

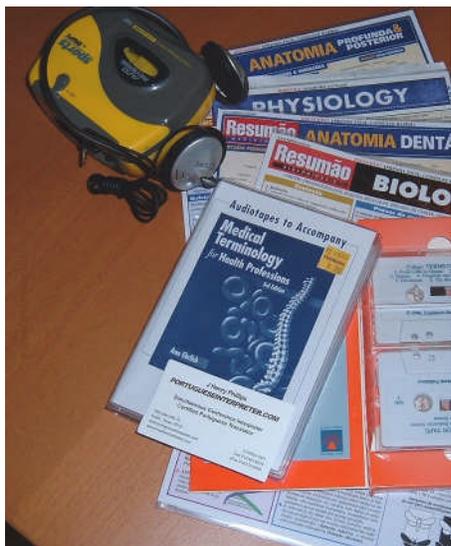
CRAMMING

by J. Henry Phillips
portugueseinterpreter.com

"How many here," bawled out my medical terminology professor, "have any background in health or medicine?" This was one of those huge University of Texas classrooms, and when I looked back and saw that over 200 of the 300-odd students enrolled had their hands upraised, I realized I was done for. At least two *dozen* of them were actually wearing scrubs or nurse's uniforms! Luckily for me, technology came galloping to the rescue.

Every night I recorded my unbearably dull medical vocabulary and Greek & Latin exercises on a short answering-machine cassette tape. Every day I used this tape to bombard myself with review material as I bicycled and marched from class to class. I got a few odd looks from the younger students until I learned to fake a few reggae moves and put some rhythm into my walk. Soon they figured I must be listening to hip-hop, and I fit right in.

I transferred the vocabulary material to a regular cassette tape every few days and used to review the entire semester. By the time finals rolled around I was so well prepared that, even though I arrived late and missed the first two hours and 40 minutes of the three-hour exam, I was still able to complete everything and review it before turning it in for an A. The efficacy of this method made a profound impression on me. Ever since then I have collected audio books and recordings covering the type of material people expect me to interpret. As I scour used book stores for rare dictionaries, I also visit the media section and look for audiobooks on tape and relevant CDs.



A lot of material can be downloaded directly from sites like Gutenberg.org and played on an MP3 player no bigger than a cigarette lighter. I gave up trying to use an Apple iPod for this type of material, because the iPod is designed to keep playing the same stuff over and over. A Mambo Mano from kasercorp.com sells locally for \$50 new and holds 4 GB of audio files. I don't even know how many CDs that is, but I know it is well over a dozen, because mine is never half-full. I erase the old files and add new material anytime I want, and the rechargeable battery lasts and lasts. Bicycle-helmet-compatible headsets that cover your ears from behind cost about five dollars apiece from Discountelectronics.com on Anderson Lane and sound as good as an expensive stereo system. Portable cassette players show up at garage sales for about the same price, and I picked up several hours of medical terminology review tapes for a total of maybe six dollars at used bookstores.

To visualize this kind of subject matter, bookstores around campus, electronics stores—even newsstands—sell laminated review sheets for nursing, physiology, anatomy, dentistry and so forth. I collect these in English and Portuguese every chance I get, and toss a selection into my carry-on luggage to review when the flight crew orders me to turn off my electronics. It takes some getting used to, but after a while you can leaf through these reference folders and at the same time listen to medical terminology tapes without too much distress (except perhaps from the overly-graphic illustrations). These reference folders cost about \$5-\$8 brand-new.

Although I do a lot of first aid, occupational illness and accident prevention material as an oil and gas translator, this is not really enough preparation for simultaneous interpretation at conferences peopled mainly by doctors and nurses discussing their *métier*. Some inexpensive tapes and a media player can nevertheless go a long way toward tuning your ear to the vocabulary and pronunciation medical experts prefer. The discussion is much easier to keep up with if you have a general review of the basic concepts fresh in your mind. Hundreds of quick study titles can be found in English at Barcharts.com and in Portuguese at Bafisa.com.br. Any technique that shortens a final exam by nearly 90% without hurting your grade can't be all bad. —JHP