

## SURVEY REVIEW

# Adult EFL courses

*Hitomi Masuhara, Naeema Hann, Yong Yi, and  
Brian Tomlinson*

### Introduction

Our intention in this review is to evaluate eight current adult EFL courses published by British publishers, as well as to draw attention to the recent trends commonly observed in these courses. This comprehensive review further develops the criterion-based evaluation approach that was introduced for the first time in an *ELTJ* review by Tomlinson, Dat, Masuhara, and Rubdy (2001).

In the 2001 review, two courses from each of four major UK publishers were evaluated. In this review, however, eight publishers were invited to provide only one of their recent courses. This was an attempt to provide a wider perspective on the materials available in the market.

The courses which we have received and evaluated are as follows:

Name of the course	Authors	Publishers
<i>Quick Smart English</i>	Wilson/Tomalin/Robb/Benne/Forget/Collie	Brookemead
<i>face2face</i>	Redston/Cunningham	Cambridge University Press
<i>Straightforward</i>	Kerr/Clandfield/Jones/Scrivener	Macmillan
<i>Just Right</i>	Harmer/Lethaby/Acevedo	Marshall Cavendish
<i>Total English</i>	Foley/Hall/Acklam/Crace/Bygrave/Clare/Wilson	Pearson Longman
<i>Innovations</i>	Dellar/Hocking/Walkley	Thomson ELT
<i>New English File</i>	Oxenden/Latham-Koenig/Seligson	Oxford University Press
<i>Framework</i>	Goldstein/Jones/Lloyd/Morris	Richmond Publishing

In order to ensure feasibility and quality of comparison, we focused only on the intermediate level of each course.

Our team consisted of Dr Hitomi Masuhara from Japan, Naeema Hann from Pakistan, Yong Yi from China, and Prof Brian Tomlinson from England. All the evaluators have considerable experience of using adult EFL courses in various contexts around the world as well as research expertise in materials evaluation. The team was coordinated by Dr Hitomi Masuhara.

In order to conduct this review, we first revisited the list of 133 evaluation criteria proposed in the 2001 review by Tomlinson *et al.* They were originally developed from research into what learners, teachers, and administrators want from coursebooks. What the current team did then was to examine each criterion from the perspectives of

- current theories in language learning and teaching,
- representativeness in terms of teachers' and learners' needs and wants, and
- comparability and continuity of the reviewing principles between this present review and that of 2001.

After careful selection and addition of criteria, we tried to phrase our 104 evaluation criteria for this review so that they focused on predicted effectiveness in learning and teaching. They were also written to evaluate mainly the student's book and teacher's book on the grounds that these were the course components that teachers and students focus their use on.

After agreeing on our criteria, each of us independently evaluated the eight courses. We each focused on a different unit number and started each evaluation with a detailed analysis of that unit. Then we graded the course on a scale of 0–5 for most of our 104 criteria, but on a scale of 0–20 for those criteria under the heading of 'Publisher's claims', and 0–10 for those under the heading of 'Flexibility' and for four universal language learning items in 'Pedagogic approach'. Finally, we wrote evaluative comments under each of the headings which the criteria were grouped under (e.g. 'Flexibility'; 'Pedagogic approach'; 'Design'). This procedure was carried out independently and in isolation by each reviewer so as to avoid contamination of judgement. Here is an example of the criteria we used:

4 Pedagogic approach

To what extent is the coursebook likely to:

4.1 facilitate the learners' understanding of the target language in use?

(Grade = /5)

4.2 encourage the learners to use the target language?

(Grade = /5)

4.3 facilitate the learners' use of the target language?

(Grade = /5)

4.4 provide the learners with achievable challenges?

(Grade = /5)

4.5 help the learners to feel respected?

(Grade = /5)

4.6 help the learners to feel that they are treated as individuals?

(Grade = /5)

4.7 provide the learners with choice?

(Grade = /5)

4.8 help the learners to personalize their language learning?

(Grade = /5)

4.9 encourage independent learning?

(Grade = /5)

4.10 help the learners to learn from their mistakes?

(Grade = /5)

Finally, we collated and then averaged our scores for each criterion for each course and then looked for distinctive convergence and divergence in our evaluative comments.

### General review of the courses

Before reporting the general results, we would like to explain the scope of this report. However vigorous and systematic the procedures may be, pre-use evaluation is known to be subjective in its development of criteria and in eventual judgements (McGrath 2002; Tomlinson 2003). We attempted to compensate for this by establishing a team of four reviewers from different countries and backgrounds, by evaluating the courses in isolation from each other, and by averaging our scores. We tried our best to ensure that our evaluation criteria were theoretically justifiable and up-to-date against the findings in the relevant fields. We believe that the procedures are as accountable and objective as possible. But we are in no way claiming that our evaluation results are definitive. A different team of reviewers would almost certainly produce a different set of criteria and evaluation results. In this sense, we reiterate the point in Tomlinson *et al.* (2001) about the limitations of pre-use evaluation:

Only a thorough whilst-use evaluation and a rigorous longitudinal post-use evaluation could reveal reliable evidence about the value of the courses in affecting learner attitudes and behaviour and ultimately in contributing to the development of the communicative competence of the learners. (p. 82)

What we are able to do in this review is to present our informed and collective predictions as to the likely value of the eight courses at intermediate level. (See Appendix for a summary of our evaluation results.)

### Overall coursebook criteria Publisher's claims

In general, the blurbs, promotional leaflets, and introductions in the teachers' books seem to us to be acceptably descriptive in their claims. It was felt, however, that *face2face*, *New English File*, and *Total English* were more form-focused and less communicative than they claimed. For example, *face2face* claims 'natural spoken English in context' in the blurb, Key feature 2, but most of the content seems to focus on explicit sentence level grammar teaching and practice. *Innovations* flags 'natural conversations' in the blurb but the authors explain in the introduction to the teacher's book that the texts are rewritten to include maximally useful vocabulary.

One noticeable omission in almost all the courses is a comprehensive statement of learning objectives. We looked for overall statements of 'what the course is aiming to achieve at intermediate level as an end product' so we could compare publisher's claims against the actual book, but all we found were page after page of descriptions of contents and of the different components. With the new trend towards multi-component courses including CD-ROMs, DVDs, and websites, we felt as if we were reading a catalogue rather than a description of a coherent educational course.

All the courses do refer to the level specification of the Common European Framework (CEF). *Total English*, for example, lists 'Can do' statements in its syllabus outline, claiming that 'The can do objectives give a purpose and reasons for learning'. Such European focus may make sense on the basis that, as Masuhara and Tomlinson (2008) point out, EFL coursebooks also



cater for the General English short course market in Europe. The CEF 'Can do' statements, however, may not be applicable for EFL users around the world.

As potential selectors and users, we would like to see a clear specification of goals and methodology plus an explanation of the measurement used to check whether objectives have been achieved.

## Flexibility

Many of the challenges for global EFL adult courses include satisfying learners in any country with different learning styles and preferences, background, and cultural orientation.

One way of tackling this challenge may be to acknowledge the fact that English is now turning into a global lingua franca, as *Framework* refreshingly acknowledges and takes measures to cater for. The 'native norm' often depicted in coursebooks is becoming less significant in a contemporary world where a majority of the communication is between non-native users of English (Graddol 2006). Addressing adult global English users leads to a shift in perspective: it influences the choice of topics, treatment of cultures, and varieties of English. In this sense, we welcome the efforts made by *Framework*, *Quick Smart English*, and *New English File* to include contemporary controversial texts or universal topics from various parts of the world. Note that many courses still seem to treat a particular 'western native variety' as a model but call it 'natural spoken English in context' (blurb, Key feature 2 in *face2face*), 'natural conversations' (blurb in *Innovations*), and 'relevant and authentic English' (blurb in *Straightforward*). The main concern of these courses seems to be to help the learners approximate their pronunciation and their use of vocabulary, grammar, and expressions to the prescribed norms.

Another way of trying to satisfy diverse users of global coursebooks may be to respect the intelligence and experience of the learners and teachers and encourage and help them to personalize and localize the content and activities. *Straightforward* offers adult contents and encourages the learners to think and speak/write their responses. It also encourages the use of the Internet to connect the classroom with 'real life'. We like *Just Right* and *Quick Smart English* because they offer interesting extensive texts that can be exploited for localization, but regrettably the tasks that follow require intensive reading and it is difficult to break the fixed sequence. The teacher's book for *Straightforward* gives more than one suggestion for approaching/presenting student book contents in class. We felt, however, that most of the courses offered little opportunity or encouragement for adapting the materials to the needs, wants, personalities, or styles of the learners or teachers. Suggestions for adaptation in the teacher's book would be welcomed for all the courses in order to increase the level of flexibility.

Trying to cater for different learning styles and preferences would be another way to satisfy any learners anywhere. Most of the courses, however, seem to focus on teaching discrete learning points that suit analytical learners, few of them provide activities for experiential learners, and none of them provide activities for kinaesthetic learners who prefer to learn through physical activity. The emphasis in most courses is on explicit teaching of declarative knowledge followed by controlled or guided practice (typical

PPP: Presentation-Practice-Production). Furthermore, a lack of extended texts and tasks makes it very difficult for the teacher to try to cater for experiential learners by changing the order or focus of the activities.

It seems to us that most of the courses are trying to provide flexibility by adding more and more separate components so that users can mix and match. Tomlinson *et al.* (2001) questioned the value and effectiveness of multi-component courses and warned against possible negative effects, such as writer and teacher exhaustion and unreasonable cost. The multi-component course seems to be here to stay and it now includes more sophisticated CD-ROMs, DVDs, and websites. If all users are privileged enough to be able to afford fast IT and bear the cost of expensive coursebook sets, such extras might be welcomed, but all the evaluators agree that this is not the norm at present.

We noted some fundamental problems with the multi-component course. First of all, the content maps are now very complicated, with information covering all the contents and components (see *Total English*, *Quick Smart English*, and *Straightforward*). As was mentioned in 'Publisher's claims' (above), the Introduction and the blurb read more like a catalogue. These ready-made supplements are supposed to help the teachers to minimize their preparation time but finding out what is available could itself become another chore for teachers.

Secondly, there seems to be a competition among the publishers to provide 'help for teachers', such as photocopiable extra materials, student portfolios, and test sheets. *Total English* and *Innovations* claim to offer authoring software for customizing tests. These tests, CD-ROMs, and DVDs, however, favour teaching and testing explicit and discrete knowledge. They are not suited for nurturing skills through experiential approaches, projects, and kinaesthetic activities, or for interactive face-to-face feedback, even though all of these approaches are recommended by researchers and methodologists in language learning (e.g. Tomlinson 1998; Ellis 2000; Doughty and Long 2003).

In this review, we have limited the scope to student's and teacher's books only. What we realized was that in some courses writing has been moved to a Workbook or CD-ROM (*Straightforward*, *face2face*, *Framework*). *Innovations* does not have a writing component at all. Learners who come to the UK for General English short courses may be more interested in listening and speaking but what will the consequence be for EFL learners overseas? A neglect of writing and a lack of feedback could mean a further decrease in opportunities for language acquisition.

We would like to urge publishers to consider the pros and cons very carefully in continuing with the multi-component course. It is possible to design books which can be used differently in different circumstances and which are economical and effective at the same time (e.g. Maley 1998).

## Syllabus

The comparison of content maps seems to reveal basic similarities in coverage across all the courses. Grammar and vocabulary are consistently included in every course. What is notable is the prominence given to vocabulary. In *face2face*, vocabulary is given equal importance to grammar.



*Straightforward* claims to offer a lexical syllabus and to place strong emphasis on vocabulary development (teacher's book: viii). *Total English* considers that vocabulary plays a central role in communication and thus offers revisions and practice of high-frequency useful vocabulary. *Innovations* emphasizes its strong focus on idiomatic use of the language such as 'collocations, fixed expressions and idiomatic language' (blurb). *New English File* gives the same prominence to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (introduction to the teacher's book). It is reassuring to know that courses are responding well to the recent developments in corpus-based studies.

Another welcoming trend seems to be renewed appreciation of function, that is, pragmatic use of language, e.g. in *face2face*, *Straightforward*, *Quick Smart English*, *Just Right*, and *Framework*. *Just Right* offers some activities in which learners are guided to pay attention to appropriacy of language use. We were very disappointed, however, to find that all the courses failed to recognize the fact that in real life there is a purpose for communication and we change how we communicate according to the target audience and the intended effect. Almost all the communication activities seemed to be 'classroom' activities and to lack purpose, specified audience, and real-life outcomes.

Most of the courses give much greater prominence to listening and speaking than they do to reading and writing. It seems to have been decided in most of the courses that classroom time should be spent mainly on listening and speaking practice. This may be due to the market demands from the General English users but it certainly works against EFL learners whose opportunities for exposure to language use is often very limited outside the class. What is especially worrying is the scarcity of extensive reading. For example, *Straightforward* combines listening and reading and *Innovations* uses the script from the listening activity as reading material. One of the negative consequences of downgrading reading is that in most courses there is no substantial content for the learners to respond to. The reading texts are usually too short or bland and offer very little for learners to think, speak, or write about. There are comparatively interesting extensive texts in *Just Right*, *Quick Smart English*, and *New English File* but even these texts have no more than seven paragraphs. Even worse still, the potential engagement of these interesting texts is often interfered with by comprehension questions that require intensive reading or by language-related exercises. We strongly regret that confusion still exists between 'teaching language using reading texts' and 'reading for real-life purposes' (Masuhara 2003).

#### Pedagogic approach

On the evaluation sheet we gave this section 30 per cent of the points given to the overall coursebook rating because we believe that sound pedagogic approaches facilitate intake and acquisition. The criteria in this section are linked with current thinking in language learning theories (Tomlinson 1998; Ellis 2000; Doughty and Long 2003).

The most obvious pedagogic feature of many of these courses is that they are teaching-centred rather than learning-centred and that they seem to assume that what is taught will be learnt. All the courses provide impressive

realistic portrayal of life and some controversial or serious topics, such as war and history, from different perspectives (e.g. *Just Right*, *Quick Smart English*, *Straightforward*, *Framework*). In our experience, serious topics, if treated sensitively, could induce surprisingly deep engagement among learners. Those who connect with the experience in the text even report cathartic effects. We would like to see more courses trying to use genuinely engaging texts and fully exploiting their cognitive and affective potential rather than spoiling them with mundane language exercises.

## Voice

In general, the voices of the authors in these courses are neutral and semi-formal. Research shows that a personal, friendly, and supportive voice seems to narrow the distance between the authors and the learners, to stimulate engagement with the content, and to create positive associations with learning (Beck, McKeown, and Worthy 1995; Tomlinson 1998). Many people though think that such a friendly approach may not be welcomed by those learners who respect teacher authority. However, three evaluators from Pakistan, China, and Japan independently felt that the learners would welcome a friendly approach from English textbooks and teachers. Let us take an experiential approach to see which style may work for you. The following examples are from three different courses:

**Example 1:** Fill in the gaps with the comparative or superlative form of the adjective in brackets.

**Example 2:** Look at this list of products that are often advertised with children in mind. How many more items can you add to it?

**Example 3:** Look at the photos and answer the questions.

1. Do you remember anything from your early childhood? If so, why?

Which one would you like to see if you were a student?

In Example 1, the learners are given an impersonal instruction in the voice of an expert talking to a novice, even though in many cases the adult EFL/GE learners have done such exercises thousands of times. The use of grammatical metalanguage makes the instructions even more distant.

Example 2 seems neutral but not unfriendly or disrespectful. A personalized way of eliciting the vocabulary ('How many can you add to it?') may seem more enticing than just being asked to write a list of vocabulary items. Some learners, on the other hand, may find it patronizing. Example 3 uses standard instructions but the question itself is personal and open.

These three kinds of voice are used in all the courses. However, there was a general tendency for *Quick Smart English*, *Total English*, and *Innovations* to address the learners directly in a supportive manner. *Just Right* and *Straightforward* use a neutral, safe, and generally friendly voice. *Face2face* and *New English File* tend to be neutral but possibly distant in a sense that their questions tend to be factual, for example, 'Now read the article. What does the writer say?'.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of choosing the right voice applies to the teacher's book as well. We liked the helpful but non-patronizing voice of *Straightforward* and



## Voice

realistic portrayal of life and some controversial or serious topics, such as war and history, from different perspectives (e.g. *Just Right*, *Quick Smart English*, *Straightforward*, *Framework*). In our experience, serious topics, if treated sensitively, could induce surprisingly deep engagement among learners. Those who connect with the experience in the text even report cathartic effects. We would like to see more courses trying to use genuinely engaging texts and fully exploiting their cognitive and affective potential rather than spoiling them with mundane language exercises.

In general, the voices of the authors in these courses are neutral and semi-formal. Research shows that a personal, friendly, and supportive voice seems to narrow the distance between the authors and the learners, to stimulate engagement with the content, and to create positive associations with learning (Beck, McKeown, and Worthy 1995; Tomlinson 1998). Many people though think that such a friendly approach may not be welcomed by those learners who respect teacher authority. However, three evaluators from Pakistan, China, and Japan independently felt that the learners would welcome a friendly approach from English textbooks and teachers. Let us take an experiential approach to see which style may work for you. The following examples are from three different courses:

**Example 1:** Fill in the gaps with the comparative or superlative form of the adjective in brackets.

**Example 2:** Look at this list of products that are often advertised with children in mind. How many more items can you add to it?

**Example 3:** Look at the photos and answer the questions.

1. Do you remember anything from your early childhood? If so, why?

Which one would you like to see if you were a student?

In Example 1, the learners are given an impersonal instruction in the voice of an expert talking to a novice, even though in many cases the adult EFL/GE learners have done such exercises thousands of times. The use of grammatical metalanguage makes the instructions even more distant.

Example 2 seems neutral but not unfriendly or disrespectful. A personalized way of eliciting the vocabulary ('How many can you add to it?') may seem more enticing than just being asked to write a list of vocabulary items. Some learners, on the other hand, may find it patronizing. Example 3 uses standard instructions but the question itself is personal and open.

These three kinds of voice are used in all the courses. However, there was a general tendency for *Quick Smart English*, *Total English*, and *Innovations* to address the learners directly in a supportive manner. *Just Right* and *Straightforward* use a neutral, safe, and generally friendly voice. *Face2face* and *New English File* tend to be neutral but possibly distant in a sense that their questions tend to be factual, for example, 'Now read the article. What does the writer say?'.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of choosing the right voice applies to the teacher's book as well. We liked the helpful but non-patronizing voice of *Straightforward* and



*Just Right*. However, the prescriptive tone of, for example, *face2face* and *Total English* was not too popular among the evaluators.

#### Instructions

It is very important that the instructions physically stand out. We recommend that instructions be written in a distinctively different font or colour, or in capital letters as in *face2face*, *Just Right*, *Innovations*, and *Framework*. In this sense, we find the instructions in *Quick Smart English*, *New English File*, and *Total English* to be in want of improvement.

Instructions are very difficult to write for anyone, regardless of skill or experience. Therefore, it would be advisable to ensure careful monitoring by third parties and trialling of the instructions. We did notice a lack of clarity and specificity in many of the instructions. For example, the instructions often did not make clear what was to be done and when, for example, *Quick Smart English*, p. 32; *face2face* 7a, p. 57; *Straightforward* Reading 1, p. 66; *Framework* Unit 4, p. 64. Too many instructions were given in one go, for example, *face2face* Activity 3, p. 21; *Just Right* Exercise 8, p. 27; *Total English* Unit 4, p. 49. The language for instructions was not consistent for each category of activity, for example, *Just Right* pair work, noticing, etc. Also, some instructions were very difficult to follow, for example, *Innovations*, p. 49.

#### Teachability

We use the term 'teachability', to refer to how courses help teachers with diverse personalities, backgrounds, and experience who are pressed for time and faced with seemingly endless work (Masuhara 1998). Most of the courses emphasize how they help teachers to minimize their preparation time. The main selling point these days seems to be the multi-component course which offers websites, photocopiable extra materials, ready-made tests that can be adapted, etc. As was pointed out in 'Flexibility' (above), flooding teachers with more and more extras does not necessarily help them, but could actually increase their workload.

We agree that the best help for teachers would be a clear, interesting, and effective student's book that never failed to give fun and pleasure to teachers as well as students. Teachers vary in experience, English proficiency, and confidence so what they need is a well-organized student's book with good instructions. We like a relaxed layout with a lot of space which helps to achieve a smooth sequence of teaching (e.g. *Just Right*). A cluttered and busy student's book, on the other hand, requires extra preparation to tackle the problem (e.g. *Quick Smart English*, *face2face*). Above all, great coursebooks can inspire, stimulate, and develop both students and teachers anywhere in any situation. Extensive use of engaging texts of various genres and text types, especially stories and literature on universal themes, never fails to fascinate learners and releases teachers from having to look for texts at great cost and time.

Also, we would appreciate a clear and easy-to-use teacher's book with succinct and good suggestions for effective teaching. *Straightforward* is closer than the others to our ideal. We rated *Framework* highly because it provided useful panels for mixed levels, alternatives, and background information in a very systematic and clear way. Dense information in the teacher's book is a turn off for busy teachers (e.g. *Quick Smart English*).

We do admit the fact that it is impossible for EFL/GE coursebook writers to cater for unknown global users. Therefore, it would make sense for the writers to offer choices and suggest ways of adapting materials. Teachers would really appreciate suggestions for personalization and localization, as well as matching the needs and wants of multi-level classes, etc. Very few of the courses, however, provide help in adapting the global course to specific situations, or cater for different teaching styles or personalities, or (most important of all) make efforts to make the courses interesting for the teachers. Such ideas in either the student's or the teacher's book would not require extra costs, risks, or expensive equipment that often does not work. We would look forward very much to such developments in the future.

**Coursebook-specific  
criteria  
Design**

Some of the courses were considered to be cluttered and dense with too much text crammed on to each page and not enough white space to provide relief and clarity. *Quick Smart English*, *face2face*, and *New English File* were noted in particular to have such a tendency. They lacked separation and sequencing clarity, and on some of their pages we found it very difficult to focus our attention (e.g. *Quick Smart English*, p. 9 and *New English File*, p. 71). On the other hand, we found that *Innovations*, *Just Right*, and *Total English* made good use of white space and tried to make the sequence and separation of their activities clear.

**Illustrations**

We were disappointed with the rather unimaginative use of illustrations in all the courses. We wondered where those varied, aesthetic, and interesting illustrations had gone since the quality of illustrations in coursebooks was highly praised in Tomlinson *et al.* (2001)? Where are the aesthetic paintings, simulated documents (e.g. papers, paperbacks), cartoons, and intriguing illustrations which created interesting discussions and useful activities? The illustrations seem to be smaller and more functional. Even headings and icons seem to have become smaller and insignificant.

Almost all the photos we see in the current courses seem to be things British or western (*Innovations*, *New English File*, *Just Right*, *face2face*, *Straightforward*), possibly biased toward young, healthy, and smiling faces. *Framework*, *Quick Smart English*, and *Total English* do though offer some variety of figures from different ethnic groups and different age ranges.

Some photos and illustrations serve no apparent function (*face2face*, *New English File*, *Straightforward*, *Innovations*). They are not particularly aesthetic or useful. They do not help to connect the language to the world or to the learners. The instructions, activities, and illustrations just do not seem to relate to each other.

**Reading texts**

We all agreed that in most of the courses the most notable and regrettable features of the reading texts were their brevity and restricted range of text types. The typical text is no more than half a page long and gives information. There might be the occasional email, or news clip, or magazine, but the content tends to be trivial. Around 2001, there were some coursebooks which had extensive reading sections or a supplement but this seems to have been replaced by references, portfolios, and tests. How do EFL learners develop reading skills or even the positive habit of reading? Free



voluntary reading has repeatedly resulted in general language acquisition (Tomlinson 2001; Krashen 2004) but none of the coursebooks we reviewed seemed to address such research findings.

#### Listening texts

Many of the courses in this review have managed to provide listening material which is realistic (not necessarily authentic), varied, and sometimes engaging. For example, the listening texts for Units 11, 15, 16, and 17 of *Quick Smart English* sound very realistic. *Straightforward*, *Total English*, and *Framework* replicate features of authentic spoken English. It is a pity that the listening texts are short and lack variety in *Total English*, *face2face*, *Just Right*, and *New English File*.

The genres used are mainly dialogues, interviews, and reports. What seem to be lacking are poems, stories, and some provocative texts. An engaging poem or a controversial story can not only provide opportunities for developing the skills required in experiential listening but also provide meaningful content on which to base subsequent speaking and writing activities. In our comments when reviewing these courses, we kept using such terms as 'short', 'too easy', 'contrived', and 'not engaging'.

#### Teacher's book-specific criteria

We found that there were basically three types of teacher's book:

- Those that gave answer keys but not much else and were uninteresting to read (i.e. *face2face* and *Innovations*).
- Those which gave clear and detailed procedures to the teacher for using the book but which were rather prescriptive and left very little room for the teacher to adapt and localize the course (i.e. *New English File* and *Total English*).
- Those which provided useful suggestions and choice for teachers as well as useful additional activities for the teacher to choose from (i.e. *Just Right*, *Straightforward*, and *Framework*).

Some evaluators liked the conciseness of the teacher's book for *Innovations* but thought the one for *Quick Smart English* to be too dense.

#### Specific evaluation of the individual courses

*Quick Smart English*  
(Brookemead Associates Limited)

All of the evaluators independently appreciated the fact that *Quick Smart English* tries to provide engaging and stimulating texts and personalized tasks in which adult learners exchange views.

What we like about it:

- The potential for engagement of texts and tasks (e.g. Unit 6 'You are being watched', Unit 9 'Give peace a chance').
- The global range of location, themes, and voices.
- The compact design with 'Language bank' flap and CD.
- The teacher's book offering links to authentic media websites.

What we do not like about it:

- Too much help seems to be given to make the tasks less complicated and easier.
- Portfolio writing does not prepare for real-life writing with specific readers and purposes.

- Interesting questions, discussions, and tasks do not often lead to any real-life outcomes and often the next activity follows with a different focus.
- It claims to have a CLIL component but just uses typical school subjects as topics.
- Pages appear too busy and cluttered.
- The restricted variety of text types and genres (many reporting and informative texts).
- The lack of function of many of the illustrations.
- It does not always provide what it promises in the blurb, for example 'Grammar supplement' for all units.

We gave *Quick Smart English* an overall average rating of 69.7 per cent.

#### *face2face* (Cambridge University Press)

Some of us liked *face2face* but none of us rated it very highly. The words frequently used in the evaluators' comments included 'very short texts', 'prescriptive', 'explicit teaching', and 'easy practice'.

What we like about it:

- The layout of the student's book helps teachers to identify the vocabulary, grammar (central strand), and other teaching points.
- The teacher's book has a lot of photocopiable materials.
- The CD-ROM allows for multimedia access and variety.
- The CD-ROM allows learners to check their own progress and customize tests, as in 'My portfolio' in the student's book, p. 160.

What we do not like about it:

- The excessive focus on language form.
- The lack of real-life tasks.
- The short texts and the often very controlled activities.
- The main focus of this coursebook appears to be giving information about grammar and vocabulary. The authors seem to assume that 'teaching = learning', which is contradictory to what we know about language acquisition in that learners learn best when they are exposed to comprehensible input in a motivated and engaged manner and when they get to use language rather than just practise it.

We gave *face2face* an overall average rating of 56.4 per cent.

#### *Straightforward* (Macmillan)

We liked many aspects of *Straightforward* but, above all, we rated highly how it seemed to respect the intelligence of the learners and teachers. We also appreciated the interesting personal introduction and useful advice in the teacher's book.

What we like about it:

- It provides a wide variety of authentic/semi-authentic texts.
- Attempts are made to make the tasks authentic and real life.
- The student's book has personalized 'thinking' and 'productive' activities which are likely to be both affectively and intellectually engaging for adult learners.
- It offers possibilities for localization by the teachers and students.
- It provides useful language and cultural notes.



- The teacher's book gives more than one suggestion for presenting the student's book contents in class.
- There are web search tasks which are a good way of extending learning into 'real life' if learners are not doing the course in an English-speaking country.

What we do not like about it:

- The engagement potential of a text is often interrupted by conventional language practice (e.g. Unit 5 'Hard sell grammar', p. 47).
- The lack of real-life outcomes after interesting discussions.
- The lack of a feedback/results button on the CD-ROM for unit activities.

We gave *Straightforward* an overall average rating of **71.9 per cent**.

*Just Right* (Marshall Cavendish)

All the evaluators appreciated the clear explanation of principles and methodology that underlie *Just Right* in the teacher's book. We also liked the use of white space and uncluttered layout that facilitate a smooth transition from one activity to the next.

What we like about it:

- It offers interesting and engaging extensive texts.
- It tries to cater for students of mixed backgrounds and abilities and offers extras and alternatives.
- It offers lots of revision and recycling.
- There are some awareness activities that encourage discovery.
- The listening texts are quite 'real' in terms of speed of delivery and the emotions in the voices.
- Its attractive illustrations are often usefully functional.

What we do not like about it:

- The extended texts are often followed by intensive reading/listening tasks.
- There are no target real-life outcomes for tasks.
- The focus is more at sentence level than discourse.
- The texts and tasks generally seem to be written from western perspectives.

We gave *Just Right* an overall average rating of **68.5 per cent**.

*New English File* (Oxford University Press)

The evaluators agreed in their independent ratings that *New English File* offers interesting and affective topics. We also liked the fact that it pays attention to learning outside the class by making a clear link with the workbook, the multi-ROM, and websites.

What we like about it:

- The language learning points are presented in connection to the texts.
- It attempts to engage affect with a lot of personalized questions in response to interesting texts.
- It allows for different learning styles via multimedia components.
- Teaching contents and methodologies are systematically and clearly presented in the teacher's book.
- It addresses the needs of intermediate learners in the introduction to the teacher's book.

*Total English*  
(Pearson Longman)

What we do not like about it:

- The predominant focus on language forms—with not enough attention to language in use.
- It uses a lot of informational texts such as magazines or newspaper articles but not many other genres.
- It is very prescriptive in a sense that all learners in the class are expected to attempt all activities.
- There are no suggestions in the student's book or teacher's book to extend learning beyond the classroom.
- The limitations imposed by the brevity of the texts.
- The multi-ROM does not allow learners to move on to the next item in the grammar quiz until the current one is correct.
- Although the multi-ROMs are helpful, they assume users' easy access to computers.
- A lot of components could mean more cost, which makes this course less affordable.

We gave *New English File* an overall average rating of 63.3 per cent.

Some evaluators liked *Total English* more than others. The level specification of the CEF is commonly used nowadays but *Total English* highlights 'Can do' statements in the map as well as in the units. We were not sure, however, if we agreed with the authors' claim that 'Can do' objectives give 'a purpose and reason for learning' (introduction to the teacher's book).

What we like about it:

- It addresses 'classroom realities' based on 'research', such as students missing classes, not having clear objectives or directions in learning.
- It does encourage personalization.
- It offers a choice of media as well as workbooks and a film bank to support the student's book.
- The teacher's book includes a lot of photocopiable worksheets and props for activities, which some teachers may welcome.
- The 'Test masters' CD-ROM offers five types of tests which can be adapted.

What we do not like about it:

- The limitations imposed by the short and easy texts.
- It offers very little exposure to language in use.
- The learners are likely to have very little opportunity to use language.
- The lack of opportunities for learners to make discoveries for themselves.
- The excessive focus in all the components on the explicit teaching of grammar rules at sentence level. The 'Test masters' CD-ROM and photocopiable worksheets may further reinforce this tendency.
- The assumption seems to be that providing input and testing will ensure learning, which is contradictory to what second language acquisition studies seem to indicate.

We gave *Total English* an overall average rating of 61.5 per cent.

*Innovations*  
(Thomson)

We liked *Innovations* in that it departs from the conventional grammar-based syllabus and attempts to provide a 'language-rich lexical/grammatical



syllabus' which, according to the authors, helps the learners fulfill their wish to understand and speak natural spoken English. The authors also explain that the texts derive from authentic articles but have been rewritten to include maximally useful vocabulary and collocations and to elicit some kind of personal response. The use of such enriched texts is controversial but we did note that some texts were engaging.

What we like about it:

- It provides a lot of examples of the idiomatic use of language, such as collocations, fixed expressions, and idiomatic language.
- The layout is clear and predictable and therefore easy to navigate, even for students with a different text direction in their L1.
- The 'Expression organiser' at the end of the student's book allows learners to add their own phrases and collocations.
- There is a concise no-nonsense approach to describing the course.

What we do not like about it:

- The lack of extensive texts could lead to very little rich exposure to language in real use. The reading texts are very short and there is often only one listening text in a unit. This may cause problems in EFL contexts where the classroom is the only source of exposure to the target language.
- The predominant use of western and urban spoken models may not suit all levels, curriculum objectives, or cultures.
- Mimicking and memorizing the lexical chunks and expressions seem to be the underlying language learning philosophy.
- The lack of variety of genres and text types.
- The neglect of writing skills.
- Both the student's book and the teacher's book are very prescriptive and explicit.

We gave *Innovations* an overall average rating of 67.1 per cent.

#### Framework (Richmond Publishing)

There are many things which we all liked about *Framework* and we would happily recommend it and use it ourselves. We especially liked the fact that the introduction to the teacher's book discusses not only what the course provides as input but also how it tries to maximize learners' intake.

What we like about it:

- It attempts to engage affect by giving ample opportunities for personal response.
- It offers a lot of personalization and encourages learners to relate to their own world experience and views.
- The topics are contemporary, global, and often thought provoking.
- World English speakers are included in the audio materials.
- A clear account is given of how the World English news broadcast DVD can be used in relation to the student's book.
- The priority is given to experiencing the texts prior to language discovery and practice.
- The realism of the world created by the course (e.g. argument and competition as well as agreement and cooperation).

- Learner autonomy is emphasized throughout the course as can be found in its discovery approach to language and language use, self-evaluation tests, and language portfolio on the Web.
- The teacher's book is clear and helpful for both new and experienced teachers with the provision of useful panels such as mixed ability, common mistakes, and alternatives.
- A clear and easy to see content map that links different components.

What we do not like about it:

- The student's book itself does not seem to include many extensive texts. The website link to Richmond graded readers is enticing but not all the global learners may have easy access to the Internet.
- The limited range of genres and text types, and the brevity of many of the texts.
- There does not seem to be any focused provision for learners with different abilities in aural and literacy skills.

We gave *Framework* an overall average rating of 71.8 per cent.

After our rigorous evaluation of the eight courses, our conclusion is that we would all be happy to teach or recommend *Framework* and *Straightforward* as our first choices with *Just Right* and *Innovations* as second choices, as they are all genuinely adult courses with the potential to motivate both teachers and learners.

See Appendix for a summary of the scores which each course was given for each criterion heading.

### General trends in current courses

#### Positive trends

We all agreed that we had noticed and welcomed the following positive trends in course development:

- Broadening the perspectives of English. Reinterpretation of 'native English' in relation to 'global English' (*Framework*, *Quick Smart English*). This has led to the inclusion of a wider range of accents, genres, and personality types in the audio-visual components of these courses.
- A greater attempt to create 'reality' in the texts (*Framework* and *Total English*).
- Adult content and tasks which require intellectual and/or affective investment from the learners (*Straightforward*, *Just Right*, *Framework*).
- An increase in attempts to personalize the learning process by getting learners to relate topics and texts to their own lives, views, and feelings (*Framework*, *Straightforward*, *Quick Smart English*). Emphasis on learner autonomy as in the use of learning portfolio and self-assessment (*Framework*).
- Attempts to reflect the recent theoretical developments such as corpus studies. More focus on lexical grammar and pragmatic use of language in real life.
- Better quality teacher's books, which are easier to see and which treat teachers with respect and offer ideas for alternative or extra activities (*Just Right*, *Straightforward*, *Framework*).
- A multiple trialling of the materials, as evidenced by the lists of acknowledgements to the institutions involved in the trialling.



All the above are welcome trends, but we all agree that most of them could go even further and become more widespread across all courses.

#### Negative trends

We also agreed that we shared concerns about what we considered to be the following negative trends:

- In trying to satisfy GE learners in Europe and EFL learners all over the world, courses are not satisfying the needs and wants of either group (see Masuhara and Tomlinson 2008; Tomlinson and Masuhara 2008).
- Lack of comprehensive and coherent statements of overall learning objectives for all the courses. How do CEF specifications relate to EFL learners? What does the whole course aim to achieve? What are all the extras and components for in relation to the objectives? We could not find any answers.
- Scarcity of engaging and extensive reading and listening texts. Lack of poems, literature, and stories that stimulate, entertain, and fascinate teachers as well as students. Even if the tasks and activities fail, EFL teachers and learners can enjoy the texts and be exposed to language in use. We would like to remind the course producers of the many claims by methodologists of the potential value and appeal of literature supporting our point (e.g. Tomlinson 2001; Maley and Duff 2007).
- The lack of aesthetic illustrations that have educational value.
- The neglect of the value of extensive writing as a means of self-expression, creativity, and life skills. Writing could give purpose to reading and language discovery. Feedback and revision provides individual development opportunities.
- The scarcity of real tasks which have an intended outcome other than just the practice of language forms.
- The neglect of activities which could make full use of the resources of the mind by stimulating multi-dimensional mental responses which are at the same time sensory, cognitive, and affective (e.g. Masuhara 2005).
- The lack of activities aiming to stimulate the imagination of the learners.
- Claiming to offer a discovery approach to language but actually offering disguised grammar teaching which usually consists of helping learners to reach a predetermined answer and then asking them to check the answer in a grammar summary (e.g. *face2 face*).
- The apparent abandonment of the extended project as a means of engaging learners in motivated and meaningful encounters with the target language in use.
- The continuing predominance of analytical activities and a neglect of activities which could cater for learners with other preferred learning styles (e.g. kinaesthetic activities).
- The overwhelming increase in the number of multi-components in all the courses with a noticeable drop in creative energy for each component (either from author fatigue or from bringing in extra writers, who may not be core members of the team, to write workbooks, etc.). The ready-made photocopiable materials and tests could lead to unprincipled explicit teaching of discrete item grammar and disguised language drills of trivial content at the cost of overall development of skills and educational development.

## Conclusion

We would like to acknowledge the qualities of many of the components of the courses we have evaluated. We were all delighted by the move towards stimulating more personal responses from the learners, pleased by attempts to try to simulate real communication, impressed by the realism of many of the audio-visual components and by the use of the Internet.

Coming from differing backgrounds and knowing both privileged and underprivileged EFL classroom situations, however, we all urge materials producers to re-appreciate the value of the core student's and teacher's books. As teachers ourselves, what we want is a student's book which stimulates, fascinates, excites, entertains, inspires, challenges, and helps both students and teachers to develop. We want a teacher's book which succinctly and clearly shows ways of effective and principled teaching that satisfies language learning theories. In our view, what teachers want are not prescriptions but good texts, advice, and suggestions so that they can personalize, localize, and adapt the global coursebooks to suit their learners in their classrooms.

## References

- Arnold, J. 1999. *Affect in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beck, I. L., M. G. McKeown, and J. Worthy. 1995. 'Giving a text voice can improve students' understanding'. *Reading Research Quarterly* 30/2: 220-238.
- Doughty, C. J. and H. Long. 2003. *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ellis, R. 2000. *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graddol, D. 2006. *English Next*. London: British Council.
- Helgesen, M. 2007. 'Notes from the Apocrypha'. *Folio* 11/2: 9.
- Krashen, S. 2004. *The Power of Reading* (2nd edition). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 2001. 'Grammar' in R. Carter and D. Nunan. *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maley, A. 1998. 'Squaring the circle—reconciling materials as constraint with materials as empowerment' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maley, A. and A. Duff. 2007. *Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Masuhara, H. 1998. 'What do teachers really want from coursebooks?' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masuhara, H. 2003. 'Materials for developing reading skills' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. London: Continuum Press.
- Masuhara, H. 2005. 'Helping learners to achieve multi-dimensional mental representation in L2 reading'. *Folio* 9/2: 6-9.
- Masuhara, H. and B. Tomlinson. 2008. 'English for General English' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *English Language Materials Learning—A Critical Review*. London: Continuum.
- McGrath, I. 2002. *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. 1998. 'Introduction' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. 2001. 'Beginning to read forever'. *Reading in a Foreign Language* 13/1: 523-38.
- Tomlinson, B. 2003. *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. London: Continuum Press.
- Tomlinson, B., B. Dat, H. Masuhara, and R. Rubdy. 2001. 'Review of adult EFL courses'. *ELT Journal* 55/1: 80-101.
- Tomlinson, B. and H. Masuhara. 2008. 'Materials used in the UK' in B. Tomlinson (ed.). *English Language Learning Materials—A Critical Review*. London: Continuum.
- Viney, P. 2007. 'Author test'. *Folio* 11/2: 25-7.

## The reviewers

Hitomi Masuhara has coordinated this reviewing team. She is a Visiting Fellow at Leeds Metropolitan University and Secretary of MATSDA (the Materials Development Association). Her main interests include the role of the brain in language acquisition, materials, and teacher development. She has



presented at numerous international conferences in five continents. Her publications include eight coursebooks, journal articles (e.g. *ELTJ*, *MET*), book chapters on materials development and language learning (e.g. Cambridge University Press, 1998; Continuum, 2003, 2007, and 2008), and books (e.g. *Developing Language Course Materials* 2004, RELC).  
Email: hitomi.masuhara@gmail.com

**Naeema Hann** teaches languages at Leeds Metropolitan University and has produced resources for and managed ESOL, work-based ESOL, Community Languages and Bilingual programmes. As public relations officer for National Council for the Development of Urdu (NCDU), Naeema was the editor of the bilingual journal *Urdutimesuk*. She delivers training for CILT (The National Centre for Languages), Natecla, and Becta. Naeema teaches English to adults including refugees. Her interests include progression and literacy in L1 for ESOL learners.  
Email: N.Hann@leedsmet.ac.uk

**Yong Yi** is a PhD student and language tutor at Leeds Metropolitan University. She also holds

a professorship in Qufu Normal University in China, where she used to be involved in EFL teaching and teacher training. She has published articles on EFL learning and teaching. Her current interests include the role of the brain in writing in EFL.

Email: y.yi@leedsmet.ac.uk

**Brian Tomlinson** is Visiting Professor at Leeds Metropolitan University and Founder and President of MATSDA (the Materials Development Association). He has worked in language education and teacher development in Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Vanuatu, and Zambia and has given conference presentations in over 40 countries. His numerous publications include *Discover English* with Rod Bolitho (Macmillan), *Openings* (Penguin), *Materials Development in Language Teaching* (ed.) (Cambridge University Press), *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* (ed.) (Continuum), *Language Acquisition and Development* (ed.) (Continuum), and *English Language Teaching Materials* (ed.) (Continuum).  
Email: brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com

## Appendix

Publishers	Brookemead Associates Limited	Cambridge University Press	Macmillan	Marshall Cavendish	Oxford University Press	Pearson/ Longman	Thompson	Richmond Publishing
	<i>Quick Smart English</i>	<i>face2face</i>	<i>Straight-forward</i>	<i>Just Right</i>	<i>New English File</i>	<i>Total English</i>	<i>Innovations</i>	<i>Framework</i>
Total grade	625 61.9%	56.4%	71.9%	68.5%	63.3%	61.5%	67.1%	71.8%
Overall coursebook	425 62.2%	55.9%	78.8%	67.8%	62.6%	60.6%	67.0%	70.9%
Publisher's claim	40 67.5%	65.6%	80.6%	77.5%	76.9%	68.1%	76.3%	79.4%
Flexibility	100 65.3%	51.3%	74.0%	66.8%	54.0%	60.0%	62.8%	69.8%
Syllabus	60 60.0%	57.9%	71.7%	67.9%	64.6%	62.9%	71.3%	72.1%
Pedagogic approach	125 59.2%	54.0%	67.8%	66.0%	62.6%	58.2%	65.0%	69.8%
Topic contents	25 67.0%	58.0%	69.0%	66.0%	62.0%	63.0%	65.0%	71.0%
Voice	20 67.5%	60.0%	73.8%	67.5%	70.0%	63.8%	67.5%	70.0%
Instructions	20 61.3%	63.8%	67.5%	71.3%	67.5%	60.0%	80.0%	70.0%
Teachability	35 64.3%	52.9%	71.4%	65.7%	61.4%	55.7%	62.1%	67.9%
Student's book specific	150 61.8%	56.2%	68.7%	68.5%	64.8%	64.2%	66.2%	73.8%
Design	35 59.3%	57.9%	75.7%	77.1%	70.0%	67.1%	77.1%	73.6%
Illustration	30 56.7%	55.0%	65.0%	63.3%	68.3%	69.2%	68.3%	77.5%
Reading text	40 64.4%	53.8%	67.5%	66.9%	65.6%	60.6%	61.3%	75.0%
Listening text	45 65.0%	57.8%	66.7%	66.7%	57.8%	61.7%	60.6%	70.6%
Teacher's book specific	50 59.4%	62.2%	81.1%	74.4%	65.0%	60.0%	70.6%	73.3%