INTRODUCTION

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT

SCENARIO

Shawna Long is a newly admitted student in a medical assistant program at your school. Shawna is anxious about starting classes and very concerned that she may not be a successful student. She had trouble with some of her classes in high school and must continue to work part time while taking medical assistant (MA) classes. Based on what you discover about the learning process in this chapter, see if you can help Shawna take steps toward success.

While studying this chapter, think about the following questions:

- Why is it important for Shawna to understand how she learns best?
- Time management is a crucial part of being a successful student and a successful medical assistant. What are some methods Shawna can implement to help her manage her time as effectively as possible?
- Shawna will face many problems and challenges while working through the MA program. How can she develop workable strategies for dealing with these issues?
- What is the role of assertiveness in effective professional communications?
- Studying may be a challenge for Shawna. What skills can she use to help her learn new material and prepare for examinations?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define, spell, and pronounce the terms listed in the vocabulary.
2. Assess the importance of developing professional behaviors as a member of the allied health team.
3. Examine your learning preferences.
4. Integrate how your learning style affects your success as a student.
5. Apply time management strategies to make the most of your learning opportunities.
6. Apply problem-solving techniques to manage conflict and overcome barriers to your success.
7. Discuss the role of assertiveness in effective communication.
8. Integrate effective study skills into your daily activities.
9. Design test-taking strategies that help you take charge of your success.
10. Incorporate critical thinking and reflection to help you make mental connections as you learn material.
critical thinking: The constant practice of considering all aspects of a situation when deciding what to believe or what to do.

empathy (em-’pah-thé): Sensitivity to the individual needs and reactions of patients.

learning style: The way an individual perceives and processes information to learn new material.

perceiving (per-’sér-ing): How an individual looks at information and sees it as real.

processing (pro-’ses-ing): How an individual internalizes new information and makes it his or her own.

You have taken the first step toward becoming a successful student by choosing your profession and field of study. The medical assistant profession is both challenging and rewarding. Becoming a medical assistant opens the doors to a wide variety of opportunities in both administrative and clinical practice at ambulatory or institutional healthcare settings. Medical assistants are important members of the healthcare team, and as a healthcare professional, you will be expected to practice certain professional behaviors (Figure 1-1). These professional behaviors include demonstrating dependability, respectful patient care, empathy, initiative, a positive attitude, and teamwork. To become a successful medical assistant, you first must become a successful student. This chapter helps you discover the way you learn best and provides multiple strategies to assist you in your journey toward success.

CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION 1-1

Consider your history as a student. What do you think helped you to succeed? What do you think needs improvement? Create a plan for improvement that includes two or three ways you can become a more successful student. Be prepared to share this plan with your classmates.

WHO YOU ARE AS A LEARNER: HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

Think about what you do when you are faced with something new to learn. How do you go about understanding and learning the new material? Over time you have developed a method for perceiving and processing information. This pattern of behavior is called your learning style. Learning styles can be examined in many different ways, but most professionals agree that a student's success depends more on whether the person can "make sense" of the information than on whether the individual is "smart." Determining your individual learning style and understanding how it applies to your ability to learn new material are the first steps toward becoming a successful student (Figure 1-2).

Learning Style Inventory

For you to learn new material, two things must happen. First, you must perceive the information. This is the method you have developed over time that helps you examine new information and recognize it as real. Once you have developed a method for learning about the new material, then you must process the information. Processing the information is how you internalize it and make it your own. Researches believe that each of us has a preferred method for learning new material. By investigating your learning style, you can figure out how to combine different approaches to perceiving and processing information that will lead to greater success as a student.

When faced with a new learning experience, students decide how they will go about learning the new material; that is, either by watching and observing the new activity or by doing something active to learn about it. Individuals who learn by analysis,
observation, and reflection are considered abstract perceivers. Abstract learners analyze new material as ideas that require thought to process. They study the information and build theories to help them understand it. Abstract perceivers prefer structured learning situations and use a step-by-step approach to problem solving.

Individuals who learn by "doing" are concrete perceivers, who learn information through direct experiences of acting, sensing, or feeling the new material. Concrete learners prefer to learn things that have a personal meaning or things that they feel are relevant, and they rely on detailed information to learn new material.

The second step in learning new material is information processing, which is the way learners internalize the new information and make it their own. New material can be processed by two methods. Active processors prefer to jump in and start doing things immediately. They make sense of the new material by using it. They look for practical ways to apply the new material and typically do not mind taking risks to get the desired results. They learn best with practice and hands-on activities. Reflective processors have to think about the information before they can internalize it. They prefer to observe and consider what is going on. The only way they can make sense of new material is to spend time thinking and learning a great deal about it before acting. Complete the activity in the Student Study Guide to help you determine your learning style preference.

**CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION 1-2**

- Consider the two ways to perceive new material. Are you a concrete learner, who ties the information to a personal experience, or are you an abstract learner, who likes to analyze or reflect on the meaning of the material? Choose the type you think most accurately describes your method of investigating new information.
- Now, think about the way you process learning. Are you an active processor, who always looks for the practical applications of what you learn, or are you a reflective processor, who has to think about new material before internalizing it?
- After completing this activity, write down the combination of your perceiving and processing learning styles and share it with your instructor.

**Using Your Learning Profile to Be a Successful Student: Where Do I Go from Here?**

No one falls completely into one or the other of these categories. However, by being aware of how we generally prefer first to perceive information and then to process it, we can be more sensitive to our learning style and can approach new learning situations with a plan for learning the material in a way that best suits our learning preferences. Your preferred perceiving and processing learning profile will fall into one of the following four stages of the Learning Style Inventory, which was created by David Kolb of Case Western Reserve University.

- **Stage 1 learners have a concrete reflective style.** These students want to know the purpose of the information and have a personal connection to the content. They like to consider a situation from many points of view, observe others, and plan before taking action. They feel most comfortable working rather than doing, and their strengths include sensitivity towards others, brainstorming, and recognizing and creatively solving problems. If you fall into this stage, you enjoy small group activities and learn well in study groups.
- **Stage 2 learners have an abstract reflective style.** These students are eager to learn just for the sheer pleasure of learning rather than because the material relates to their personal lives. They like to learn lots of facts and arrange new material in a clear, logical manner. Stage 2 learners plan studying and like to create ways of thinking about the material, but they do not always make the connection with its practical application. If you are a stage 2 learner, you prefer organized, logical presentations of material and therefore enjoy lectures and readings and generally dislike group work. You also need time to process and think about new material before applying it.
- **Stage 3 learners have an abstract active style.** Learners with this combination of learning style want to experiment and test the information they are learning. If you are a stage 3 learner, you want to know how techniques or ideas work, and you also want to practice what you are learning. Your strengths are in problem solving and decision making, but you may lack focus and may be busy in making decisions. You learn best with hands-on practice by doing experiments, projects, and laboratory activities. You enjoy working alone or in small groups (Figure 1-3).
- **Stage 4 learners are concrete active learners.** These students are concerned about how they can use what they learn to make a difference in their lives. If you fall into this stage, you like to relate new material to other areas of your life. You have leadership capabilities, can create on your feet, and usually are vocal in a group, but you may have difficulty completing your work on time. Stage 4 learners enjoy teaching others and
working in groups and learn best when they can apply new information to real-world problems.

To get the most out of your learning profile, you need to apply this knowledge to how you approach learning. Each of the learning stages has pluses and minuses. What works for a particular situation may not work for your learning style. For example, if you are bored by lectures, look for an opportunity to apply the information being presented to a real problem you are facing in the classroom or at home. If you are an abstract thinker, take time outside of class to think about new information so that you are ready to process it into your learning system. If you benefit from learning in a group, make the effort to organize review sessions and study groups. If you learn best by teaching others, offer to assist your peers with their learning. By taking the time now to investigate your learning style, you will perceive and process information more effectively throughout your school career.

**Critical Thinking Application 1-3**

Take a few minutes to reflect on a time when you really enjoyed learning about something new. How was the material presented, and what did you do to “make it your own”? What do you need to do to become a more effective learner?

**Time Management: Putting Time on Your Side**

One of the most complicated tasks for a professional medical assistant is to manage time effectively. No other workplace can compete with the distractions and demands of a busy healthcare setting. Do you think you practice effective time management skills? Do you believe that you are in control of your time, or do you think that other people or situations control it? How frequently do you say that you just do not have enough time to do what you are supposed to do, let alone those things you would like to do? Time management gives you the opportunity to spend time in the way you choose. Effective time management is also crucial to your success as a student and as a future healthcare professional (Figure 1-4).

**How to Put Time on Your Side**

The following time management skills are designed to help you deal effectively with the demands on your time. Highlight the ones that you think will be most useful in helping you deal with your situation.

1. **Determine your purpose.** What do you want to accomplish this semester, in this course, or in this unit of study? What do you want to achieve as a student? What is one thing you can do to help achieve your goals?
2. **Identify your main concern.** Besides school, what other demands do you have on your time? Based on the learning goals you have established, what do you need to do to accomplish your goals?
   - **Plan time:** Schedule projects in advance with notes to yourself on deadlines.
   - **Use down time:** Take your work with you everywhere you go. Do small bits at every opportunity.

**Figure 1-4** Time management in a busy medical practice.

- **Guard time:** Avoid distractions (e.g., television, music) that interfere with your concentration. Notice how others abuse your time. Learn to say no to outside demands on your time.
- **Discover time:** Steal time from other activities in your schedule.
- **Assign time:** Ask for help when you need it from friends and family.

3. **Be organized.** What materials (e.g., books, research, supplies) do you need to have an effective study session? What preparation is needed to make the most of your time?
   - **Read time:** Use a day planner or calendar to write down due dates for assignments and tests. If a paper or project is due on a specific date, write yourself a reminder in your day planner to start the project on a specific date so you are sure to have it done when it is due.
   - **Optimal time:** Take advantage of the time of day when you study and learn the best. Schedule study time during your peak performance time. If you are an early bird, make time for homework first thing in the morning. If you are a night owl, do your homework at night. Plan on dedicating at least some of your optimal time to your school work.

4. **Stop procrastinating.** If you avoid working on your goals, you may not achieve them. Examine the following suggestions as ways to break the procrastination cycle.
   - **Make the work meaningful.** What is important about the work you are putting off and what are the benefits of getting it done? Reflect on your long-range goals. Is it important to do a good job on the work so you can earn an acceptable grade, do well in the course, complete the medical assisting program, and ultimately find employment?
   - **Plan work deadlines:** Break assignments into achievable sections that can be completed in the time slots available.
Schedule those work sections in your day planner so that you do not forget deadlines for assignments.

- Ask for help: Let your support system know you have work to get done. Ask them for encouragement to stay on track. If you have school-age children, you can set an excellent example by planning "family" homework sessions. You can get some of your work done while acting as a role model for learning behaviors for your children. Let your partner know when due dates are looming or tests are scheduled. Ask for help in meeting day-to-day demands so that you can study or prepare for school.

- Prioritize: If you keep avoiding a certain task, re-evaluate its priority. If it is really worth worrying about, get started now, not later. Don’t waste time worrying about how you are going to get things done. Spend that time actually working on the projects that worry you the most.

- Reward yourself: Create a reward that is meaningful and something for which you will work. If you want to spend time with your family or friends on the weekend, develop a plan and stick to it so that you can share that special time as a reward.

5. Remember you: It is very easy to become overwhelmed with responsibilities both in school and at home. Part of successful time management includes setting aside time to do things you enjoy. You have chosen a profession that can be very demanding. Now is the time to remember that you have to take care of yourself as well as meet your professional and personal responsibilities.

**CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION**

1-4 How do you spend your time? For 3 days this week, write down the amount of time you spend on each activity. How much television do you watch? How much time do you spend talking on the phone? How about driving time, visiting time, work time for family and friends, and so on. At the end of the 3-day period, add up the amount of time you spend on your daily activities. Do you recognize any time you might be wasting? Can you implement any of the suggested time management strategies to make more time available?

**PROBLEM SOLVING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

As a future member of the healthcare team, you frequently will face problems and conflicts. Although we usually look at these situations as negative factors in our lives, problem solving and conflict management actually give us the opportunity to affect a potentially negative situation in a positive way. Learning how to manage problems can be very useful for your practice as a medical assistant, as well as for your success as a student.

The first step in reaching an equitable solution to a problem or conflict is to identify the central issue. How many times have you known that you were upset about something but were not really sure why you felt that way? You cannot solve a problem or resolve a negative situation unless you are sure of what is at the root of your feelings. You need to understand the problem and gather as much information about the situation as possible before you decide to act. One way of doing this is to ask yourself these questions:

- When does the situation occur and under what circumstances?
- How does it make you feel?
- Is someone else involved?
- What interferes with making a decision or resolving the conflict?

Once you understand the situation and how you feel about it, you need to decide whether it is worth the effort to resolve it. Prioritize your involvement. Sometimes situations and problems may arise that you are unable to resolve or that you may decide are not important enough to act on. For example, if one of your co-workers refuses to take out the garbage when it is his or her turn, does that really bother you? If it does, you need to deal with the issue. However, if the individual helps out in other ways, then perhaps the garbage isn’t worth the effort to resolve the conflict.

After you have gathered the details about the problem or conflict and you have decided it is important enough to act on, it is time to determine possible solutions. One way to do this is to ask for advice or brainstorm ideas with individuals you respect. Sometimes another person can give you special insight into the problem that you were unable to see on your own. After brainstorming for possible solutions, you should then get feedback regarding the workability of the suggested solutions. An alternative to brainstorming possible solutions to the problem is to list on a piece of paper the pros and cons of possible solutions. Simply looking at a list of the positive aspects of the solution may help you solve the problem. Before deciding on a particular solution, make sure you carefully analyze the consequences of each proposed solution: Which one best meets your needs and has the potential for providing an outcome you can live with?

Finally, you are ready to implement the chosen solution. However, your work is not yet over. You need to evaluate the outcome of your decision and see if it truly did meet your needs. If not, it may be time to review other possible solutions and try another approach.

Conflict management requires some additional consideration. If you are in conflict with a peer, instructor, or co-worker, it is important to follow certain guidelines. You should attempt to solve the conflict in a private place at a prescheduled time. This ensures that the person will meet with you and that neither one of you has to worry about others overhearing the conversation. At the meeting, clearly state your feelings about the conflict and how you would like it resolved. Then try to come to an agreeable solution. The best way to deal with conflict situations is through open, honest, assertive communication. However, just as with problem solving, it is important to follow up on the decided course of action to see whether it effectively deals with the source of the conflict (Figure 1-5).

**CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION**

1-5 Think about a serious problem you are currently facing. Use the brainstorming and/or pros and cons method for coming solutions to the problem. Implement your chosen solution, and follow up on its effectiveness. Do the problem-solving process help you manage the situation more effectively?
**Chapter 1  Becoming a Successful Student**

**Nonassertive and Aggressive Behaviors and Language**

An individual with nonassertive body language displays the following behaviors when attempting to deal with conflict and may use some of the following words:

- **Nonassertive**
  - Keeps eyes downcast.
  - Shifts weight when talking.
  - Has a slumped posture or slams the hands.
  - Whines or uses a high-pitched tone of voice.
  - Says “Maybe?” or “I guess.”
  - “I wonder if you could…”
  - “Would you mind very much if…”
  - “It’s not really important.”

An aggressive person displays the following behaviors and may use the following words:

- **Aggressive**
  - Leans forward and points a finger when talking.
  - Rises the voice or sounds arrogant.
  - Says “You’re right…”
  - “If you don’t watch out…”
  - “Do it or die!”
  - “You should do it this way!”

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**Assertive Communication**

One of the challenges faced by workers in a healthcare environment is acting assertively when necessary. Assertive communication allows you to express your thoughts and feelings honestly and enables you to stand up for yourself in a reasonable, rational manner without an emotional scene. However, most of us are not born assertive; it is a behavior that must be learned, and many of us must practice it over and over again before it becomes a natural response.

Passive, or nonassertive, individuals often feel hurt when they are taken advantage of or are anxious about dealing with conflict. Just because they comply with what they are told to do or do not agree when they are treated unfairly does not mean that they are not upset about the situation. Often these individuals internalize their hurt and anxiety and eventually have an angry outburst because of built-up stress. Aggressive individuals, on the other hand, take advantage of others, appear self-righteous, and act in a superior way to get what they want. People who act aggressively may incite or hurt others to achieve their goals or to have their own needs satisfied.

Learning how to respond assertively in a potentially challenging situation enables us to be honest and direct with others while at the same time being emotionally honest with ourselves. The goal of assertive behavior is to treat others with respect while acknowledging our own feelings about the problem. The first step in becoming assertive is to describe the situation and how it makes you feel. Perhaps you have a co-worker who is taking advantage of you, coming to work late, asking long breaks, not answering the phones, and so on. How does that make you feel?

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**Critical Thinking Application**

Do you consider yourself passive (nonassertive), assertive, or aggressive? Think about a recent conflict situation. How did you respond? (Could assertive behavior help you solve the problem while making you feel better about yourself?)
STUDY SKILLS: TRICKS FOR BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT

So far in this chapter, we have looked at the influence of individual learning styles and time management on learning success. Now we will investigate some ideas that are useful for learning new material. These study skills include memory techniques, active learning, brain tricks, reading methods, and note-taking strategies.

Several techniques can help you store and remember information. The first of these involves organizing information into recognizable groups so that the brain can find it easily. You can organize information by getting the big picture first before trying to learn the details. One way to implement this strategy is to skim a reading assignment before actually reading and taking notes on the material, thus getting a general impression of what you need to learn before tackling the details. Depending on your learning style, it may also help to find a way of making the new information meaningful. Think about your educational goals and how the new material will help you achieve these goals. Another way of remembering material is to create an association with something you already know. If new material is grouped with already stored material, the brain remembers it much more easily.

A useful study skill for some learners is to be physically active while learning. Some students learn best if they walk or talk out loud while studying. Besides encouraging learning, moving and talking while studying relaxes your brain and makes you awake.

Another way to be actively involved in learning is to use pictures or diagrams to represent the material you are studying. Some people are visual learners, and creating pictures of the material is the easiest method for them to retain the information. Other students find that rewriting notes or making lists of information helps them retain the material. Writing also helps students who need to "do" something to learn.

Studying goes much more smoothly if you work with your brain rather than against it. If you tend to get anxious and worried while studying, you may be acting on your own worst enemy. One way of dealing with a topic you are anxious about is to overtread it. If material is overlearned, you are much less likely to experience test anxiety. Another method for remembering material is to review it quickly after class. This overview helps the new information become part of your long-term memory system. Many students find creating songs, dances, or word associations an effective way to learn and remember new material. Putting details into a familiar song and moving to it can help tick the brain into remembering the information. This is especially helpful when trying to learn anatomy and physiology. Another excellent way of learning information is to actually teach it to someone else. Teaching requires you to have a good understanding of the material and the ability to describe it for others. It can be an effective reinforcement of complicated material.

A great deal of the learning process is expected to take place from assigned readings. You can use several methods to make reading assignments more meaningful. If you find a reading assignment challenging or difficult to understand, the first step is to take the time to read it again. Sometimes the first time through the material is not enough to gain understanding. As you read, highlight important words or thoughts and step periodically to summarize the material. If you get bored while reading, use your body—walk or talk your way through the assignments. Take the time to look up words or terms you do not understand, or ask your instructor or tutor for help. Outlining the material can help you create a brief overview of what you need to learn. And finally, the best way to determine whether you learned anything from your reading is to try to explain it to someone else. If that is effective, you know you have acquired the knowledge needed from the reading assignment.

Many students find effective note taking a challenge. The big question is, "How much of what the instructor says do I actually need to write down?" The first step in effective note taking is to come to class prepared. The more familiar you are with the material, the easier it will be to determine the important parts of the instructor's lecture. Pay attention to the instructor, and look for clues about what he or she thinks is important. Ask questions about the material if you do not understand it rather than writing down information that makes no sense to you. Think critically about what you hear before you write it down so you can start to build relationships among the things you want or need to know.

When it comes to actual note taking, some strategies can make the process of recording notes an active learning tool. Organize the information as much as possible while you are writing, in either an outline or a paragraph format. Use only one side of the paper for easier reading, and leave blank spaces where needed to fill in details later. Use key words to help you remember the material, and create cues or diagrams to help visualize it. If permitted, use tape recorders when appropriate and make sure you have either handouts or notes that cover material written on the board or in a PowerPoint presentation. Another helpful tool is to develop your own system of abbreviations to help simplify the writing load.

The most effective way to use your notes is to review them shortly after class. This is the time to add details, clarify information, or make notes about asking the instructor for explanations during the next class. You could even exchange notes with students you trust to compare information (Figure 1-6). Some students find it beneficial to type or rewrite their notes. This can give you an opportunity to learn the material as you transcribe...
is. As you are reviewing your notes, you also can draw mind maps of the information or diagram outlines to help you better understand and remember the material.

Creating mind maps is a way of representing the main idea of a topic and supporting important details with a figure or picture. Healthcare textbooks present complicated concepts with multiple main ideas, each with its own important details. Mind maps are a way of consolidating complex details and organizing them into a format that is easier to remember. The spider map (Figure 1-7) presents a method for including several main ideas with details in one study guide. The fishbone map (Figure 1-8) can be used to trace complicated causes of disease. The chain of events map (Figure 1-9) displays the cause and effect of events, such as infection control or the history of medicine. The cycle map (Figure 1-10) shows the connection between factors, such as in the chain of infection. Creating your own mind maps is a way of making the information more meaningful and easier for you to understand.

Although many techniques can help you study, perhaps the most important one is your attitude toward learning. Some students fall into the "I can't possibly learn this material" trap. That type of attitude only leads to self-defeat. The way to overcome barriers is first to recognize that they exist. Once you know your weak spots, use the suggested study skills to improve in those areas. Do not be afraid to ask questions or to ask for help if you do not understand the material. Use as many different strategies as necessary to become a successful student.

**CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION**

1-7

Write down at least two barriers to learning that you face. Review the study skills suggestions and choose four to try out. Use them over the next week to help you learn new material. Reflect on whether the chosen study skills helped you learn the material better.

**TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES: TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR SUCCESS**

What happens when you do not know the answer to the first question on a test? What if you do not know the next one? Are you able to go on without panicking? Many people find taking tests the most challenging part of being a successful student. Multiple approaches are available that you can use to take charge of your success and improve your ability to take tests. These include such strategies as adequate preparation, controlling negative thoughts during test time, and understanding ways to manage various types of questions.

The first step is to go into a test adequately prepared. Use the time management skills already outlined in this chapter to prepare for the big day. Recognize and use your preferred learning style to retain the material and increase your confidence. Use memory tools (e.g., flash cards, checklists, and mind maps) to help you visualize the material. Form a study group if you are the type of learner who benefits from studying in groups. Schedule and plan study time, and reward yourself for your hard work.
It is also important to go into the test rested and relaxed; therefore, you should eat, exercise to relieve stress, and sleep before the test so that you are as alert as possible.

Before you start the test, make sure you read the directions carefully. If possible, begin with the easiest or shortest questions to build your confidence. Be aware of the amount of time allotted for the examination, and pace yourself accordingly. As you go through the test, look for clues to answers in other questions. During test time, remember to use positive self-talk at the first indication of panic. Repeatedly remind yourself that you are well prepared; relax and think about the material before you get worried. You need to stop negative thoughts as soon as they arise and instead visualize yourself being successful. Use slow, deep breathing to relax and, if helpful, close your eyes for a minute and visualize a relaxing place before you go on with the test. You may find it helpful to wear a thick rubber band on your wrist and snap it as soon as you start to think negatively. The string of the rubber band provides a physical reaction that interferes with the power of your negative thoughts and serves as a reminder to focus on the exam and not on your anxiety.

Certain strategies are useful for answering different types of questions. With multiple choice questions, try to identify key words or clues in each question. Read the question carefully and answer it in your head before you review the provided answers. If you are not absolutely sure of the answer, make an educated guess or follow your instincts in choosing an answer. “True or false” questions give you a 50/50 chance of being correct. Remember that if any part of the question is not true, then the statement is false. Again, check the statements for key words that help indicate the direction of the answer. Look for qualifying terms (e.g., always, never, sometimes) that are the key to understanding the meaning of the true or false statement.

**CRITICAL THINKING APPLICATION**

Think about a time you experienced a dilemma. Write down the details of the situation and how you felt. Choose four thinking strategies you think would be beneficial in handling similar situations in the future.

**BECOMING A CRITICAL THINKER: MAKING MENTAL CONNECTIONS**

The ability to process information and arrive at reasonable conclusions is crucial to all healthcare workers. The process of critical thinking involves (1) sorting out conflicting information, (2) weighing your knowledge about that information, (3) ignoring or letting go of personal biases, and (4) deciding on a reasonable belief or action. Critical thinking is actually an active search for the truth.

Critical thinking could be described as thorough thinking, because it requires learners to keep an open mind to all possibilities. Successful students are thorough thinkers, because they must determine the facts about the topic being learned and come to logical conclusions about the material. Critical thinkers also are inquisitive learners, who constantly analyze and sort out conflicting information to reach conclusions.

A crucial step in critical thinking is evaluating the results of your learning. Reflection is the key to critical thinking. “How did I learn what I learned?” and “What does it mean in my life?” are questions that must be asked consistently to continue to learn. Becoming a successful student, and ultimately a successful member of the allied health team, requires critical thinking skills.

**SUMMARY OF SCENARIO**

One of the things Stewna can do to improve her learning is to determine her individual learning style. By understanding how she typically perceives and processes new information, she can plan the best methods for learning the material. In addition to understanding who she is as a learner, Stewna needs to practice successful time management skills to keep up with school and work responsibilities. Effective problem solving and developing study skills that work for her are also keys to her success as a student.

**SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Define, spell, and pronounce the terms listed in the vocabulary. Spelling and pronouncing medical terms correctly build the medical assistant’s credibility. Knowing the definitions of these terms promotes confidence in communicating with patients and coworkers.

2. Assess the importance of developing professional behaviors as a member of the allied health team. Medical assistants play a vital role on the healthcare team and are expected to show such professional behaviors as being dependable, practicing respectful patient care, displaying empathy, showing initiative, demonstrating a positive attitude, and functioning as an effective member of the healthcare team.

3. Examine your learning preferences. Learning preferences are the ways you like to learn and that have proven successful in the past.

4. Interpret how your learning style affects your success as a student. Your learning style is determined by your individual method of perceiving or examining new material and the way you process it or make it your own. People are either concrete or abstract perceivers and either active or reflective processors.

5. Apply time management strategies to make the most of your learning opportunities.
Effective time management strategies, such as setting goals, prioritizing, getting organized, and avoiding procrastination, will make you a more successful student and an effective medical assistant.

6. Apply problem-solving techniques to manage conflict and overcome barriers to your success.
   Problem-solving and conflict management techniques are crucial to your success. First, identify the central issue and how you feel about it; then consider possible solutions and their potential results, implement the chosen solution, and analyze the results.

7. Discuss the role of assertiveness in effective communication.
   Assertive communication allows you to express your thoughts and feelings honestly and enables you to stand up for yourself in a reasonable, mature manner without an emotional scene. Learning how to respond assertively in a potentially challenging situation enables you to be honest and direct with others while at the same time being emotionally honest with ourselves. The goal of assertive behavior is to treat others with respect while acknowledging our own feelings about the problem.

8. Integrate effective study skills into your daily activities.
   Study skills, such as memory techniques, active learning, brain ticks, effective reading methods, note-taking strategies, and mind maps, all help students to be more successful.

9. Design test-taking strategies that help you take charge of your success.
   Test-taking strategies include preparing adequately for the examination, controlling negative thoughts during the examination, and understanding how to deal with different types of questions.

10. Incorporate critical thinking and reflection to make mental connections as you learn material.
    Critical thinking can be defined as thorough thinking, because it considers all sides of the information without bias. Reflection is the process of thinking about or reviewing information before acting.

**CONNECTIONS**

- **Study Guide Connection**: Go to the Chapter 1 Study Guide, read and complete the activities.

- **Evolve Connection**: Go to the Chapter 1 link at evolve.elsevier.com/ to complete the Chapter Review and Chapter Quiz. Pursue other resources listed for this chapter to increase your knowledge of becoming a Successful Student.