft skills in medicine	Learn empathy and polite expressions	Role-play: breaking bad news / comforting a patient
3. Writing: case summary	Write a short case report in paragraph form	Peer-edit and correct common writing errors
4. Project presentation day	Students present a 3–5 min topic (e.g., diabetes, first aid)	Presentations + Q&A from classmates
5. Course review and reflection	Evaluate progress and review vocabulary	“Medical English Jeopardy” game; feedback form

Homework idea: Write a reflection: “*What I learned in this course and how I’ll use English in my future career.*”

Recommended Resources

Videos: TED-Ed “Body Stuff with Dr. Jen Gunter”, BBC Learning English – *English at the Hospital*

Apps: Quizlet (Medical English sets), Anki

Books: - *English in Medicine* (Cambridge University Press)

Oxford English for Careers: Medicine 1 & 2

Websites: Medline Plus (simple medical explanations), Breaking News English (health topics)

Assessment Suggestions

Continuous participation (20%)

Vocabulary quizzes (20%)

Written case report (20%)

Final oral presentation (40%)

CONCLUSION. Teaching English to medical students requires a pedagogical model grounded in relevance, authenticity, and clinical communication. Because medical learners use English for professional practice rather than general conversation, EMP instruction must focus on needs-based planning, context-rich vocabulary learning, interactive speaking tasks, and exposure to real medical discourse. The integration of role-plays, simulations, authentic case materials, and technology-supported tools significantly enhances students' ability to apply English effectively in medical settings.

The four-week syllabus and sample activities presented in this article demonstrate that structured, communicative, and clinically meaningful tasks not only improve linguistic competence but also support the development of critical medical soft skills such as empathy, clarity, and professionalism. Overall, an effective EMP course equips students with the practical language tools required for patient communication, academic study, and participation in the global medical community.

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