

A Book I've Used

Proficiency Expert

Megan Roderick and Carol Nuttall
with Nick Kenny
Pearson Education 2013
See page 91 for details



Students who wish to score well in gate-keeping examinations need good exam-preparation materials to help them reach their goal. *Proficiency Expert* could be one of those that high-achieving students really need.

The coursebook consists of ten topic-based units covering a broad sweep of content. Each module is divided into two sections (A and B) and focuses on the developing of language skills, language knowledge and the test-taking strategies required for coping successfully with the Cambridge English: Proficiency Examination (CPE).

Unlike most other examination-preparation material, this volume shows a shift away from product-orientation – emphasizing correct answers to test items – towards more process-orientation, aimed at equipping students with the necessary test-taking strategies to help them achieve their potential.

Most of the tasks in the book aim to develop the subskills tested in the exam – of listening, reading, speaking and writing – or are focused on an advanced area of linguistic knowledge.

Each module begins with a page of lead-in activities to activate the students' background knowledge. This is followed in the A units by strategy-training activities for Reading, in which the students are given the opportunity to complete a task with strategy support and then, where possible, reflect on the process in a post-task activity. (These reflection tasks, labelled "Task Analysis", are a feature of many of the skills sections.) Substantial vocabulary practice then extends out of the reading text and leads into a Use of English exam task. The rest of the unit consists of a Listening strategy task, language development activities linked to a Use of English paper and a Writing development task. The B units go from Listening to Speaking, Language Development to Use of English and a full process-approach to a Writing task. Each unit ends with a module review which provides additional exercises for the students to use their acquired lexical and grammatical knowledge in new contexts.

Writing is, from my own experience with students studying for CPE, really stressful, and a genre and process-based approach will help reduce anxiety. Each main task contains question analysis, genre-awareness, planning support, ideas for language (practised in mini-activities) as students are guided through a first draft to their final version.

The Exam Reference, Expert Grammar, Expert Writing and Expert Speaking sections at the end of the book are very helpful. The Exam Reference describes what is required in each part of the exam, as well as the task strategies needed for each. The Expert Grammar section explains and exemplifies, unit by unit, the areas of grammar practised, and this will help build up the students' confidence. I particularly like the Expert Writing section. The first part explains the

assessment criteria – how the Writing tasks are marked and graded – and offers a writing checklist to help develop the students' editing skills. The second part contains model answers for each genre tested, with awareness-raising points and a Further Practice task. Then come two full pages of linking devices such as evaluating, expressing grades of agreement, and so on. The Expert Speaking section also includes a page of linking devices (starting off a conversation, sustaining, concluding and moving on, etc.).

Unfortunately, the book does not provide an answer key, so any student wishing to use it for self-study will need to access the Teacher's Resource material online! However, this is a primarily a class book and as such concentrates more on process than on just getting answers right or wrong. I believe that once the students have mastered the appropriate strategies, they will be able to complete the tasks in the exam successfully.

Although I am not so naïve as to think that a coursebook on its own is enough to get students to master the skills necessary for CPE, *Proficiency Expert* provides a very firm basis and would be a wise choice.

Le Van Canh

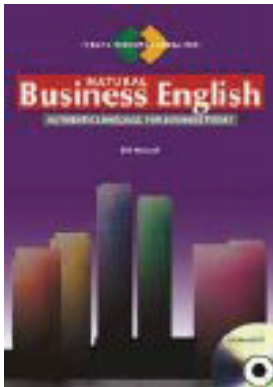
Le Van Canh is a Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and a Teacher Educator at the University of Languages and International Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Natural Business English

Bill Mascull

Delta Publishing 2013

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Natural is a funny word, isn't it? What a recipe book will call *plain yoghurt* will be called *natural yoghurt* on the packaging; the brand's marketing people will have seen to that. Some years ago OUP put out an underrated coursebook series called *Natural English*, which begs the question: was everything else *unnatural English*? What does *natural* mean in a title called *Natural Business English*? Does it mean *authentic*, as the subtitle – *Authentic language for business today* – suggests? Seemingly not, at least not in the sense of the texts it contains being drawn from the world outside ELT (or BELT – Business English Language Teaching). Indeed, there are few texts, since most of the language is delivered at the sentence level, and they are clearly written to provide a nesting place for the new lexis, not that there is anything wrong with specifically written texts. Would anyone complain about footwear being specifically designed for skiing, football, trekking, snorkelling or dancing? *Natural* here seems not to denote much; what this really is is a 120-page book of lexical input for 20 sectors in the world on Business English. And it's quite impressive.

The author promises and delivers some 800 words, collocations and multi-word units that occur in the professional domain. They're organised into 20 four-page units, with 10 or 11 steps or exercises, three of which are linked with the included

audio CD. After every four units there is a two-page Review spread that is set out rather like a test, which of course you mark yourself, as the Answer Key is at the back of the book, along with the Audio Scripts and a seven-page Glossary that gives you some grammatical information but no phonological guidance or unit references. It still comes across as being very user-friendly. But who is the user? While it's aimed primarily at the self-study market, it could be used in small doses in class. No student–student interaction is envisaged, though there are small hints for any lingering teacher at the bottom of every second page, suggesting a research or homework task. Level? They say B2/C1, and certainly any BEC candidates who sprinkled their output with this lexis would favourably impress examiners at Vantage and Higher level. Having said that, I could see this material being used successfully by many B1 or C2 learners. The fact that there is no grammar as such aids this elasticity.

There is another issue with the nature (ha!) of the end-user. Will learners already working in Finance be interested in the unit on Research and Development? Will those in Marketing want to do the one on Manufacturing? Who would want to use the whole book? Probably pre-service learners. Other than that, I can see it coming in handy as something that makes a guest appearance on a wide range of BELT courses. And a lot of this lexis has very wide coverage: *ripped off*, *herded like cattle*, *(to) exceed expectations*, *(to) go out of their way to help*, and the delightfully supple *delighted* (all on page 31), because we are all customers, clients, consumers, aren't we? Just ask our governments.

Among the selling points are, as already mentioned, how easy it is to use, and the fact that you could use the units in any order, or simply, like most vocabulary books, pick the ones that interest you. It is very strong on meaning, it tackles collocation head-on, it includes a brave range of idiomatic language (some of it even touching on the very tricky area

of newspaper headlines), sporting metaphors and a great section on courtship metaphors that talks about mergers and de-mergers. It contextualises new language well, and doesn't give the impression of overload, surely one of the major potential pitfalls of a book of this nature. There is typically one closed exercise in which the learner uses, chooses or manipulates the input. Apart from the Review spreads, the further exposure and practice that the learner will need to begin to acquire the new language will have to come from outside; here, perhaps, is the role of the teacher lying in wait. There is a fair variety of exercise types – the danger in a book like this is to be far too uniform. And I was delighted to see that it doesn't shy away from some of the more critical ways we talk about people we have to deal with at work. ELT publishers tend to present us with a sweetie-sweetie world that puts me in mind of the Paradise side of a Heaven and Hell / Last Judgement Renaissance diptych. There are nice little touches here and there; study tips, such as the note (page 18) about what happens to phrasal verbs when they convert into nouns, and notes on UK/US usage and spelling. There is a generous amount of attention given to word-formation.

It's an attractive artefact. There are no colour photos, to be sure, just one illustration per unit, but photos would serve no purpose here. The pages breathe; they look less dense than some of the vocabulary books that the prolific Mr Mascull has written for CUP. However, the drawing of skyscrapers on the front cover harkens back to BELT coursebooks of the late 80s/early 90s, and the two large central ones bear an uncanny and unhappy resemblance to the Twin Towers. More could have been asked of Delta's graphic design department in this area, I feel.

The meaning of new words is the heart of this material, and it's an area that is usually very well-handled. Yet it can be tough trying to find new ways to get a closed one-item answer; page 64 asks us what word is defined by 'An

organisation to protect people who work in transport', the correct answer being *union*. Or 'This has to look right in relation to the things on sale' (answer: *store design*). Also on page 32: 'Store owners want to increase figures for this by making their stores as attractive as possible' (answer: *footfall*, a term I didn't know in this particular meaning). It's never easy to know how much detail to go into in these 20 topic areas, or how much transient, trendy language to include. It can become daunting, or it can become too lightweight, but for the most part I think this book gets it just right.

The 48 audio tracks are scripted and delivered with the speed and clarity you'd expect in a B2 examination. Some of the decontracted forms jar, at least for a native speaker, and some of the definitions ("an early pioneer", "back to the drawing board to start again") slip into tautology. 90% of the voices were RP. Only four voices were (intended to be) American, and there was one where a Pom tries in vain to sound Australian. Aren't there thousands of out-of-work Aussie actors in the UK any more? The University of Hereford is mentioned no fewer than four times; no other university is. A case of product placement? It would be, if it existed. At times, and this is by no means limited to this book, you can get all the listening answers right without even getting the CD out of its pocket. Unit 8 Exercise 5 is an example of this. Unit 14 Exercise 6 asks us to put the six near-synonyms of *(to) fire someone* into six different sentences and then listen to check their answers, but in reality any of the expressions (*give someone the boot, let someone go, throw someone out*) could go with any of the answers. People have a choice when they talk. The audio texts are simply there to vocalise or explain the lexis, almost like a talking dictionary, so surely you shouldn't criticise an almond tree for not giving you hazelnuts. However, given the fact that there's no pronunciation as such in this package, I wonder whether some or even all of the CD could simply have been re-cast as a support

for pron, especially important in the multi-word units, expressions and idioms. Isn't knowing how a word sounds a key part of being able to use it?

But perhaps there is another, hidden, end-user for this book. I mentioned before that *footfall*, in terms of studying customer behaviour, was new to me, ditto *stick to your knitting* and *black swans*. I've also learned the cute little word *inshoring*. I wonder how many people teaching BELT out there really know which is which when they hear about *bull market* and *bear market*. Come on, let's be honest! And how about *spot rates, equity* and *leverage*? Here's our chance, oops, I mean *your* chance.

Brian Brennan

Brian Brennan is the Language Training Manager at International House Barcelona Company Training.

Get on Stage!

Herbert Puchta, Günter Gerngross
and Matthew Devitt
Helbling Languages 2012
See page 91 for details



With so much authentic and ELT specific material available for free online, you might think that photocopiable resource books had had their day. This release from Helbling Languages, however, demonstrates that well-designed, original and creative materials are still very relevant.

Pitched at teens and young adults, *Get on Stage!* is both a collection of drama-based classroom materials and a teacher training resource. For the students, the main body of the book is divided into four parts. There are ten short sketches, three medium-length sketches, five medium-length plays based on traditional stories, and three teenage dramas. A quick-reference guide in the back of the book gives the CEF level (between A2 and B2), language focus, number of roles and performance length. Whether you are looking for something light and humorous for a small class on a rainy afternoon, or a semester-long serious drama project, you will probably find something to suit. If that's not enough, almost all of the plays and sketches are on either the CD or DVD, in pockets inside the back cover. There is also a photocopiable worksheet for each play, focusing mainly on vocabulary and grammar, and a set of answer keys.

These resources alone are probably enough to make the book worth buying. However, what I think really

sets it apart is the instructional DVD. Presented by co-author Matthew Devitt and his young cast, it leads the teacher through the basics of stage acting and direction. As a teacher who wants to start putting on plays with his students, but has no experience or background in drama, I found it incredibly useful. Devitt has an extensive CV as both an actor and a director (including an Olivier Award nomination!), and engagingly demonstrates such concepts as staging and blocking, voice projection and learning lines. The DVD is pitched to the teacher rather than the student, although some sections may be helpful to show in class. The information presented on the DVD can also be found in a more succinct and organised form in the introduction of the book, along with a number of shorter warm-up activities.

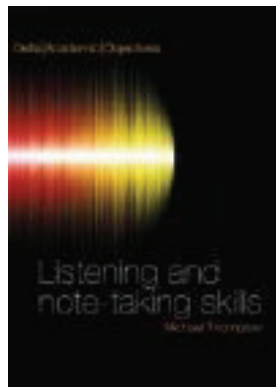
An enterprising teacher may be able to put together a similar collection of materials from *YouTube* videos and online scripts, but I really think Helbling have published such a well-crafted and thorough collection that there is no need. I have already had very positive student feedback from the first couple of sketches I tried out in class, and I'm looking forward to testing more of the ideas in the book in future.

Darren Elliott

Darren Elliott has been teaching and training teachers in Japan and the UK since 1999. He has published material on teacher development, technology and language education, and learner autonomy. He maintains a blog at www.livesofteachers.com.

Listening and Note-taking Skills

Michael Thompson
Delta Publishing 2013
See page 91 for details



This material falls within Delta's *Academic Objectives* series, which also includes reading and writing skills. The current volume's aim is stated simply: to prepare students for academic listening.

The material is intended to be used either for self-study or in a teacher-led context. The Student's Book contains CDs with all the listening passages. The Teacher's Book includes explanatory notes, plenty of teaching ideas, a number of extra photocopiable activities, the answer key and the whole of the Academic Word list (developed by Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, based on data from several disciplines according to range and frequency).

There are six main units in all: Higher Education, Rock 'n' Roll Inc, Whose law is it?, Death by universe, Happiness is ... and Brand new. The first is self-explanatory: the others roughly approximate to the disciplines of business, law, marketing, psychology and social studies, and general science. The very clear Contents page shows how each unit is further sub-divided into sections: topic focus, language focus, listening for production, listening for meaning and a final extension section. The progression through each unit is easy to follow, from topic and vocabulary warm-up, listening to

short extracts for specific points, then finally to more extensive listening practice. Throughout each unit are a number of shaded boxes: green for "going further" (i.e. a short extra task if time and/or inclination allow) and blue indicating an information box with more extended explanations, for instance on note-taking, summarising, the AWL, the structure of talks, and so on. In addition, there are two consolidation sections, each reviewing the work done after a block of three units. The four appendices in the Student's Book provide: 1 the pairwork data for the relevant tasks; 2 exercises related to the AWL; 3 transcripts for the audio recordings and 4 the answer key.

Each unit is self-contained and can be selected for study according to preference and interest. There is a wide range of activity types throughout. To give just a flavour, these include vocabulary brainstorming; sentence completion; recognising given lexical items in a talk; notes completion; matching exercises; reordering sentences; choosing appropriate headings for sections of text; rewriting. Quite a lot of this practice is intended to be done in pairs, and occasionally in small groups.

A good deal of the content and related activities are of direct relevance to the more specific issues associated with listening in an academic context. Most obviously, much of the vocabulary work is based on the Academic Word List, and there are a number of useful spin-off exercises to do with prefixes, suffixes and other aspects of morphology and 'word families' (*define–definition; territory–territorial; depend–dependable*, and so on). To take a few other examples from across the coursebook, we can find work on dealing with hearing/pronouncing numbers; recognising linking words in the development of a speaker's argument; using common abbreviations in note-taking; recognising speech signals (of importance, or topic switch for instance); structuring summaries. It is positive to see the inclusion of an exercise (Unit 1) on mis-hearing words

and phrases, a common problem in note-taking, but one that does not often feature in comparable materials.

A further positive feature of the material is the explicit attention to language work – a reminder, if needed, that language practice should have a central role in teaching English for academic purposes, alongside the discipline focus on such areas as genre, critical thinking and academic literacy. So as well as the extension vocabulary work already mentioned, we find exercises on such areas as collocations, verb and adjective choice, function words and the use of stress in English speech. That said, in the table of contents it is a little unclear why the sub-heading of 'language focus' mainly contains items that would more usually be recognised as study skills and their sub-skills (aspects of note-taking; organising signals), whereas language work is more likely to appear under the sub-heading of listening for meaning (vocabulary, collocations, word families, function words).

As far as the intended audience is concerned, the author makes it clear in terms of language proficiency that the material is designed for learners of English at the B2 and C1 levels of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference), i.e. independent (B2) or proficient (C1) users. The introduction to the Student's Book sets this out in more detail. What is, however, surprising is that there is no indication in either the Student's or Teacher's Book of the academic level at which the material is pitched. There is obviously a great difference in terms of knowledge and experience of study between students at pre-undergraduate level on a foundation programme and those studying at postgraduate level for a Master's degree or a PhD. A potential user can only surmise from the nature of the material that it would be most relevant in the earlier stages of academic study, which is not to say that much of the language work would not be useful for higher-grade students. There is an oblique hint in a short video clip of the author

talking about the material on the Delta website, where he says it is for students who do not necessarily wish to study in an English-speaking country, but who do want to learn something more academic than 'general English'. This reviewer assumes that it would, therefore, also be relevant for older school students as well as those already at university.

The listening material itself (referred to as 'the Listeners') covers short extracts for listening to specific points of content or language, to longer stretches lasting several minutes. There are conversations, interviews and whole talks. There is a range of accents including English, Irish, North American (US and Canada), Australian and also proficient non-native English. There is a slight tendency towards North American, as there is in the content of some of the units: Unit 1 on Higher Education, for example, concerns the American university system. (The author himself is an American working in Italy.) It is surprising that the sources for the listening material are not stated, so one can only make the assumption that they were specially written and recorded for this book. They do sound rather scripted and fluent, and not really the kind of speech that would be found in an academic lecture, such as hesitation, use of redundancy and repetition.

This is an attractive-looking set of materials with a variety of content and tasks. It is strong in its attention to vocabulary development. It could fairly be described as value-added general English rather than EAP, and is certainly at the more generalist wide-angle end of the spectrum. Those seeking practice of more direct relevance to university-level students, particularly in an English-speaking environment, would more likely turn to one of the several coursebooks that use authentic lecture material, such as Campbell and Smith (2009), Lynch (2004), Sarosy and Sherak (2006). However, *Listening and Note-taking Skills* would certainly be useful for learners wishing to develop their language proficiency towards more formal study and professional environments.

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Jo McDonough

Jo McDonough was senior lecturer in ELT at the University of Essex and Director of the EFL Unit. Her main interests are in EAP and teacher research. She has been a long-standing member of BALEARP and was an inspector for Accreditation UK.