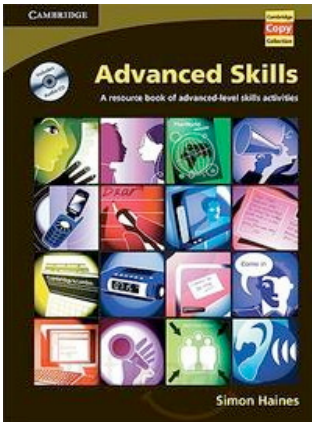


<i>Advanced Skills: A Resource Book of Advanced-Level Skills Activities</i>		
Author:	Simon Haines (2006)	
Publisher:	Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP	
Pages	ISBN	Price
pp. x + 139	978-0-521-60848-0	\$45 U.S.



Advanced Skills is a recent title in the Cambridge Copy Collection series. This series provides teachers with photocopiable materials to use in their ESL/EFL lessons. There are over 30 titles in the series, and this is the first one to focus exclusively on advanced level students.

Advanced Skills consists of four sections. Each section deals with a different language skill (reading, listening, speaking, and writing). Each of the four sections covers the same nine themes: Dreams, Technology, Work-Life Balance, Relationship, Futures, Emotions, Rights and Wrongs, Narratives, and The Unexpected. Each unit contains teacher's notes, instructions for using the materials, and answer keys. Each of the 36 lessons (according to the notes in the front of the book) takes approximately 45-60 minutes. A CD and corresponding tapescript comprises the listening exercises. According to the introduction, the book is intended for students "who have completed an upper intermediate general coursebook and/or have passed the Cambridge FCE (First Certificate in English) or an equivalent exam" (p. 8). The author also points out that the material can help students prepare for tasks in the Cambridge CAE or IELTS exams.

Overall, the book is well thought out. The introduction is complemented by a table of contents (referred to as a "map of the book"), which lists skills, key language, and duration of each lesson. Each lesson gives the teacher a great deal of support, including lists of vocabulary to pre-teach, answer keys, and clear instructions for each step of the lessons. Frequent use of drawings and photographs will appeal to visual learners. In addition there is a strong language component in each lesson, such as lists of useful language and collocation exercises.

The author took care to provide pre-reading tasks for the reading lessons. For example, before students read the article "The futile pursuit of happiness," which describes Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert's views on happiness, they first discuss a number of quotes about happiness, then reflect on what could make them happier. This interchange among students can help them activate their previous knowledge, making them more prepared to read the article. Similarly, the author also includes warm-up tasks for the listening activities. In "Men's work," students complete a chart about the ages at which men and women do things such as starting school, starting work, and getting married, before listening to an interview with a woman who works as a crane operator.

Another strength of this book is the numerous opportunities for personalizing topics. In the speaking lesson titled "Are you a workaholic?" students answer a questionnaire about their work habits, then share their answers with another student. Another example is the reading lesson "Dream on!", where students are asked to write about their dreams and how they hope to achieve them. Personalizing language learning can be motivating for students, as they are more likely to be interested in expressing themselves than writing about unfamiliar people and topics.

I was also impressed by the inclusion of several intriguing topics, such as exclusive residential areas, traffic calming, and the future relationship of humans and computers. Students tired of talking about shopping, food, and travel will find these a welcome change of pace. These more unusual topics present opportunities for students to talk about a range of thoughts and ideas they hadn't expressed before.

Although the book is professional and well-written, I had a few problems with it. The introduction is less than a page and a half. It answers four questions: "Who is *Advanced Skills* for?" "How will *Advanced Skills* help my students?" "How is *Advanced Skills* organized?" and "What is the best way to use *Advanced Skills* in the classroom?" These questions are answered briefly, and some parts are a bit obvious for teachers familiar with teacher resource books, such as the suggestion that teachers "dip into the book from time to time to supplement either a general coursebook or exam practice material" (p. 8). Perhaps the author could have answered additional questions, such as What does second language research have to say about advanced learners? or How do we differentiate between intermediate learners and advanced learners? or What special needs do advanced learners have? Also, he could have provided some tips for teaching advanced students, and given some suggestions for alternative uses for the material. The introduction mentions additional activities contained in the teacher's notes, but after looking through the book carefully, I noticed such extras in only a few lessons. Perhaps the author could have added some variations or follow-up activities as well. Considering the price of the book, as well as possible photocopying costs, the book could have included more support for the teacher.

Another problem concerns the audio CD. While the voices on the CD provide clear models for advanced level students, as well as a fair assortment of listening texts (speeches, monologues, conversations, and interviews), they represent only British English. I think

including several varieties of English would have given the listener a greater challenge, as well as a more appealing mix of voices.

Despite these few shortcomings, *Advanced Skills* is a well-constructed resource book for teachers of advanced level classes.

Hall Houston
Kainan University, Taiwan
<hallhouston@yahoo.com>

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