

Tales of a Coder Part III: School Begins

☒ **Mary Pat:** *If you remember, my friend Bob decided he wanted to become a medical coder and asked for help. He chose Allied Schools because he felt he made a connection with the people at Allied and they also offered an attractive payment plan. Bob has started the program and wrote this for me about his experience so far.*

Bob: I recently received my first package of school supplies from the Allied Schools. When I opened the box I found a welcome packet with instructions for getting help online, two textbooks (Medical Terminology and Anatomy and Physiology) and a couple of CD-ROM discs. I was ready to begin.

Medical Terminology

I began with Medical Terminology. The instructions that I found when I logged online for the first time were to **read and complete the exercises in the first chapter of the textbook.**

The course began with basic word structure. I learned about suffixes, prefixes and root forms. The various incarnations of all of these parts were a matter of pure memorization. It was reassuring that I did know some of them from family medical issues and from studying Greek and Latin words in school many years ago. The instructions were to look at the ending first for part of the term's meaning, and then to move to the left for the root form and any prefix. By combining these, the meaning of the term emerges.

For instance: HEMATOLOGY.

- logy – means the study of.
- hemat/o – the root form for blood.

Therefore, hematology is the study of blood.

There are hundreds of root forms, suffixes and prefixes but thankfully, Chapter 1 did not try to teach me all of them at once! Examples were given for the words presented, the text was full of colorful illustrations and short cuts, and memory devices were introduced along the way. Next came over **twenty pages of exercises** with answers so that I could check my progress. The exercises were offered in a variety of formats in an effort to keep you from getting too focused on one method of memorizing, as well as keeping it as fresh as possible. There were fill-in-the blank and multiple-choice quizzes, medical word scrambles and even some short word problems that described simple medical cases where you had to determine what term best described the cases. It was a very thorough attack at memorizing a fair amount of material.

After I made myself work through the book exercises twice, I logged online and started **the computer work**. What I discovered was a rehash of the book but it was presented in an easy-to-follow manner that moved very quickly. What I also discovered was that if I had absorbed the material well from the text, the computer rehash went quickly.

Then I was presented with an **online practice test** that they said could be taken as many times as I wanted, but they recommended that I not move on to the real test until I had achieved at least a 90% score.

I'm proud to report I got 90% on my first try and then moved on to do the **formal test** that required a 70% to pass. And ta - dah.... I passed with 100%! (OK, I just could not help but brag a little bit.) The real point though is that by studying hard on the book you should achieve great success with the computer portion of the program and success is what we all want.

In addition to the books I received two computer discs and I found them to be wonderful additions to the study program. One

disc has a collection of additional exercises, glossaries, flash cards and animated lessons that examine different parts of the body. There were even some arcade games based on Wheel of Fortune and Concentration – cute, fun and one more way to get the information lodged in your brain forever.

The second disc went over all of the terms introduced in each chapter and gave an audio definition that was very helpful in making sure I understood the correct pronunciation. There was a spelling bee section on this disc as well that presented yet another approach for people more inclined toward audio learning as opposed to visual. All in all, the discs were a very comprehensive and a powerful reinforcement of work to memorize the material thoroughly. I am now on to the next section covering body cavities, body planes, body systems and sections of the spine.

What I've Learned

My normal procedure for working on this class is to sit down at the kitchen table and review the exercises in the book for the section I am studying. I can easily spend an hour or two with the book and seldom do I realize how much time has passed before I stand up for a break. Two hours a day writing out answers in a notebook (I am not writing in the book) helps me to get the material down. In an effort to mix it up a little bit, I sometimes pull out the discs and play one of the arcade games for fun. When I feel confident about a section I move on and do the online portion. I try to get two hours in every day but I am lucky to actually do it 3 or 4 days a week.

Over the last few weeks I have made progress but I have also learned a lot about what is required to be successful in this ambitious endeavor.

- 1. You must make the time to work at the program.** If you do not set aside time every day or at least every other day, you will move slowly. If you can't make yourself

sit down and do the work, you will not be able to get through the program.

2. **You must get your mind in study mode.** It has been a few years since I was in school and even though I spent quite a bit of time with homemade flash cards and a couple of the Dummies books, I still had to make the old brain work. It is a challenge, but it is refreshing.
3. **You must memorize. A lot.** Study the different sections and don't let yourself take any short cuts because it is not good enough to be able to answer just the multiple-choice questions. You must know the terms and meanings and they must be in your head and ready to spring forth when needed.

So far, I am really pleased with the program I chose. A number of different approaches are offered in order to reinforce the memorization required, and practice quizzes and exams allow you to feel comfortable before moving on to new material. There is no short cut to what must be done – it's all about putting in the time and the discipline. I am not moving as fast as I hoped I would, but I think I will pick up some steam when I get through the terminology and anatomy and start on the actual coding portion.

Next time – Bob reconsiders his choice.