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The CATESOL Journal

Title

Side by Side Plus: Life Skills, Standards, and Test Prep Book 1 - Bill Bliss and Steven J. Molinsky

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7hc0f0x5>

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 23(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

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Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/B5.36201

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Business English (10th ed.)

Mary Ellen Guffey and Carolyn M. Seefer
Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2010.

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Mary Ellen Guffey and Carolyn M. Seefer's 10th edition of *Business English* provides clear grammatical guidance and empowers students with the ability and confidence to use resources available in the business environment to communicate successfully. Written to help advanced ESL students improve their written fluency and comprehensibility, this text is clearly organized, progresses logically, and focuses on sentence structure and syntax.

This book consists of five units, each of which has two to four chapters that focus on specific grammatical structures (e.g., nouns, verbs, conjunctions, commas) and appropriate workplace nuances (e.g., how to address e-mail correspondents, the acceptable use of acronyms). Most chapters begin with a clearly structured grammar lesson with many explicated example sentences, while chapters focusing on a specific part of speech are divided into levels of increasing difficulty to help students gradually build their ability to properly use and understand the new grammatical feature.

Alongside the grammar lessons are brief notes titled "Career Tips," "Trivia Tidbits," and "Study Tips" to help students understand the application of the lesson, satisfy a curiosity, or quickly summarize a lesson. Following the grammar instruction, several study sections allow students to explore newly learned grammar rules in the context of a business environment. Here, students practice their English skills with fill-in, multiple-choice, short-answer, and written exercises. In the "Frequently Asked Questions" section, students also learn about common grammar mistakes that businesspeople make.

The section finishes with "Chat About It," in which the author poses various business-oriented questions for students to use to practice their grammar and communication skills in writing or orally with a classmate. Additionally, each chapter begins with a pretest to evaluate the student's level with regard to the grammatical feature to be studied and ends with a posttest for students to examine how their understanding of the English language has progressed; this feature is a vital tool for students and teachers alike.

Each unit covers a specific topic of the English language in addition to providing useful and easily understood business tips. Unit 1 gives students a simple yet effective overview of the parts of speech and sentence structure as well as a

thorough explanation of the various references students could use in the business world to quickly solve communication blunders. Giving students the ability to be responsible for their own learning beginning in Chapter 1 makes this book an excellent teaching tool for mostly or completely self-taught learners.

Units 2 through 4 probe deeper into the components of sentence structure with numerous practice exercises for students to evaluate their level of comprehension and command of various difficult and irregular grammatical constructs. Units 5 and 6 focus on punctuation and writing, and they are clearly designed to help students polish their ability to communicate smoothly in written English. The appendices further support student self-help strategies with regard to spelling, vocabulary, and general formatting.

This text would be easily used without instructor guidance, as part of an online course, or in a classroom setting. The many online features support student self-learning, and the in-text grammar exercises could be used for personal practice or for in-class activities. For an advanced-level student, the language used throughout the teaching section of each chapter is easily read but not condescending, and the short tips and thorough word-choice explanations allow learners to easily see how the language construct applies to their goal of learning business English.

Some of the more problematic aspects of this book are that it is very text-heavy and has few opportunities for students to practice listening and speaking English skills. However, the fact that chapters are divided by large colorful section titles and have key phrases in bold helps soften the monotony of the grammar lessons and allows students to quickly access information. Similarly, students can use the “Chat About It” sections to practice speaking and listening skills with classmates, and for additional grammar practice, the textbook’s website provides students with supplementary material.

This book is very appealing for the self-motivated. A young adult or younger student may find the grammar- and text-based lessons too tedious to stay focused for long periods of time, but adult learners could use this text to improve their grammar and communication skills dramatically. For teachers, this book effectively plans lessons for itself. The chapters’ content is cleanly and logically organized, and the in-text exercises could be assigned to individuals or groups with ease. Furthermore, the online component provides teachers with additional material if extra practice is necessary.

Overall, *Business English* is an excellent text for self-taught and classroom-based advanced ESL students. Each chapter provides students with numerous examples, practice exercises, and explanations of the English language as it is used in the business setting. While many sections and even entire chapters are simplistic for the advanced ESL student, the text refrains from condescending language and instead reinforces basic sentence structure as a means of acquiring a nativelike command of the English language. As a whole, this text would greatly benefit individuals working in an English-speaking environment who wish to polish their grammar and communication skills.

Side by Side Plus: Life Skills, Standards, and Test Prep Book 1

Bill Bliss and Steven J. Molinsky

White Plains, NY: Prentice Hall Regents, 2008.

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Book 1 of Side by Side Plus, by Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss, provides ESL learners with the fundamental basics of English for life skills, standards, and test preparations. The book serves to enhance students' speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills through a grammar and communicative-based approach. An audio CD is also included with the book to serve as a supplement for students to encourage them to continue practicing English in their homes. *Side by Side Plus* offers an innovative way for adult learners to learn English because learners can practice using the language for practical purposes by allowing them to use their creativity and personal experience to produce English sentences.

The book contains 17 units with a test assessment at the end of every unit. Each lesson is broken down to include a specific topic, vocabulary with graphical representations, reading and writing activities, as well as grammar and pronunciation practices. Although the units have a similar basic organization, each unit contains types of activities different from those in the previous unit to reduce its predictability and restore excitement for students. Multiple and diverse supplemental activities can spark more interest in learning and promote spontaneous communication between students. In addition, the text ingeniously organizes the units progressively: Each unit incorporates topics and material from the previous lesson so that students are constantly practicing previous material to maximize retention.

Unit 1 features an organization that is typical for all units, which includes a vocabulary, reading, listening, pronunciation, grammar, life skills, and assessment section. Unit 1 specifically focuses on introducing oneself. It includes many student-paired activities such as interviewing one another to obtain personal information. To further assist students, the lesson contains written dialogues to serve as a model or reference for the students to follow. It also features semifinished dialogues, which have fill-in-the-blanks to incorporate new vocabulary and to promote student interaction and imagination. At the end of the unit, a brief assessment test checks the students' understanding of the lesson.

The other units contain different activities that are not included in Unit 1. These various activities involve students' creating a story while using a given picture as a reference. Role-plays, interviews, and "creative boxes" that allow students to describe their personal lives, such as their neighborhood, are scattered among the different units. There is even a magazine-style *Gazette* section at the end of selected units that features articles that serve to reinforce previous topics and entertain students.

One of the greatest strengths the book provides is a variety of pictures that assist in the student's learning process. These graphical representations serve

as an efficient guide for students to have a better understanding of the new vocabulary and its definitions. Furthermore, many of the activities offer additional practice by having students provide various descriptions of pictures that relate to the lesson. The vibrancy of the pictures also gives the material an eye-catching appeal so that it is less boring and predictable.

Moreover, the students may find that the activities are interactive because they apply the material and respond to genuine questions about themselves. These activities encourage students to use their newfound knowledge and share or discuss with others in order to increase exposure to and use of English. Some of the varied activities also keep students physically involved, including role-playing, acting out dialogues, and drawing to maintain a high level of entertainment to increase motivation in learning. Teachers may find the test assessments at the end of each unit to be beneficial because they help reduce some of their workload and allow teachers to assess their students' comprehension of the material.

The book attempts to improve reading, speaking, listening, and writing skills, along with comprehension, in each unit. However, cramming these four essential topics may be potentially overwhelming and frustrating for students because of the considerable amount of information that they must remember and may not yet have mastered before continuing to the next section. Although incorporating these four skills into each unit may be overwhelming, the book balances the development of these skills so that no one skill is more heavily focused on than the other in order to gain proficiency in literacy and speech.

Despite its shortcomings, *Side by Side Plus* is an ideal book for learning English as a second language. Perhaps its greatest strength is its practicality for adult learners to use for everyday life skills. These skills include making introductions, describing emotions (among other things), and looking for employment. The variety of activities provides additional practice to help learners establish proficiency in English.

Real Reading 2

David Wiese

White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, 2011.

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R*ead Reading 2* holds true to its name by providing structure and practice for students to engage with texts in real and meaningful ways. This book is a great find for teachers: Not only is it theoretically grounded and pedagogically sound, it is also well organized, visually appealing, and easy to use.

Real Reading 2 is the second book in a four-book intensive reading series and is intended for low-intermediate learners. The book consists of 24 chap-

ters organized in 12 thematic units. Unit themes include “The Truth About Shyness,” “The Movie Business,” “The Food We Love,” and “Haiku.” The material within the units is well organized and coherent. At the same time, units, reading selections, and tasks can easily be resequenced to meet the needs of students and curriculum. Reading selections include both pedagogical and adapted authentic texts. The wide sampling of genres is impressive and includes newspaper and magazine articles, folktales, poetry, diaries, and several digital genres, including a blog and an online discussion board.

The *Real Reading* approach is based on research by series consultant Paul Nation. It emphasizes controlled vocabulary development through careful selection of texts and tasks. The texts are designed so that readers at each level will likely know 95-98% of the words. Selection of target vocabulary is based on analysis of word lists, exposing students to the most frequently used words in general and academic English texts. A focus on skills and strategies development gives readers the tools they need to continue to expand their vocabulary and improve their reading long after the course ends.

Real Reading 2 offers all the elements that a teacher needs for a successful intensive reading lesson. It features complete, purposeful sequencing of pre-, during, and postreading activities. Each chapter begins with prereading activities to activate prior knowledge and prepare for new vocabulary. Students are also asked to complete a task while reading that involves noticing a grammatical, discursive, or content feature. Before students complete postreading activities, a reading goal gives focus and direction to rereading the text. Postreading activities include comprehension checks and discussions.

Clear and ample skills presentation and practice for both vocabulary building and general reading skills are predominant in every unit. With each new skill, students are given several opportunities to practice and apply it, integrating it into their reading processes. Another unique feature is the book’s focus on reading fluency, with four fluency sections that provide fluency strategies and practice. Additional vocabulary practice for each unit, fluency progress charts, and a fluency-practice answer key are provided at the back of the book.

Another strength of *Real Reading 2* is its excellent graphic organization. The layout is well organized, attractive, and easy to follow. Readings are accompanied not only by appropriate photographs, but also by graphic organizers such as charts, diagrams, and tables. Texts are presented visually in a manner appropriate to their genres (e.g., a blog extract looks like a screen shot, and a definition looks like a page torn from a dictionary).

The supplemental materials included with the book make it easy to deploy the text in the classroom. The MP3 audio CD-ROM has recordings of all target vocabulary and readings. The online *Teacher’s Manual* includes a course outline, a model lesson plan, suggestions for variation and adaptation, and a student book answer key. Also available online are printable tests for each unit that consist of a reading passage followed by comprehension, vocabulary, and vocabulary skill questions.

Although *Real Reading 2* is a stellar textbook overall, a few drawbacks and limitations are worth noting. One major drawback is that the highly controlled

vocabulary achieved through extensive text adaptation may alter the integrity of the texts. Another possible drawback of this textbook is the subject matter. Although independent thematic units allow the teacher greater flexibility in selection and sequencing, the lack of cohesion among units may cause difficulty in meaningfully unifying course content. Additionally, the topics are so generic that students may have trouble engaging with them.

Real Reading 2 is also limited in the scope of its intended audience. Because of its focus on academic and technological genres and vocabulary, this text is most suitable for academic and international student settings and likely less appropriate for adult education. This book would also be inappropriate for a course that targets writing skills, as integrating writing is not featured.

Nevertheless, when used with its intended audience, *Real Reading 2* delivers a well-rounded reading experience that empowers learners to engage meaningfully with texts. The effects of its skills-based approach continue beyond the reading course as students apply these approaches to new reading tasks. Teachers will appreciate the benefits for their students and welcome a textbook that is comprehensive and easy to use.

Using Textbooks Effectively

Lilia Savova (Ed.)

Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2009.

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Beginning teachers often get caught up in the use of the textbook as a complete unit and forget to use supplemental material. The limitations of the text become clear with time, and the teacher moves on to incorporate new material. Good teachers know the text is a tool. It should not be an end in itself. *Using Textbooks Effectively*, edited by Lilia Savova, is a collection of essays that focus on expanding the material within textbooks. The book is divided into 12 chapters and the student level ranges from elementary school to university. The prose is easy to understand and somewhat jargon free. Each essay has a “Reflection” section in which the authors consider the merits of using a particular approach. Chapter 1 provides the overview: How can teachers teach the students and not the textbook? Many teachers who have provided chapters in this text do just that and try to engage students with content that is “structured and imposed from the outside” (p. 1). The book tries to break the focus on the teacher and covering the material. The focus then shifts to basing the instruction on the needs of the students. The following chapters relate other teachers’ success at thinking beyond the textbook.

Chapter 2 offers advice for business English teachers who use texts that are

inadequate at representing oral communication in business meetings. Using classroom-tested suggestions, it adds activities that treat dialogue as a proposal and not a rule.

Chapters 3 and 4 address the topic of ESL learners who use science textbooks. Chapter 3 encourages the use of the Internet to supplement the text, while Chapter 4 uses reading strategies to make biology content more accessible. Eileen Ariza, Philomena Eckel, and Elena Webb (in Chapter 3) make very useful suggestions to supplement texts; specifically, they formulate a three-step program. First, preteach specific science concepts. Second, model electronic research (Googling) and provide guided practice. Third, pair the students up and have them demonstrate their knowledge (via media presentation). Marietta Bradinova (in Chapter 4) lists scaffolded instruction tips to make biology less bewildering. She found ways of helping students remember biology content in order to prepare them for a cumulative standardized test. She recommends summarizing, note-taking, and mind-mapping strategies to help learners remember what is most important about the reading. The students are encouraged to consider how their prior knowledge fits into the new material.

In Chapter 5, Christopher Stillwell discusses curricular issues related to the discrepancy between communicative competencies expected by the text and students who lack them. In fact, he outlines a simple and effective technique for making alternative use of reading passages that allow students to provide scaffolding for themselves. It's a simple technique that requires students to read, pair up, write the five most important words or phrases, retell, and debrief.

For those who like to think outside the textbook, Chapter 6 offers a play as a stand-alone text that integrates all skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. This is communicative teaching at its core, in which the teacher plays the role of director and the students are the actors. The students involved were Indian university students enrolled in an engineering program.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 all take issue with the limits of the text and each author finds a different way to expand those limits. For example, Patrick Rosenkjar (Chapter 7) offers pre-, while-, and postreading activities. These include studying the *Peanuts* comic strip and adding communicative tasks and materials. Chapter 8 takes a view toward improving English for Special Purposes with a simple activity of creating workplace dialogue. Thai undergraduate nursing students had to select a job-related task, write a treatment plan (in the form of a role-play for teacher and students), record and listen to the performed role-play, transcribe it, and present their lessons learned. Natalie Hess (in Chapter 9) also offers similar activities that offer the students choices in doing group or individual work. The text she uses is the short story "The Lottery." After the story is covered, the students have the opportunity to clarify vocabulary and predict the ending of the story.

Chapters 10 and 11 are written by Asian educators who discuss their views about adapting the text or the student. In the former chapter, Jia Zhimei, Xu Menqing, Li Ning, and Li Hailin write in terms of adapting the textbook to suit the needs of students. In the latter chapter, Deoksoon Kim writes in terms of reading strategies for ESL learners. Chapter 10's authors describe the adaptation

of a textbook through macroadaptation strategies such as omission, addition, reduction, modification, and replacement (p. 95). The students in this example were postsecondary school students in China. Chapter 11's author discusses the importance of reading strategies for academic success. Such strategies include forming extratextual connections and making intratextual analyses of the rhetorical features of reading texts (p. 109). Ten strategies are listed for teachers to use that are task based with defined outcomes for students. U.S. elementary school students in language arts classes were the participants in this narrative.

For teachers of English for Special Purposes, this book has exceptional value. Student input is emphasized, as in the case of business English and vocational English (Chapters 2 and 8, respectively). Involving students in their own learning creates a better learning atmosphere. Furthermore, teachers who teach pronunciation, stress, and intonation will find Chapter 6 to be of great importance. Essentially, the teacher becomes a director as multilevel students enact the play or act as tutors/assistants. The teacher provides guidance, but the students take a more active role. In Chapter 4, non-English content (biology) is presented to teachers in such a way that permits scaffolding and encourages retention among nonnative English students. Teachers who must teach content subjects to ESL students will find this book and its insights quite useful.

***McGraw-Hill's Conversational American English:
The Illustrated Guide to the Everyday Expressions of American English***

Richard A. Spears, Betty Birner, and Steven Kleinedler
New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

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A guide for successful American English conversation is an ESL student's best friend. Finding the right words to say during a conversation can be motivational and anxiety reducing. *McGraw-Hill's Conversational American English* by Spears, Birner, and Kleinedler successfully establishes an ESL-friendly dictionary filled with conventional expressions for a wide range of social interactions.

The text is designed not only to help an ESL student comprehend American English expressions in conversations, but it also provides a means for the learners to use the terminology themselves. A helpful instruction chapter titled "Using This Dictionary" provides details on how to navigate through the book. It prepares the student for italicized informational asides that will be encountered, including certain symbols such as the equal sign (=), which will precede a definition or simpler way of stating an expression. The instructions also notify the reader that indication of the register or usage of certain expressions (professional, informal, slang, etc.) will be in parentheses next to the phrase.

The “Topic and Situation Index” chapter comprises a table of contents that lists the specific theme or social interaction in large bolded font, followed by a topic in that theme on the next row, and several subtopics or expression groups thereafter. Each subtopic is assigned a number, allowing the student to efficiently find the desired phrase. The “Conversational American English Expressions” chapter is where all of the content is found. It follows the same format as the table of contents, with the addition of specific examples for each subtopic. Illustrations of the expressions in action are abundantly present to help the learner understand and memorize the gestures that can be paired with the phrase. The text is intended for adult learners and is universally applicable to all levels of ESL students because it includes basic, intermediate, and advanced expressions.

McGraw-Hill’s Conversational American English would be useful for enhancing oral skills in ESL students. With multiple expressions for a given social interaction, an ESL student has the power to decide which phrase to use. For instance, expression group 10 shows different ways of telling “how you have been doing” in a positive way. The student can pick from seven possible expression choices, which vary from “keeping busy” to “keeping out of trouble.” Thus, teachers can guide students to familiarize themselves with American English conversational jargon and learn to comfortably use it in their daily lives.

The authors did an excellent job with the text and organization. The format is easy to follow, as it starts with a general theme such as “Conversational Encounters” and narrows it to “Focusing Attention,” followed by subtopics such as “Getting someone to listen to you.” The specific examples that fall under each subtopic are listed with the more simple/generic responses first and then progress to more complex expressions. This aspect is what makes the text so universally applicable. An ESL instructor can assign expressions based on the level of the class.

Suggestions for future editions may include formatting updates and the inclusion of an additional chapter explaining usage. Having certain words defined in a legend on the side of each page as opposed to sporadically italicizing underneath certain expressions could eliminate potential confusion and establish more flow. It could also help to have a section that explains the register or usage of expressions such as “slang,” “cliché,” “folksy,” and “formal,” which now are found in parentheses next to phrases. A thorough understanding of usage will motivate the student to make an effort to use the expression when he or she encounters the appropriate conversational setting.

Mastering the art of American English conversation is essential for ESL students because it prepares the individual for successful interactions in the real world. Although the text may need some formatting updates and an additional informational chapter, the book overall is very organized and well written. It is through *McGraw-Hill’s Conversational American English* that teachers can help ESL students gain the knowledge necessary to improve their ability to engage in successful American English conversations.

Future: English for Results, Level 5

Lynn Bonesteel, Arlen Gargagliano, and Jeanne Lambert
White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2010.

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Future: English for Results, Level 5 is the sixth volume in the six-level adult-education ESL series from Pearson Longman and is specifically designed for low-advanced students, or those who have scored between 221 and 235 on a Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) Reading exam. This textbook richly integrates content in various skill areas, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, life skills, problem solving, and social-persistence learning. In addition, the book is designed to equip students with skills necessary to achieve their goals and to use language meaningfully.

Future, Level 5 consists of a pre-unit, which is an orientation to the book, and 10 core units. Each unit is correlated to specific CASAS standards, CASAS competencies, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) ESL Low Advanced competencies, and Florida Adult ESOL course standards. The topics of the units include setting goals and pursuing dreams, getting a job, road trips, safety, advancing on the job, health, citizenship, law, saving the planet, and technology. Every unit starts with a full-page photo that introduces the themes and vocabulary of the unit and then continues with nine lessons. Each lesson deals with separate skills as mentioned. With its emphasis on explicit instruction in reading and writing skills, the material in *Future: Level 5* helps English learners transition into further education, career training, and career advancement. This particular textbook incorporates more academic skills, more advanced content standards, and more content-rich texts compared with other levels in the *Future* series.

This book has several strengths. First, this textbook provides outstanding coverage of life-skills competencies. On the "Scope and Sequence" chart, a number of tasks are highlighted in red and these tasks are related to civics and American culture. These specific tasks, along with four unit topics (i.e., road trip, home and workplace safety, citizenship, and law), are dedicated to help adult learners adjust and fit into an English-speaking society.

Second, the topics, contents, and the visual aids are authentic and up-to-date. For example, sample résumés and job postings, Google maps, Internet webpages, pictures of various situations, and cellular phone text messages are included. Some of these visuals help to activate English learners' schemata (i.e., background knowledge) while others help to develop and expand learners' knowledge and skills.

Third, the activities and tasks within each unit address multilevel classes and diverse learning styles. Sample activities and tasks include fill-in-the-blanks with target vocabulary words and expressions, discussing ideas in groups, writing cover letter and résumé, answering literal/inferential/evaluative questions

based on a reading, listening for main ideas and details, and unscrambling sentences. In addition, the high-interest readings introduce various countries and cultures (e.g., China, Sweden) and useful, topical information related to living in the US.

Last, a variety of resources are made available for both teachers and students. For teachers, a great deal of teacher support is provided. Assessment tools (i.e., placement test and test prep book), teacher's edition and lesson planner, classroom audio CDs, teacher training DVDs, and additional teaching ideas and activities are available from the Longman website. For English learners, a variety of resources such as writing models, persistence activities, grammar reference and review, audio scripts, practice plus CD-ROM, and workbook are offered.

What mainly distinguishes *Future: Level 5* from other textbooks is that it contains writing models and persistence activities in every unit at the very end of the book. A process-based approach is advocated in the writing lessons within each book. However, sample written products (i.e., the writing models) are provided at the end of the book so that students have a better idea of what the final written products should look like. The persistence curriculum aims to help learners build community, set goals, develop better study skills, and feel a sense of achievement. The persistence activities (e.g., listing characteristics of a good English speaker, prioritizing learning strategies, exploring expectations about learning, evaluating progress) are wonderful but they do not seem to relate to the unit topics. Further associations should be made between the persistence activities and the content within each unit.

Besides the persistence curriculum, the book has two other areas for improvement. First, grammar points receive minimal attention and are rarely revisited. The grammar lesson in each unit offers short explanations about the grammar point but are only two pages and only three practice activities are included. Teachers may have to dedicate more attention and classroom time to grammar. Second, vocabulary teaching is overlooked. The target vocabulary and expressions are somewhat embedded in the reading lessons and do not receive explicit instruction. For certain vocabulary and expressions, it might be helpful to explain them in detail since word knowledge contains many layers: meaning, collocations, grammatical features, word parts, and register (Zimmerman, 2009).

Overall, *Future: Level 5* is an interesting and well-organized textbook with up-to-date topics and content for both teachers and low-advanced English learners. Although the textbook has minor areas that could be improved, it is still a useful textbook for helping English learners develop language skills as well as life skills competencies within a communicative framework.

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Reading for Today 5: Topics for Today (4th ed.)

Lorraine C. Smith and Nancy Nici Smith

Boston, MA: Heinle, 2011.

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Before reading this review, please take a moment to consider the following questions:

1. What are some principles of good reading instruction?
2. What issues/types of texts are most relevant to your learners?
3. Can you think of any textbooks that contain most or all of these elements?

Ready? OK. Now that you have activated your background knowledge, you are in a better position to judge whether or not *Topics for Today (TFT)* describes a book that suits your philosophy of reading instruction and your learners' needs.

Topics for Today (4th ed.) is the fifth in a series of five *Reading for Today* texts, each developed for a specific learner level. As the last in the series, *TFT* is intended for advanced, college-bound learners and is suitable for both EFL and ESL contexts. As such, the readings presented in the text are both academic in nature and diverse in content. The readings are spread over 12 chapters and the chapters are divided into four units. Each unit presents a theme (e.g., "Society: School and Family," "Technology and Ethical Issues") with each chapter dealing with a particular aspect of that theme. Every chapter includes both a main reading and a secondary reading that provides another (not necessarily contrary) perspective on the chapter's topic. The readings themselves are all authentic materials taken from a wide variety of publications, though the type of publication is heavily weighted toward news sources (e.g., *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, *Free China Review*, *ABC News*, *National Academy of Sciences*, and *Time*). None of the texts have been simplified, although some have been slightly shortened.

Surrounding each reading passage is an apparatus that includes prereading, rereading, while-reading, and postreading activities. The prereading section aims to stimulate learners' opinions and knowledge concerning the text, encouraging better comprehension as they read through the text for the first time. After reading the passage once, learners are directed to reread the passage, this time underlining what they consider to be the most important ideas. Once they have read the passage a second time, learners are asked to outline the main ideas of the text and to write a short summary. Afterward, learners engage in various exercises that encourage the integration of bottom-up and top-down reading skills and strategies such as word attack, skimming, scanning, summarizing, and critical thinking. A reading-strategies self-evaluation that follows each passage asks readers to reflect on and become more aware of the various

reading strategies they did and did not employ while reading each passage.

The authentic, unsimplified texts and the sturdy pre-, while-, and postreading apparatus surrounding each passage make *TFT* a strong reading instruction text supported by current reading theory and research. Moreover, the balanced integration of bottom-up and top-down activities works effectively to develop learners' ability to tackle a text from both a local and a global perspective.

Two examples in particular that demonstrate the quality bottom-up and top-down integration exemplified in the text are the dictionary-skills and critical-thinking sections in each chapter. In the dictionary-skills section, readers are presented with a bolded word in a sentence from the passage, followed by a dictionary entry containing the various meanings of the word. They must select the best definition given the context in which the word is found in the text. The words are also shown with a variety of their collocations, helping learners to develop their awareness of how these words tend to collocate with other words. Sometimes, instruction that effectively teaches dictionary proficiency, a very important bottom-up skill, is often neglected or mishandled in ESL reading texts. *TFT*, however, both incorporates the topic and deals with it well. After this section, learners engage in a critical-thinking activity that asks them to analyze and extract meaning from various parts of the text. Learners evaluate the tone, underlying assumptions, and implications of the text and are reminded that there is no one right answer because their responses depend on what they think about the text. Together, these exercises, along with many others, show learners that successful reading integrates bottom-up and top-down processes.

One slight weakness is that the presentation is cluttered and that one of the reading strategies orders learners not to translate into their native language. The text could benefit from a little more clarity of presentation and teachers may find that judicious use of translation into the learner's L1 can sometimes facilitate rather than hinder comprehension.

If your answers to the questions presented at the top of this review included a strong prereading, while-reading, and postreading apparatus that includes bottom-up and top-down skills integration, a focus on reading strategies, and authentic, academic texts, you may find *Topics for Today* a useful text for teaching your advanced, college-bound ESL/EFL students.

Perfect Phrases for ESL: Everyday Business Life

Natalie Gast

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

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Perfect Phrases for ESL: *Everyday Business Life*, by Natalie Gast, provides high-intermediate and advanced ESL learners the opportunity to master

communication skills to function in diverse, real-life professional situations. It not only presents common modern phrases, questions, and statements in an organized, reader-friendly way, but it also provides the learner with a conversational foundation to build upon. *Perfect Phrases* is directed toward individuals who are prepared to enter the global workforce in the US, or toward those who are already in the mainstream industry and want to boost their confidence in expressing themselves.

One of this book's greatest strengths is its reader-friendly organization and presentation of material. Gast divides the book into seven sections, each of which focuses on a different aspect of daily business interactions. Each section is headed by a short anecdote that illustrates how the section will pertain to the business world. Section topics encompass a wide range of potential scenarios, including "Small Talk," "Presenting Yourself," and "Networking Within Your Organization and Beyond." Each section is then divided into several small chapters, each of which presents common phrases to use, followed by a brief "Grammar and Expressions" section and ending with "Idioms and Other Vocabulary." The beauty of the structure is that the text does not have to be read from front to back but instead can be used on an as-needed basis. For example, when making a phone call, the reader can simply flip to Part 3, "Using the Telephone."

Another aspect of this book that deserves praise is the applicability of the phrases themselves. Gast provides a wide variety of statements and questions for each given situation. Furthermore, the phrases are modern and up-to-date, so they both expand the means of expression and enhance the capacity to understand coworkers when such phrases are heard. *Perfect Phrases* even explains idioms and colloquial slang that may be heard in the workplace, so as to better prepare the reader for different forms of interaction, both formal and informal.

Furthermore, the book's compact size makes it easy to fit in a briefcase, purse, or even in a pocket. This accessibility makes it much easier to bring along and refer to whenever needed. This is a nice change from the usual bulky textbooks and English dictionaries that ESL learners would otherwise use.

However, room remains for improvement. While the text is detailed and presents a variety of phrases for each situation, it can get to the point where some phrases are unnecessary. The long lists may intimidate or overwhelm the reader, and in many cases the list could be shortened considerably to display the most practical phrases to use in each situation without being redundant. In addition, some of the phrases may sound awkward coming from an ESL speaker. While the majority of terms provided are indeed "perfect" for navigating the business world, idioms such as "off the cuff" and "change hats" are used so infrequently they may sound outlandish.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings do little to detract from the benefit that this text can provide to an advanced ESL learner in the workplace. Perhaps the text's greatest strength, and what most significantly distinguishes it from other ESL textbooks, is that it not only teaches English communication skills, but it also provides advice and tips to help the reader survive and eventually thrive in the American business world. Just the phrases would be a sufficient foundation

to build upon, but *Perfect Phrases* takes it a step further in giving recommendations on a wide range of topics such as public speaking, handling stress, and networking. The advice is not limited to verbal expression but encompasses how to compose oneself and proceed with confidence in each situation. The text does a great job of recognizing that integrating into the American workforce involves more than learning to speak properly. The appendix comes in especially handy in this aspect. Appendix A, titled “The American Business in a Nutshell,” concisely, yet thoroughly, comments on the subtleties in the business world that cannot be learned through speech only—topics such as handshakes, appearance, and personal space.

In conclusion, Gast’s *Perfect Phrases* is a unique resource that can be used by advanced ESL learners who are entering or have already begun integrating into the American workforce. It could also be an effective class text for instructors of business English seminars in the workplace or community college courses. It provides the basic expressions to function in the daily business routines, and at the same time recognizes that learning English is a constant process and presents material that can further develop the reader’s composure and confidence. The consistent organization of the sections, coupled with the wide variety of modern phrases, makes *Perfect Phrases* invaluable to ESL individuals in the business world.