

# Introduction

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## The Why of This Book

*Achieving Competency in English: A Life Skills Approach* began more than 30 years ago as I, a new teacher, saw my adult foreign students struggle with the mysteries and complications of how to live in America while they learned English. It seemed obvious that those two problems could be addressed simultaneously. My students asked me questions about their daily lives and shared their embarrassments and problems, and I wrote vocabulary and grammar lessons that would answer those questions.

Foreign students are still struggling with the exact same issues today. Now those issues have a name: SCANS and CASAS Life Skill Competencies.

Thus, the second edition of *Achieving Competency in English: A Life Skills Approach*—a book written to give the intermediate adult student competency in both English and life skills. (The first edition was titled *Competency in English: A Life Skill Approach*.)

## The How of This Book

Learning about American culture while learning English is a stimulating and necessary experience for students. The concepts and vocabulary in this book will be constantly reinforced when students leave their classrooms and go out into the “real world.”

The book has ten chapters. Chapters address the most basic competencies needed for students to function in an English-speaking community, such as:

- the American culture of meeting people
- basic information on social interaction
- the practical needs of how to use a bank, the post office, etc.
- how to get a job
- what to say to a doctor

Each chapter has a Reading Readiness opener and six parts. The opener consists of two pages with pictures to introduce the theme of the chapter and the key vocabulary. The pictures lend themselves to informal, nonthreatening class discussions, in which the teacher can elicit comments from the students while introducing some new vocabulary.

Section 1 contains two reading passages in which new and crucial vocabulary appears in a cultural context relevant to the adult foreign student. The students learn the vocabulary, sometimes from the context. The choice of vocabulary may be of interest: The words taught are a result of more than 15 years of classroom testing of this material with my adult students. I include those words my students routinely struggled with or did not know before using this book. Of course, you may find different words cause trouble for your students, and you may decide to teach some other words in the reading. The passages can be used for listening comprehension and/or for reading. After each passage is read (silently by the students or aloud by the teacher), several true/false questions test the students' listening comprehension and generate discussion. A vocabulary reinforcement exercise follows, providing additional contexts/examples of the vocabulary items as they reinforce the theme of the chapter. Thought-provoking cross-cultural discussion questions are presented that can be done as a class, in groups, in pairs, or even assigned for written work. Section 1 ends with a crossword puzzle that also reinforces the newly learned vocabulary.

Section 2 of each chapter reinforces the vocabulary and cultural concepts of Section 1 by describing real-life experiences that are directly relevant to the ESL student of today. Again, these situations can be discussed with the whole class, in groups, or in pairs. If the students are confident enough in their English, they can even organize panel discussions or debates to be presented to the whole class.

Section 3 presents conversation practice using real-life expressions that the students can use and will hear in their daily experiences, on television, and in the movies. There are many role-playing activities. Again, these can be done as a class, in groups, or in pairs.

Section 4 contains realia and writing components that emphasize practical tasks such as filling out forms or applications, writing checks, etc. It may also contain cartoons, short newspaper articles, and other features, depending on the topic of the chapter.

Section 5 is designed to help the student learn how to read the graphs, charts, and maps that are so very prevalent in the daily life of America, and a necessary skill for those students who will pursue academic courses and professions. The statistics found in the charts will surprise and raise the consciousness of the students as to the dangers of tobacco smoke, the rising consumption of sugar, and the like.

Section 6 includes suggestions for the continuation of independent learning outside the classroom. This reinforces the concepts in the chapter and gives the student a sense of ownership of his or her English and the idea that learning English is the same as living English—it must be practiced in the real world in real situations. Many names, addresses, and websites of community and national resources are provided.

I have tried to make this a non-threatening, realistic conversational book that is stimulating, helpful, and real—and fun for both the teacher and the student. It is my hope that both teachers and students enjoy learning from this book as much as my students and I enjoyed creating it.