

Better English Every Day

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BETTER ENGLISH EVERY DAY. Paul J. Hamel. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1984. Three levels. Student texts, \$8.95 each. Instructor's manual, not yet available.

This new three-book series has been created for adults who have a low level knowledge of English. Each book, which is geared to one semester of daily ESL classes, contains 16 chapters divided into modules focusing on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There is also a midterm and a final test on usage and comprehension in each book.

As stated in the book's introduction, this series is "directed at low-level students with practical rather than academic goals and interests"; and survival type vocabulary and skills are emphasized throughout the books. Lesson topics include filling out forms, shopping, renting an apartment, etc. In the first book an introductory lesson gives students practice in reading and writing printed and cursive letters--a feature not found in many ESL series of this kind.

The visual format of this series is simple and clearly organized, with an abundance of black and white illustrations. Each chapter contains one or two short dialogs and grammar lessons concisely presented in chart form. Writing exercises reinforcing familiar structures conclude each chapter. One simple phonics lesson per chapter is found in Book One. These phonics lessons are replaced by spelling and word building lessons in the two later books.

The introduction to each book gives helpful suggestions for incorporating role-play and non-verbal cuing into the lessons. Teachers are advised to read each new dialog aloud several times and to encourage students not to repeat, but to listen. Reading comprehension "true-false" exercises follow each dialog, and several "read and draw" exercises serve as vocabulary review. There is a good variety of student-centered activities and games in each book. Pair exercises encourage students to interact; and often the book page may be folded in half, so that pairs can work together without seeing each other's questions or visual cues. (For example in chapter 3 of book 3, the student sees a coffee shop order blank on one half and must write down his/her partner's order chosen from a menu on the other half.)

My two objections to this series are minor ones. Since this is a survival series for adults, why weren't some realistic photographs of application forms, newspaper ads, or even people included? (I found the comic strip type figures somewhat "cutesy", by the time I got to book 3.) Also I found the sequencing of topics not always in agreement with student needs. For example in book 1, "Counting Money" and "Renting an Apartment" come much later than "Having a Party" and "Describing Household Chores." Nevertheless, this new series, with its emphasis on receptive skills and communicative activities, fulfills its goal of preparing students for the job market and the real world. It could be successfully used and adapted by both experienced and inexperienced ESL teachers, according to the particular needs of their students.