

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH: COMPACT FIRST IN THE INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

In this review of Cambridge English: Compact First, Second Edition (B2 Level) by Peter May, I look into what works and what does not work in using this as a text both for teaching English and for preparing for the Cambridge English: First exam. I analyze the book's strategies and classroom integration, concluding that it is effective for the exam but, like many contemporary textbooks, not ideal for the classroom.

Keywords: *Cambridge English, language exam, textbook, English, exam preparation, language instruction*

In preparing members of the faculty at Mykolayiv National Agrarian University for the *Cambridge English: First* exam, I have been using *Cambridge English: Compact First, Second Edition (B2 Level)* by Peter May (Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 978-1-107-42842-3) along with its accompanying workbook and teacher's manual. The book uses the multi-faceted approach that is popular in recent language textbooks. In our circumstances, I do not find this approach ideal.

Each chapter of *Compact First* consists of seven parts: listening, speaking, writing, 2 sections of reading and the use of English, grammar, and revision. All but grammar and revision include some practice or preparatory work and an "exam task," which emulates what the students will encounter on the exam. Furthermore, there are sections in the back of the book that describe in greater detail how each part of the exam works and specific strategies. The grammar section allows the students to review various grammar topics, and further explanations are included in the appendix. More than for teaching English, the book is designed to prepare the students for the exam. The workbook follows the same structure, providing more

practice in the form of questions and "exam tasks"; it emulates the student's book but without the explanations.

Although the book is targeted to future takers of the Cambridge English exam, the multi-skilled structure is familiar from other contemporary textbooks and was, ultimately, a difficulty. I taught from this book once a week for an 80-minute class, and this was not enough time for the book's strategies. I found that each section took about one class period, but, because we met only once a week, I assigned the writing and grammar sections for homework rather than spend our limited class time watching the students write. Furthermore, the workbook sections did not seem to correspond directly to the student book, so the homework required some tracking, as I assigned sections out of order.

Furthermore, and this is an issue with many of these contemporary language textbooks, the speaking sections require motivated students. I was lucky in having a small group of highly motivated students. I have taught similar books in larger, less-motivated classes, and the times when the students must pair off and enact a dialogue or discuss a subject are problematic. I found myself able to focus on only one or two pairs during each session, and while I focused on them, the others lost interest and returned to their phones or personal conversations. Shorter conversational "interludes" might work better for typical classes.

Where this book excels, however, is in its exam prep material. This is to be expected, of course, in an exam-prep textbook. The appendices, which are tied to the various sections of each chapter, offer further preparation for the exam itself, with guidance on what to expect, how to prepare for, and how to do each part of the exam. My students found this to be invaluable for giving them both a familiarity with what would be on the exam and strategies for their preparation and performance.

In my particular situation of having a small class of highly motivated students, this book is not bad. Of course, at the least, I would arrange the workbook so that it better corresponds to the students' book for the assigning of homework, but I would rather the workbook simply be more drills for the grammar. The textbook provides

lots of opportunities to practice for the exam, but I find that grammar nuances require drilling and drilling.

I would also set the bulk of the writing tasks to be assigned as homework. I see the benefit in doing an occasional writing task in class (to prepare the students for a timed, official session), but with our limited class time, I cannot see doing this for each chapter.

Overall, I am happy enough with this book in the general trend of language textbooks. That said, I do think the trend is a bit too conversation-focused for the large classroom. In my classes of ten or more students, more grammar exercises would be more beneficial, I believe.

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LISTENING DIFFICULTIES

The article reveals the main language difficulties in listening to a foreign text and describes the success of overcoming them. It explains the psychological characteristics of the listeners and the factors that make comprehension easier and complicated.

Key words: *comprehension, listening, students, language difficulties, a foreign text*

Successful listening and understanding depends on 1) the listener (the level of his/her development of speech hearing, memory, attention, interest, etc.) and his individual psychological characteristics; 2) the linguistic characteristics of the audio text and its conformity to the voice of experience and knowledge of the students; 3) from the conditions of comprehension of an audio text.