
Powerhouse: An Upper Intermediate Business English Course

Review by Derek Otsuji

Japan-American Institute of Management Science (JAIMS), Hawaii

POWERHOUSE: AN UPPER INTERMEDIATE BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSE. Coursebook by David Evans and Study Book by Peter Strutt. Publisher: Longman. Coursebook \$17.30, Study Book \$8.00.

Powerhouse, by David Evans and Peter Strutt, is a lively interactive business English course designed for community college ESL students at the "upper intermediate" level of language competency. It comes in two parts: a coursebook and accompanying study book, both with an integrated component of cassette recordings for pronunciation practice and general listening skills development. There is also a teacher's manual for instructional support. The course covers ten chapters, each organized around a business or communications topic, and includes a supplementary grammatical reference section for students needing a quick review. In all, *Powerhouse* should provide sufficient material for a semester's worth of instruction in a moderately paced, discussion-intensive, two-credit course.

The main appeal of *Powerhouse* is that it teaches language in a real world context: chapter lessons draw upon examples of speech and professional writing taken from business, politics, sports, entertainment, and popular culture. Because lessons are organized around themes—e.g., "first impressions," "risk and reward," "persuasion," and "globalization"—students do not merely memorize vocabulary lists and grammar rules but learn to intuit the meaning of words from contextual clues and apply language skills in realistic business situations. The thematic organization also gives instructors the flexibility of teaching the course in chapter sequence or by topic. Business conversations, interviews, news reports, historical sketches, celebrity profiles, discussion questions, and directed role plays, as well as standard vocabulary and grammar skills building exercises, encourage students to develop their English ability in listening, speaking, reading, and (to a lesser extent) writing.

Powerhouse covers traditional business concepts and mentions some key historical figures, but also introduces students to the so-called "new economy" and its emerging leaders. Since all discussions are on the elementary level, students do not need any specific business knowledge or training to do well in the course. However, a general

awareness of recent developments in business technology and the global financial markets would certainly be helpful.

The physical design of the coursebook—a hybrid of traditional workbook and slick magazine layout—is attractive and visually engaging. And since the course makes a number of references to people, events, businesses, and cultures, the visuals are mostly purposeful in that they help students to link names with faces and to gain their general cultural and historical bearings. Yet the sheer abundance of visual material and the variety of page designs are also potentially distracting and even detracting. With so much space (not to mention printing costs!) set aside for pictures and fancy fonts, some language content has to be sacrificed. Nevertheless, for teachers striving to make their instruction as relevant to their students' lives as possible, *Powerhouse* can create a vital link between the classroom and the world of people, careers, and events.

About the Reviewer

Derek Otsuji is a business writing instructor at JAISMS (the Japan-American Institute of Management Science) where he teaches business professionals from all parts of Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam. He has a master's degree in American Literature from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.
