



Medical Writing in  
**JAPANESE**

# Writing medical documents in English while thinking in Japanese

**W**riting medical documents in English while thinking in Japanese is like trying to build a bridge between two islands with very different landscapes. It's a challenge that many Japanese medical writers face, and it's not just about knowing two languages – it's about navigating two different ways of thinking and expressing ideas.

Let's start with the basics: grammar. Japanese and English are like distant cousins in the language family – they have very different ways of structuring sentences. In Japanese, it's common to leave out the subject of a sentence because it's often understood from the context. For example, “食べた” (tabeta) could mean “I ate,” “you ate,” or “they ate,” depending on the context. But in English, you need to spell everything out clearly. This means that when writing in English, Japanese speakers often have to add in details that they wouldn't normally think about in their native language.

Another puzzle is the order of words. In Japanese, the verb usually comes at the end of the sentence, while in English, it's usually near the beginning. For instance, “私は昨日病院に行きました” (Watashi wa kinou byouin ni ikimashita) literally translates to “I yesterday hospital to went,” but in English, we'd say “I went to the hospital yesterday.” This difference can make it feel like you're constantly rearranging puzzle pieces in your head as you write. It's no wonder that sometimes the resulting English sentences can sound a bit odd or unclear to native speakers.

Medical terminology adds another layer of complexity. You might think that medical language would be the same everywhere, but that's not always the case. Some medical concepts that are common in Japanese might not have an exact match in English, or vice versa. For example, the Japanese term “冷え性” (hie-shou), which refers to a condition of poor circulation and sensitivity to cold, doesn't have a direct English equivalent. It's like trying to describe a unique Japanese dish to someone who has never seen it – you might know exactly what it is, but finding the right

words in English can be a real challenge. This difference in medical terms isn't just about finding the right word; it's about making sure the core idea is understood correctly.

Writing in English while thinking in Japanese is not just about translating words; it's about translating entire thought processes. In medical writing, this challenge is even more critical. You can't just do a word-for-word translation because that often leads to confusing or even incorrect information. For instance, the Japanese phrase “お大事に” (odaiji ni), commonly said to someone who is ill, literally translates to “take care of the important thing,” but it's actually closer in meaning to “get well soon” in English. Instead, you need to understand the medical concept in Japanese, break it down to its core meaning, and then rebuild it using English words and structures.

This process of breaking down and rebuilding thoughts is a special skill that goes beyond just being good at both languages. It requires writers to think critically about how ideas are expressed in Japanese and English and find ways to bridge the gap between the two. They need to understand not just the words, but the cultural context behind medical terms and practices in both countries.

To get better at this challenging task, medical writers need to practice a lot and expose themselves to medical writing in both languages. Reading medical journals, reports, and books in English can help them get a feel for how ideas are expressed. Collaborating with native English speakers and other medical professionals can also be incredibly helpful. It allows writers to check if their English expressions accurately convey their original Japanese thoughts.

Writing medical documents in English while thinking in Japanese is a bit like being a translator, a medical expert, and a cultural ambassador all at once. It requires patience, practice, and a willingness to keep learning. This unique skill set not only facilitates effective communication but also bridges cultural and linguistic gaps in the global medical community.



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