

# Shaping up a new English for Medical Purposes course with a routine student feedback sheet

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## Introduction

Understanding student needs and perceptions is an essential part of English for Specific Purposes course development (Belcher, 2009; Richards, 2001). To ensure a course is responsive to student needs, it is important to find out student needs before, during, and after a course (Belcher, 2009). For a new course, obtaining feedback from the students while the course is ongoing is particularly beneficial for adjusting the teaching material or methods to better meet the needs of the students. This is especially so if the teacher is working with the students for the first time, as was the case in this course. To assess how a new English for Medical Purposes reading course was being received by two groups of approximately 50 third-year medical students at a Japanese university, a Feedback Sheet (Fig 1) was developed for use over multiple lessons.

## The New Medical English Reading Course

The new Medical English reading course was a compulsory one-year Medical English course offered alongside oral presentation and listening courses taught by different teachers. The lesson topics were chosen to match the subjects taught in the clinical lectures in Japanese. An overview of the course is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Medical English Reading Course

<b>Aim</b>	To foster skills for reading medical texts
<b>Material</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Term 1: Case reports from the <i>New England Journal of Medicine's</i> Images in Clinical Medicine section</li><li>Term 2: Excerpts from <i>Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine</i> and corresponding excerpts from the Japanese version of the book</li></ul>
<b>Lesson</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Term 1: Eliciting student thinking by presenting images (x-rays, CT scans, photographs etc) from the case reports, followed by fill-in-the-blanks, sentence matching, and sentence rearranging activities</li><li>Term 2: In-class English to Japanese translation, self-editing and writing commentary after reading the published Japanese version of the text</li></ul>
<b>Sessions</b>	55 minutes × 32 sessions
<b>Size</b>	approx. 50 students × 2 groups

## The Feedback Sheet

The purpose of the Feedback Sheet was to obtain information that would lead to an understanding of how the course was being received by the students. It was also meant to encourage students to reflect on their learning and to keep track of attendance. At the end of each session, the students were asked to write two useful terms/sentences they learned in the lesson and a comment. The sheets were collected and given back the following week with the instructor's stamp and occasionally her responses.

## The most notable comments in the Term 1 Feedback Sheets were those that made medical commentary related to the course text

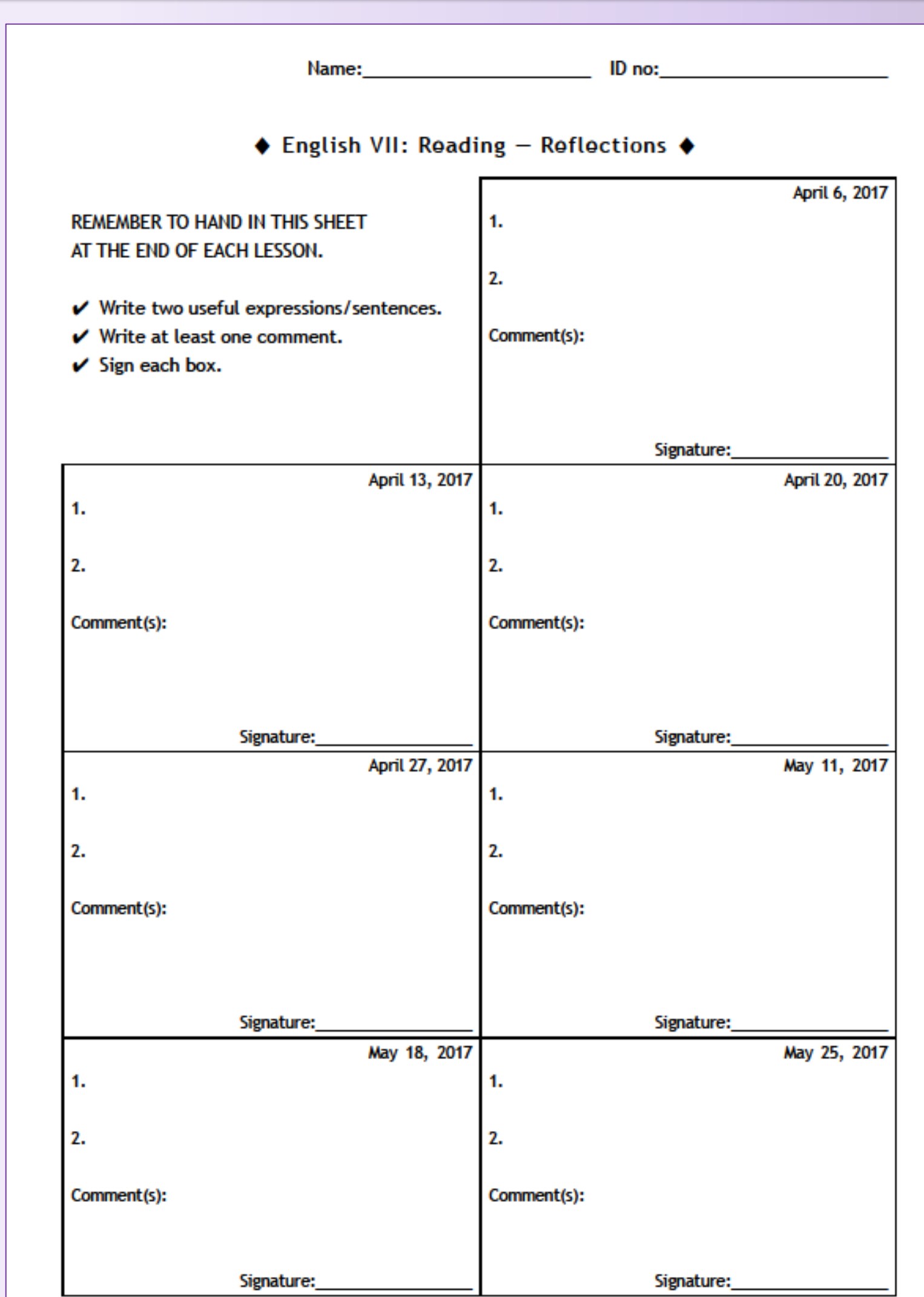


Fig 1. Term 1 Feedback Sheet

### Benefits:

- ✓ Can know which expressions students find useful/interesting
- ✓ Can help build rapport
- ✓ Can pick up complaints
- ✓ Can keep track of feedback over multiple weeks
- ✓ Can encourage students to reflect and make subject-specific commentary

### Drawbacks

- ✓ Becomes repetitive and leads to superficial comments
- ✓ May discourage students from speaking up in class
- ✓ Time consuming to mark, collect, and distribute each week

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the students for their participation in class and through the feedback sheets.

## Presenter bio

Chieri Noda teaches English for Specific Purposes courses as a part-time instructor at private universities in Tokyo. She has an MA in Communication and is currently writing up her PhD thesis which analyses video-recorded interaction in conversation classes. Her academic interests include classroom interaction, conversation analysis, genre analysis as well as English for Specific Purposes.

## Term 1 Student Feedback

The two expressions/sentences were useful for finding out what the students were paying attention to and for devising the end-of-term exam. These included not only medical terms but also formulaic academic phrases (Guest, 2017). The comments fell into several general categories: comments on the appropriacy of the teaching materials/methods, class management issues, individual engagement (e.g. I will try harder next time), rapport building (e.g. thank you for writing a response), and medical commentary. The comments on teaching material/methods and class management issues such as suggestions on seating arrangement were of practical value for improving the course.

The most notable comments, however, were those that made medical commentary related to the course text. In this large class where students were reluctant to speak up, the Feedback Sheet provided some students with a means for making medical commentary. For example, a student pointed out the differences between combination vaccines in the US and Japan and another referred to the fact that squamous-cell carcinoma (referred to in a case report) is the most common histological type of lung cancer to cavitate. These student contributions were particularly relevant for this course which sought to engage the students' knowledge in clinical medicine. These comments were shown to the whole class at a subsequent session to stimulate other students to make similar commentary.

## Development of a Term 2 Translation Worksheet

Seeing potential in the fact that some students were prepared to take the initiative to bring in their medical knowledge into the language classroom, elements of the Feedback Sheet were incorporated into a hand-in translation worksheet (Fig 2) with the aim of not just gathering information but encouraging active student participation and reflection. In the new worksheet, students were specifically asked to write a reflective commentary (in English or Japanese) on their own translation work. Students were free to write any questions or suggestions on the course in a separate voluntary feedback section at the bottom of the worksheet. Designating a specific section for commenting on their own translation has prompted students to make in-depth comments such as those below.

### Term 2 Student Translation Commentary

- 血尿は肉眼的に透明でも顕微鏡的には赤血球が認められれば顕微鏡的血尿として扱われる。そのため、「minimal」の血尿レベルがどの程度なのか本文では分かりにくい。Hematuria is referred to as microscopic hematuria if erythrocytes are found microscopically even if the urine looks clear. Therefore, it is difficult to know what degree of hematuria "minimal" hematuria refers to in the main text.
- 「lipid-lowering agent」の訳は日本語に存在しないと思います。そこで、「スタチンなどの抗コレステロール薬」と訳すのが適していると思います。I don't think there is a translation for "lipid-lowering agents" in Japanese. So I think it would be best to translate it as "anticholesteremic agents such as statins." (English in italics is author's translation)

## Conclusion

The information obtained from a routine Term 1 Feedback Sheet facilitated course adjustments and rapport building. More importantly, it showed that some students were prepared to take the initiative to link their medical knowledge with the reading text. This led to the development of a Term 2 worksheet which sought to encourage students to make medical as well as linguistic commentary on their own work. While a full evaluation will have to wait until the end of Term 2, students seem to be taking up increased responsibility in activating their medical knowledge in the Medical English reading course.

## The Term 2 worksheet has separate sections for reflective commentary and course feedback

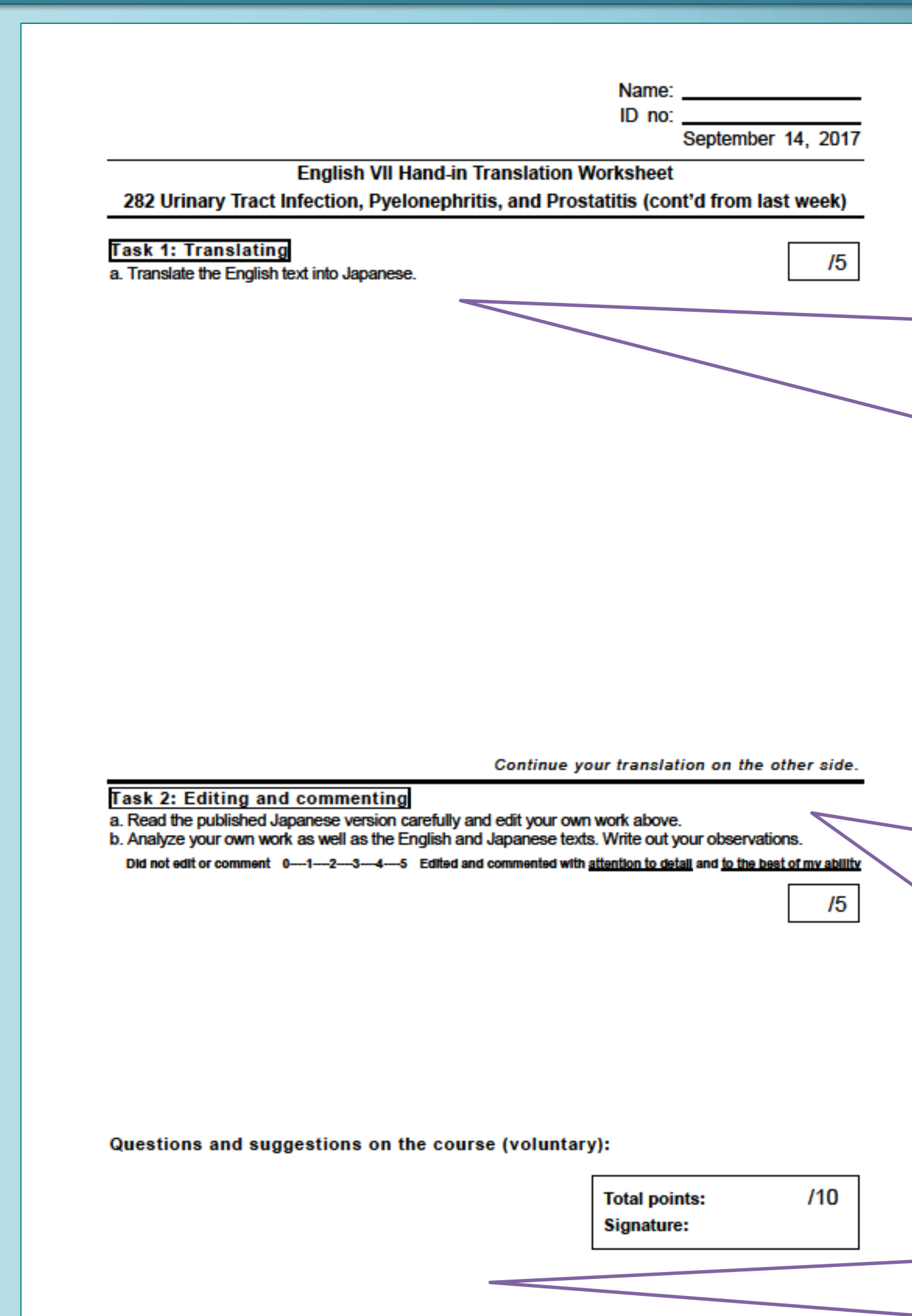


Fig 2. Term 2 Hand-in Translation Worksheet

### 1. Main Worksheet Activity

- English to Japanese translation; editing and commenting on own translation after seeing published Japanese version

### 2. Eliciting Reflection

- Commentary on lexical and grammatical features
- Commentary that link the translation to their medical knowledge

### 3. Course feedback

- Questions and suggestions for the course

## References

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- Guest, M. (2017). What are FAPs? And why should medical students focus on them? *Journal of Medical English Education*, 16(1), 18–23.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.