

Book Review

Smith, Mike & Glenda (1988) *A study skills handbook for students studying in English*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

"*A study skills handbook for students studying in English*" is a unique English for academic purposes (EAP) text book. Usually, EAP texts concentrate on reading and writing skills with a focus on one or the other. This handbook is far more comprehensive as it covers

- timetabling for study purposes,
- dictionary skills,
- library skills,
- reading skills,
- notetaking skills,
- writing skills,
- quoting skills, and
- examination skills.

As such it caters to all EAP study needs.

Mike and Glenda Smith wrote this book for foundation level students at the University of Papua New Guinea, who, like University of the South Pacific foundation students, need to improve their English language proficiency in preparation for further studies. The content on which the skills are based is multinational and of multi-interest, but focuses on Pacific issues. Using regional content is a plus for Pacific students struggling to improve their language skills; they will not have the double burden of dealing with unknown content in order to improve their language skills, as routinely happens in language texts based on foreign content (e.g., British or American concerns).

The introduction for the student states that the text is designed to be used in a "taught course in an educational institution", but that parts of the text are amenable to self-study. The format of the text, which provides explanations interspersed with hands-on exercises and "golden rules" to follow, is very adaptable to self-study groups with minimum supervision as well as high-ratio student-teacher tutorial situations.

The tone of the explanations in the text is somewhat paternalistic, but in all fairness, this is sometimes comforting to students accustomed to conservative teacher-centred classrooms. The exercises, however, are less characteristic of a teacher-centred attitude. They incorporate pair work and self-analysis questionnaires as well as more traditional exercises. Unfortunately, there is no answer key, although some answers are provided in the text itself.

The material covered in the units is to be taught in the order presented. However, the units are discrete entities, and could be used alone, or possibly in combinations tailored to particular class needs. The dictionary, and quoting skills units are thorough and particularly useful sections, as they are not always adequately covered, if covered at all, in most EAP text books. On the other hand, to supplement and select from the reading and examination skills units seems necessary as both appear to be too narrow and superficial in scope.

The dictionary unit is very comprehensive, owing to the authors' heavy emphasis on dictionary use. But it is of concern that the authors encourage ESL (English as a Second Language) learners to be overdependent on the dictionary, and, in so doing, underemphasize other word-attack skills. The dictionary unit is, nonetheless, very complete, and could be put to good use in most intermediate-level ESL classrooms.

The reading skills unit, while encouraging students to identify their reading needs and to select reading materials appropriate to their academic purposes, falls a little short on predictive reading and word-attack skills. However, there are many texts on the market which concentrate solely on developing good reading skills, although their content, admittedly, may not be oriented to Pacific students. Supplementary material is recommended to the preliminary reading skills.

The treatment of writing skills is more complete; notetaking, descriptive and argumentative writing, and illustrative graphs and charts are all provided. Furthermore, the unit on quoting skills, dealing with plagiarism, and proper documentation of source materials, covers material seldom found in EAP texts, and much needed in the classroom.

The test-taking strategies outlined in Unit 8 are also welcome additions. However, the emphasis on quantitative aspects of test taking (e.g., budgeting time for answering questions, determining the number of discrete points required in an answer on the basis of marks awarded, etc.) should be supplemented with

instructive information about qualitative test-writing skills (such as how to focus an essay answer, how to plan an essay under time pressure, etc.).

"A Study skills handbook for students studying in English" takes a rather conservative and, in the words of one author: "prescriptive" approach to study skills. This is inappropriate in learner-centred class situations, but is very helpful for high-ratio student-teacher classes, novice teachers, self-study groups, and tutorial situations. The text provides, in a very comprehensive format, clear-cut guidelines for ESL students who have to cope with academic work in the English language classroom.

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