

extra tasks, unit tests and photocopiable activities and there is background information to assist the teacher. There are also tapescripts, answer keys, tips on how to teach the different activities and advice on how to use the materials with mixed level classes, something newer teachers will certainly appreciate. At the front of the book, information is provided on the aims of the course, the methodology used and how the coursebook is structured. The authors state the importance of providing opportunities for students to use new vocabulary in context, to try out functional language in authentic role play scenarios and they also talk about how to teach the various components of the course, how to deal with pronunciation and the importance of correcting errors. As they say, "poor pronunciation and intonation in English are as great a barrier to comprehension as grammatical and lexical inaccuracies" (xii).

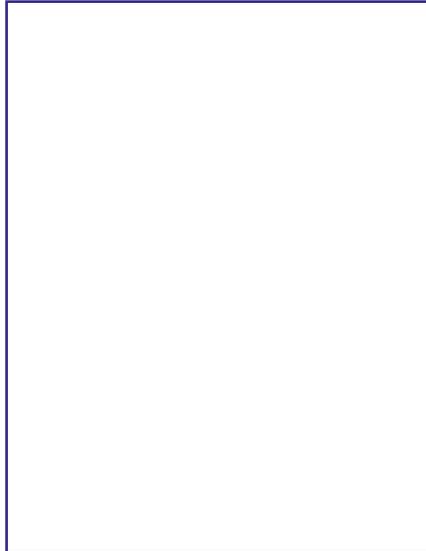
I liked *Flashlight 1* and the spirit in which it was written. Coursebooks that reflect a global perspective are always welcome on my book shelf!

Sandee Thompson

Sandee Thompson is the Director of Studies and Teacher Trainer at a private language school on Canada's east coast. She is especially interested providing the students and teachers at her school with innovative, motivating, do-able tasks.

The Business (Upper Intermediate)

John Allison and Jeremy Townend with Paul Emmerson
Macmillan 2008
See page 83 for details



One of the funniest and at the same time saddest things about our times is the way opposition political parties who have spent years bitterly criticising the government for allowing (nay, willing) education to be dumbed down suddenly do a U-turn when they find themselves in office, and passionately defend the "increasing standards of excellence in achievement" of kids in school. Nowadays, in the British GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams, 16-year-olds get three points out of a total 91 for correctly answering questions like: "Describe what customers need to do to receive a delivery service from an Indian take-away restaurant."¹ Tough, eh? You can almost hear George Orwell chuckling in his grave. How about questions that ask you to describe: "your own Saturday leisure activities and the time you spend on them" (four marks) or: "what is meant by a short-break holiday" (two marks).² Yet we would be wrong to assume that ELT is immune from this tendency. Coming away from a seminar on the new First Certificate (Dec

2008) early this year, and feeling that Cambridge ESOL were again in denial about dumbing down their flagship exam, I asked nine very experienced teachers to grade on a scale of 1-5 (where 5 is an A pass and 3 a C pass) the sample answer we'd been given in the seminar to look at. Like me, they all felt it to be a borderline pass or fail, but in fact the official grade was a 4. A wilfully misunderstood concept of *Task achievement* has widened the goalposts beyond belief. Nor has published Business English material entirely escaped this trend; consider the low engagement level of the texts and tasks, the superficial exercises on most pages of the coursebooks we use, the overlarge, pretty photos, the vast expanses of aesthetic white space, entire pages with just two short tasks/controlled practice exercises. We flit over the surface, put the words in the box in the right sentence and then move on. We seldom get down to the nitty gritty. It's as if we expected our learners to have attention deficit disorder.

Which is why this newish title from Macmillan comes as such a relief. This is not light on engagement. There is more on most of its two page spreads than you'd find in a unit of most other coursebooks. Most pages have around seven tasks/steps/exercises. It flies in the face of some of our sacred cows, for example, by reproducing an article arguing that Fair trade is a bad deal. As an adult who believes the opposite, I immediately want to read the article. I feel engaged. Controversy creates interest, but scares the pants off most ELT editors. *The Business Upper-Intermediate* comes across as the kind of coursebook you'd like to use if you were serious about studying and learning, about acquiring the language and skills to enable you really to perform these jobs in English. This is not a coursebook where you'd come away from a unit thinking *Is that it?*

Far from it; in fact there are only eight units in this book. Each is 12 pages long, and breaks down into six double-page spreads (sorry, I must remember

1. Leisure and Tourism GCSE paper, quoted by Julie Henry, Education Correspondent, The Observer 28/08/2005.

2. Ibid.

“*The Business Upper-Intermediate* comes across as the kind of coursebook you'd like to use if you were serious about studying and learning, about acquiring the language and skills to enable you really to perform these jobs in English.”

that my readership went through the educational system when it was a bit more demanding) on: About Business, with information and language for the topic area (talk, text, listen, talk, sort of thing) including a rather long reading text, though at least these texts are not from the same media source; Vocabulary (plenty of input and plenty of chances to use it, more listening, more short texts); Grammar and Functions (eight to ten steps or activities); Speaking (again, eight to ten tasks); Writing (ditto), with some excellent building stages and ideas; and finally a Multi-skill case study. “Where’s the listening?” you say. It’s everywhere; every two-page spread has at least one listening activity. There are two densely-packed review pages after every two units. If you were to do it all, it would be a heck of a lot to get through; I did a quick reckoning that a unit could easily keep you going through 36 hours of class time, and that’s without factoring in the huge amount of material on the DVD-ROM, which is included with the Student’s Book, the two pages of controlled Grammar and Practice exercises at the back of the Student’s Book, the 3-4 extra activities per unit in the same place, or indeed the additional photocopiable material at the back of the Teacher’s Book. A flimsy package it ain’t. The only thing that strikes me as being missing here is some kind of attention to the phonological system of the language, *aka* pronunciation, surely as likely to interfere with communication of the message as hit-or-miss grammar or imprecise lexis.

Looking a bit more closely at the spreads in the Student’s Book, it has things that you probably won’t have come across elsewhere; where most Business English coursebooks settle for microscopic factoids to break the monotony of the very wide margins, *The Business* offers an Internet Research Task on every spread, and the Grammar pages have a concise language box called Refresh Your Memory, which also points you to Grammar and Practice pages at the back of the book. Potentially difficult or peripheral items of lexis that appear in texts are printed in grey and appear in the Glossary in alphabetical order per unit and are colour coded by the section where they occur first in the book. This careful attention to detail is for me a hallmark of *The Business*.

Another aspect in which I think *The Business* has got it right is in the consciously international feel. You’ll find more references to Africa, Asia and Latin America here than in just about every other Business English coursebook combined. It’s a very attractive artefact in visual terms too; despite having a large amount of material on each page, it doesn’t come across as cluttered at all. The photos and other artwork are well

selected and not suspiciously large. The design team – those people who have a huge influence on the final feel of a book but who are seldom acknowledged by the end users – deserve high praise for their work on *The Business*.

Frustratingly though, the class CD doesn’t tell you what unit or task you’re on, just Tapescript 23, etc. More seriously, and this issue is by no means limited to this title, but when I dipped into Unit 5 (Selling more) and was doing the Listening on page 64, you know the sort of thing:

‘Listen to the three conversations between sales representatives and their customers. Decide which salesperson makes each of the following mistakes:

- a) criticizing the competition;
- b) giving in to pressure;
- c) overreacting and threatening the customers.’

I found that the class had a fairly obvious obstacle to overcome, i.e. What are the three short dialogues about? Yes, we know the roles, we know the overall communicative purpose of the interaction, and we know that the sales rep is going to make a hash of it in one of the three ways, but we don’t know what he/she is trying to sell, which is obviously going to have an impact on just about everything, including the choice of lexis. This lack of context is what the learner struggles with first, and it gets in the way of trying to answer the questions. As I say, this failing is widespread. How can we get round it? Maybe by having a lead-in task that establishes that in dialogue 1 someone is trying to sell an expensive swimming pool to a private individual, in the second an IT program that costs \$32,000 (though why both the rep and the buyer are Brits when talking dollars is a bit strange), and in the third someone is being badgered into joining a health/fitness club (the kind of thing we once – in the days before they played

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thumping pop/rock – called a *gym*). Alternatively, we could simply *tell* the students what the context is. *Gosh*.

No Workbook? Well, you'd hardly need one, but there is a DVD-ROM with a huge amount of short – and entertaining – authentic video material helpfully handled with a vast range of tasks. What else is on the DVD-ROM?: the class audio, tests, model business documents, a grammar reference, downloadable docs, as well as problem-solving games. The Teacher's Book, apart from all the things you'd expect, gives you a generous 23 pages of additional material, as well as a Subject Background introduction at the start of every unit. Thorough or what?

The Contents page in the Student's Book could hardly be clearer, and the unit headings are nicely transparent, but here is one thing I feel the editors have short-changed us on; if I'm looking for something on, say, Telephoning, or

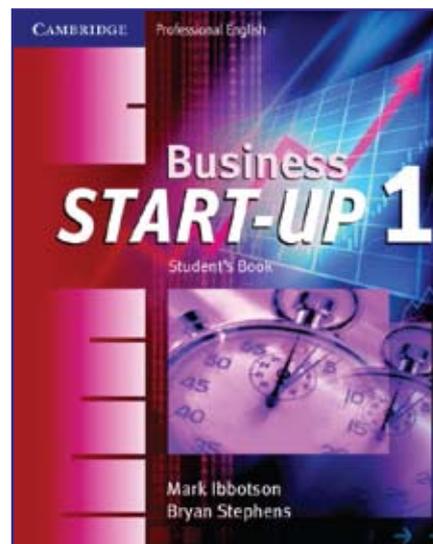
apologizing for a mix-up with an order or an arrangement, I have no way of finding it. But this is small carping; there is so much going for *The Business* that I wish I'd had it a year ago when I was choosing a coursebook for a group of young, intelligent business students, surely the ideal market for *The Business*, learners who are keen to achieve a little more in their careers than those young Britons doing the Health and Social care GCSE who the government thinks will be sufficiently challenged by tasks that ask them to identify: “two different family relationships”.

Brian Brennan

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Business Start Up 1

Mark Ibbotson and Bryan Stephens
Cambridge University Press 2006
See page 83 for details



The development process of textbooks takes so long nowadays that it wasn't until I noticed a mention of my name at the back of this book that I realised it was the same book that I had reviewed pre-publication quite a few years ago. I remember telling people to look out for it every time they complained about the lack of a really low-level business English course. However, so much time has passed that I completely forgot about it and started making those complaints myself.

So, is *Business Start Up 1* worth the wait? Simply put, yes. It fills exactly that gap we have been moaning about as it is useable with even complete beginners, but with enough emphasis on interesting and natural language and communication that elementary students would also learn a lot. While the course isn't perfect, those factors alone make it stand out.

Business Start Up 1 has 12 units taking students from saying “Hello” and the alphabet in Welcome to discussing sales and orders in Sales. Each unit is divided into three double-paged spreads, like Exchanging information by email, Making telephone calls and Talking about the weather and climate for Unit 9 Communication. As you can see from these titles, the authors haven't neglected the general English that lower