Q: Skills for Success: Reading and Writing, 2nd ed.
Nigel A. Caplan and Scott Roy Douglas.
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Over the last three decades many publishing houses have put out language textbook series attempting to serve different learning populations and proficiency levels. *Q: Skills for Success* is yet another series in that long list of language teaching and learning materials, but is perhaps more suited to college ESL needs. The series, as the title indicates, focuses on reading and writing. It has five proficiency levels and an online component with integrated digital content. Each book in the series has eight chapters, each featuring readings from a different academic discipline and different types of written genre assignments. The higher levels, four and five, appear more geared toward second language writing courses in college, as the readings seem to be of a higher level of difficulty. However, language institute intensive programs in the USA, UK, or internationally could also find this book useful, though it seems that the USA markets, and more specifically college language courses, may have been the primary target. The glossy cover is attractive, and interestingly (perhaps unusually) the same photograph is used for all books in the series (presumably that of a Norwegian town in the snow).

    Q: Skills for Success sets itself apart with simple, streamlined organization. The Table of Contents offers clearly outlined academic disciplines from which the reading selections are taken, followed by these activities (reprinted here as they appear in the Table of Contents): video, readings 1 and 2, vocabulary skill, writing skill and grammar activities. At a glance, this textbook is visually uncluttered. It clearly espouses the reading-writing connection and schema theory (Carrell & Eisterhold Carson, 1983), with a special emphasis on skills development. One slightly unexpected feature is the video, once a staple of many language book series (*Focus on American Culture* with ABC News by Susan Stemplenski comes to mind). The unit video is placed either before or after reading selections. Visual learning aids such as videos are important in making context more accessible (Stemplenski & Tomalin 1990), helping students "warm up" or prepare for the upcoming reading selection, and for exposing students to different dialects and speaking speed. However, in today's rich world of the Internet, online clips and YouTube are also widely available and worth keeping in mind (Harmer, 2007, p. 308). Although each level of textbook houses a unique disciplinary area and reading selections from it, this review will discuss only the level five textbook.

    The level five textbook contains readings taken from the following disciplines (in order from one to eight respectively as they are presented in the Table of Contents): linguistics, sociology, media studies, international relations, urban planning, ecology, psychology, and health services. In general, the readings are interesting and likely to keep the attention of the millennial student population. The video segments introduce the topic and bring visual engagement to classrooms that, in many places around the globe, are still print-dominated learning environments, despite smart technology. Reading 1, for every unit, is accompanied by the following reading skills (in unit order respectively): distinguishing main ideas from details, identifying contrasting ideas, previewing the text, making inferences, following ideas, anticipating content through questions, identifying the author's intent, and organizing notes and annotations in charts. Many of these are easily recognized as skills, and are very much relevant for learning success, but their order would appear odd to many practicing teachers. If one were to assume that the texts are

sequenced to reflect an increase in the level of content and structural difficulty, one would expect reading skills to reflect a similar order, from basic or more foundational to more complex (known in the literature as scaffolding). So, basic skills needed for working with texts, such as annotating the text and organizing information into charts, should perhaps be offered in the first (or earlier) unit, not the last. Pre-reading strategies, such as anticipating content through questions and previewing the text, should then follow, so teachers can scaffold reading and learning (Gibbons, 2002) by first providing the tools for working with texts, and then tapping into students' background schemata (Carrell & Eisterhold Carson, 1983) in order to facilitate learners' early engagement with the text.

Thus, one might wonder what the guiding organizational principle really was: the building of skills (as one would assume from the title) or topics of interest. In fact, it was hard to discern whether the level of textual difficulty was a factor in unit order at all. From the standpoint of the field of second language acquisition (SLA), one should start from where the learner is, plus one (as Krashen contended back in 1981), so that the level of difficulty increases as the learner progresses. The same could be said for strategies for successful reading or writing. For true college success, second language learners need to build the previously mentioned skills first, and then move to more challenging tasks, such as working with different genre patterns of textual organization and complex syntactic choices.

The next skill listed in the Table of Contents is vocabulary. The fields of English language teaching (ELT) and SLA have long recognized the value of vocabulary building in language acquisition (also known as the lexical approach, once a staple of any good language teacher training book, e.g., Harmer, 2007), and still relevant to English for academic purposes (EAP) in college second language writing settings. In this particular textbook, building vocabulary skills starts from the use of the thesaurus, but does not instantly exhibit a clear organizational principle. The vocabulary skills exercises are ordered in the following manner (from first to last unit respectively): using a thesaurus, using a dictionary, reporting verbs, Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, verb complements, suffixes, and adjective/verb + preposition collocations. The titles of these objectives do not include vocabulary skills such as identifying content-bearing words and other types of vocabulary crucial for understanding the text, high-frequency words versus glossary terminology, and the use of cohesive devices. Still, the textbook does provide practice in building basic skills such as dictionary use and the ability to locate definitions and recognize word parts. Overall, it seems that it places a stronger focus on morphology than vocabulary skills per se (as they relate to classroom practices).

The grammar units cover the grammar must-haves (e.g., noun clauses, passive voice, modals, and quantifiers), but also composition staples such as transitional words and syntactic choices for sentence combining. Again, as with previous features, listed here are the grammar exercises as they appear in each unit (in unit order respectively): contrast and concession connectors, noun clauses, quantifiers, parallel structure and ellipsis, passive voice to focus information, modals as possibility, subject-verb agreement, and cause-and-effect connectors. Since there is no apparent principle guiding the order of these teaching objectives, one is to assume that the course can also be used as a self-instruction tool or as independent study in tutoring and writing centers. Perhaps, instructors will appreciate the latitude in these choices, and focus on the elements their students seem to need the most. In this respect, the textbook offers both a range of resources for doing editing and revising for specific target needs (such as learning to target-edit for subject-verb agreement only, or for parallel structures).

The final skill reviewed is writing assignments and exercises. *Q: Skills for Success (5)*'s Table of Contents lists the following units of instruction (in chronological order from first to last): writing an extended definition, using evidence to support an argument, writing with unity, organizing supporting ideas, connecting information, paraphrasing, summarizing, and writing a cause-and-effect essay. Clearly, each of the elements here has a place in teaching writing, and can be used as needed by teachers and students. However, the actual order of writing activities in this textbook may present a challenge to less experienced teachers because it lacks scaffolding (Flower, 1994). Some of the units focus on types of writing skill, such

as paraphrasing, organizing supporting ideas, or connecting information. Other units focus on writing specific genre types, such as summary, cause-and-effect essay, and, to an extent, extended definition. Although one recognizes the challenges facing any author(s) putting a textbook together, some sort of guiding principle behind organization tends to be useful and appreciated by instructors, so should be kept in mind by publishers as well.

In sum, the level five book, as part of the series, offers diverse readings and exercises, and can serve as a useful learning resource for both ESL and EFL (English as a foreign language) students. Even with some drawbacks in organization or clarity of teaching objectives, *Q: Skills for Success: Reading and Writing (5)* could be used in a course on academic reading and writing, as it attempts to provide the skills necessary to succeed in writing courses. Yet, further consideration can be given to more organic connections between units and teaching objectives, though the way the textbook is currently organized allows for using individual units independently—which may have been one of the authors' and publishers' objectives after all.

References

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