

# To the Instructor

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Mixed-level classes are a challenge for even the most experienced instructor. They present not only a mixture of levels, but a mixture of goals that often seem to work against each other. For example, you may recognize that each level of students needs a different approach or different materials, and yet you want to create a classroom atmosphere that is inclusive for all students, regardless of proficiency level. You may want to develop the best materials for each student's needs and progress, yet your time or curriculum limits what you can do for students at different levels, leaving you feeling pulled in different directions.

This book was written with these competing goals in mind. In addition, it focuses on turning the conflict between goals into potentially powerful learning opportunities. Mixed-level classes, for example, provide a wonderful opportunity for students to challenge themselves, to learn to communicate with a wide variety of speakers, and to fill in the gaps in their learning, no matter what their level. By focusing on language at their own levels and then broadening the discussion to include a larger group, students develop confidence in their abilities.

I also hope that through using this text, instructors and students alike will reconsider the idea of “level” to some extent. Students often have strengths and weaknesses with different skills or even different topics. Their former education or job skills may have given them a background that makes them “advanced” in some areas and “beginning” in others. *Step It Up* can also address the needs of learners who do not fall into neat categories and may find doing work at different levels helps them to fill in the gaps of their knowledge of English.

## The Structure of This Book

This textbook is divided into 10 chapters, each focusing on a different academic discipline. There are also suggestions for additional reading and activities in the appendices at the back. Each chapter begins with an **Icebreaker** activity. This activity serves two purposes: it gives students a general sense of the chapter's theme, as well as an opportunity to take part in a pre-reading discussion. The instructor may choose to pair or group students across ability levels or within ability levels for this activity. The Icebreaker is intended as a warm-up activity,

encouraging students from the start to be comfortable with each other regardless of their level.

Next is the **Chapter Preview**. This activity serves to activate any prior knowledge a student may have about the subject matter of the chapter. It asks simple yes-no questions for each step that students can answer on their own. It also asks them to expand upon their answer with a short written response.

Each chapter then has three inter-related readings at three levels—called the **First Step**, **Second Step**, and **Third Step**. An icon identifies the levels of readings and activities:



First Step



Second Step



Third Step

This textbook focuses strongly on vocabulary development as it relates to reading and writing. Each reading passage is preceded by a vocabulary exercise focusing on challenging, but common academic words found in the reading assignment. (The vocabulary words are shaded in the readings.) The vocabulary exercise types vary—at the first and second steps, they may be dictionary look-up activities, matching exercises, or fill-in the blanks. At the third step, sentence creation activities are the most common. The difficulty level of the vocabulary and the exercise type increases with the increasing steps. The purpose of the introductory vocabulary tasks is to highlight and become familiar with key vocabulary that will be found in the reading. When students begin the reading, they will find the same vocabulary items have been highlighted within the text. This is done to draw attention to the words that have been introduced.

The readings represent different genres within the disciplines: short stories, newspaper articles, expository essays, biographies, letters to the editor, how-to articles, and so forth. Many of the readings have been chosen to expose students to well-known writers, both past and present. The writing of Helen Keller, John Steinbeck, William Saroyan, and Rachel Carson, as well as many others, will become familiar to students as they work through the text. Additionally, reading notes are added occasionally to the readings to explain cultural or historical facts that may not be familiar.

The readings are followed immediately by comprehension questions (**Check Your Understanding**) of different types. Again, simpler true/false or matching exercises are found at the lower steps, while more open-ended questions are found at the advanced steps. The compre-

hension questions focus on recall of facts and ideas from the reading passages, and some level of drawing inferences at the higher steps. The comprehension questions can be done alone or in pairs or small groups.

After the comprehension questions are group discussion questions. These are intended to be done in groups who have worked on the same readings. These questions are related to the reading, but they invite the students to relate the readings to their own experiences and to talk about things that are familiar. One suggestion for successful group discussion is to assign roles within the group. Ask one student to take notes on the group's responses, another to lead the group in asking questions and encouraging participation, another student to watch the time, and so forth. Group participation will increase significantly if students know what role they are expected to play.

Finally, there is more focused work on specific language areas appropriate to the readings and their levels. These areas arise out of the readings themselves—that is, the language focus activity comes out of a prevalent linguistic feature of each reading. These activities may deal with prepositions or word endings at the lower steps, and more complex ideas such as metaphors or complex syntax at the Third Step.

The **Chapter Wrap-Up** activities include speaking and writing tasks, some which are presented specifically by level, and some of which are appropriate for all levels. These are an important feature of each chapter. These activities allow the students to bring the expertise they have gained from their reading, whether it is at Step One or Step Three, to the rest of the group. Since all students are reading in the same academic discipline, there will be some familiarity with the topics discussed, and a heightened level of understanding and interest at all levels as a result. A fourth icon——identifies the items that are intended for mixed-level groups.

The chapters are arranged generally starting with the humanities and social science fields, moving into the sciences. However, they can be assigned in any order. It is recommended, however, that Chapter 1 be done first, since it covers basic study skills and reading strategies. The information in this chapter will help the students as they work through the book.

Students may be assigned to levels according to any system established by you or your institution, or they may choose the level that they believe suits them, according to their own assessment of their skills or the material presented in the chapter. For argument's sake, the first step can be considered *intermediate*; the second step, *high-intermediate/low-advanced*; and the third step, *advanced*. Assume a post-secondary audience.

Similarly, this textbook may be used over the course of two or three terms with the same group of students. Students can progress through the steps presented in the book until they have completed all the material—moving from the simpler material to the more complex, while working on a large variety of readings and activities.

This textbook was written in the hopes that instructors in multi-level classes will find ways to keep all students involved not only with the course curriculum, but also with each other. Each voice, whether beginning, intermediate, or advanced, has something to contribute in the classroom.

## To the Student

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This book may look different from other books you have used. It has readings and activities for different levels of students. You will see different symbols to tell you the level, or “step,” of a reading or activity:

 First Step

 Second Step

 Third Step

Another symbol——tells you that an activity is for everyone.

Your instructor will tell you which level you should work on. However, if you are at the First Step or Second Step, try some of the materials at a higher step. This will help you to learn even more. If you are already at the Third Step, look at material in the lower steps. They may contain ideas or words you haven't seen before. This also will help you to review your learning, which is an important part of being a good language learner.

A class with different levels of students can be a challenge for everyone. If you are at the First Step, it may seem difficult to speak in front of others, especially if you think their English is better than yours is. However, you will learn faster if you do.

If you are at the Second or Third Step, you may worry that you aren't making progress fast enough. However, learning to communicate with a variety of speakers will help you to become a more effective English speaker and learner, too.

The world is full of English speakers with different accents and different language abilities. Your class is a good opportunity to learn to communicate in the “real world.”