Series Overview

**Four Point** is a six-volume series designed for English language learners whose primary goal is to succeed in an academic setting. While grammar points and learning strategies are certainly important, academic English language learners (ELLs) need skills-based books that focus on the four primary skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a realistic, integrated format, as well as the two primary language bases of vocabulary and grammar. To this end, the **Four Point** series offers a unique combination of instructional materials and activities that truly require students to read, write, speak, and listen in a multitude of combinations.

**Four Point** has three English for Academic Purposes (EAP) levels. While academic listening and speaking skills are covered in one volume and academic reading and writing are covered in another, **all four skills are integrated throughout all books**, so a given task may focus on speaking and listening but have a reading and/or writing component to it as well.

**Developing the Four Skills in Four Point**

The series covers the four academic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, while providing reinforcement and systematic recycling of key vocabulary issues and further exposure to grammar issues. The goal of this series is to help students improve their ability in each of these four critical skills and thereby enable the students to have sufficient English to succeed in their final academic setting, whether it be community college, college, or university as an undergraduate or graduate student.

Many ELLs report great difficulties upon entering their academic courses after they leave the safe haven of their English class with other nonnative speakers and their sympathetic and caring ESL teachers. Their academic instructors speak quickly, give long reading assignments due the next day, deliver classroom lectures and interactions at rapid, native speed, and sometimes balk at the excessive errors in their ELLs’ writing. In sum, the ELL who has gone through a sheltered classroom setting is in for a rather rude awakening in a new learning situation where English is taken for granted and no one seems to understand or care much about the new reality of the dilemmas facing ELLs, a setting in which they are treated the same as LI students. Through these materials, we hope to lessen the shock of such an awakening.
The activities in *Four Point* achieve the goal of helping ELLs experience what life beyond the ESL classroom is like while they are still in a sheltered classroom. This chart explains some of the activities in *Four Point*:

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<th>Reading</th>
<th>Listening</th>
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<td>Students will read longer, more difficult readings on interesting and challenging academic topics that better represent the array and level in a college classroom. Extensive pleasure reading is good, but ELLs need practice for the type of reading they will find in their academic course books as well. Strategies introduced in the books will help develop the skills necessary to succeed with academic material.</td>
<td>Students will have to listen to presentations, group discussions, and lectures to not only pick out details and facts but also practice identifying speaker opinions, recognizing definitions, and synthesizing lectures with other material. Students will also gain experience listening to multiple native speakers at the same time as they discuss academic work and topics in realistic settings.</td>
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<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
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<td>Students will write both short and long assignments that mirror authentic college assignments in addition to research papers. Special emphasis is given to the academic writing skills of paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing.</td>
<td>Students will practice both short and long speaking activities and thereby develop their speaking fluency, an area often overlooked in many ESL books. Students will also practice leading a discussion, hedging and boosting, and managing Q &amp; A.</td>
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**Maximizing Coverage of the Two Primary Language Bases**

ESL materials have come a long way from the old days of equating repetitive grammar drills for speaking practice or copying sentences for writing practice. However, in the ensuing shift from focus on language to focus on communication, very little was developed to address the needs of academic ELLs who need to do much more in English than engage in conversations about daily events, fill out job applications, or read short pieces of text for pleasure. It was the proverbial “baby being thrown out with the bath water” as emphasis on grammar and vocabulary was downplayed. However, in order to participate in academic settings, our ELLs certainly need focused activities to develop and then maintain their use of vocabulary and grammar. Toward this end, the *Four*
**Point** series provides further exposure of key grammar issues without overt practice activities.

More important, these books focus very heavily on vocabulary because ELLs realize that they are way behind their native-speaker counterparts when it comes to vocabulary. Each book highlights between 125–150 key vocabulary items, including individual words, compound words, phrasal verbs, short phrases, idioms, metaphors, collocations, and longer set lexical phrases. In learning vocabulary, the two most important features are frequency of retrievals (i.e., in exercises) and the spacing between these retrievals. Spaced rehearsal is accomplished in two ways. First, after words appear in the textbook, they will reappear multiple times afterward. Second, interactive web-based exercises provide more than ample opportunities for ELLs to practice their vocabulary learning through spaced rehearsals at the student's convenience (www.press.umich.edu/elt/compsite/4Point/).

**General Overview of Units**

Each of the books is divided into six units with numerous activities within each unit. The material in each of the volumes could be covered in ten to twelve weeks, but this number is flexible depending on the students and the teacher, and the depth to which the material is practiced.

**Using the Activities in This Book**

Each unit includes three listening passages within a field of academic study (i.e., one student presentation, one group discussion or interaction, and one lecture). The group discussions and interactions appear in the online video scenes. The exercises accompanying the passages are meant to strengthen a range of listening and speaking skills, notably:

- noticing main points
- understanding classroom discourse
- using academic language functions
- recognizing signal words and phrases
- developing vocabulary
- synthesizing information

In addition to a more general listening comprehension task, most units include a specific listening focus, such as managing open lecture style, using visual aids to take notes, and connecting lecture content to other material. The student presentations range in length from 4 to 7 minutes, and the lectures range in length
from 11 to 17 minutes. Lectures and other material are provided on the two audio CDs packaged with the book. The video scenes can be found online at www.press.umich.edu/csl/comsite/4Point/.

Getting Started

A range of pre-listening discussion questions is included; each has the purpose of activating prior knowledge about, making predictions about, and generating interest in the topics in the unit. Often these questions provide opportunities for students to anticipate content and, therefore, may be revisited throughout the unit. All of the pre-listening questions lead to pair or small group discussions.

Research Strategies

Each unit introduces a research strategy, allowing students to develop a fundamental knowledge of concepts necessary to succeed in research at the college level. As students’ experiences vary, it is important to supply them with this base. It is certainly possible that students can draw on content that works particularly well for them in their discipline or other classes as they practice and develop their skills throughout the text. Other types of strategies and skills—those related to listening, speaking, and vocabulary—are highlighted at various points. Listening strategies appear in a display box with a short explanation and/or signal words and tips. Speaking strategies include key words and phrases. All include practice activities.

Listening Activities

Each unit contains three listening passages: a presentation, a discussion, and a lecture. The passages are long and authentic in an effort to mirror realistic college experiences and prepare students for success. Listening passages feature false starts, digressions, and pauses. The listening passages allow students to practice the strategy and/or hear the signal words or phrases in use.

Vocabulary Activities

Vocabulary Power activities appear once in each unit. The words chosen for these tasks are ones that may appear in a variety of academic settings. These activities serve to further develop students’ academic vocabulary base. These words are likely to be useful to the students as they move on to the synthesizing activities at the end of each unit as well as to the additional vocabulary activities: the Rapid Vocabulary Review, which focuses on synonyms and combinations and associations, and the Vocabulary Log. Students could also be asked to listen
to portions of the lecture again to discover if they recognize the words used in context.

In-Class and Out-of-Class Interactions/Classroom Discourse

In addition to the lectures, each unit includes activities designed to prepare students for the in-class interactions they are likely to encounter in post-secondary classrooms. Throughout the units, students participate in group activities that allow them to use the speaking phrases taught in the unit. Other activities include oral arguments, panel presentations, and other types of in-depth discussions. Each unit contains an impromptu speech that allows the opportunity for students to practice speaking spontaneously about academic topics.

In addition, the audio includes several features of everyday language that are designed to help make the audio and video more realistic for students. Also, in the attempt to help students understand more than professional native speakers, the videos feature fluent non-native speakers in typical academic roles to provide models and to better replicate university settings.

The video scenes are provided on the companion website (www.press.umich.edu/elt/composite/4Point/) to analyze for language, tone, and nonverbal cues as well as to generate discussion on academic listening and speaking tasks. Throughout the interaction, the students use some of the phrases and employ the strategies taught in the unit—and, in a few cases, do not use the best communication strategies. ELLs will have the opportunity to hear the phrases used in a natural conversation, practice their listening skills, analyze verbal and nonverbal communication skills of the speakers, and think critically about and discuss the interaction with their classmates. Questions in the book require students to listen for certain phrases and identify what they mean; to notice the tone of voice and think about how it changes the dynamics of a discussion; to recognize the influence of nonverbal communication by increasing their awareness of facial expressions, gestures, and other cues; and to compile all of these ideas into an analytical discussion about the interaction as a whole and what can be useful for students when they are in academic groups, especially with native speakers.

Reading Tasks

Each unit includes a reading generally used as the impetus for more extensive speaking and language activities and as a way to practice the strategies. As such, they do not include detailed comprehension questions. As the topics in the units are recent, the instructor could easily supplement a unit with current online readings.
Synthesizing: Projects and Presentations

The summative task for each unit includes four projects that mirror authentic assignments students are likely to encounter and encourage practice of the listening and speaking concepts. Students prepare projects and presentations based on what they have learned via the lectures, readings, discussions, or online or library research. For group projects, students should be given adequate time to clarify group roles and to work on their projects.

Rapid Vocabulary Review and Vocabulary Log

A vocabulary review task appears at the end of each unit and gives students another opportunity to check their understanding of key words and phrases. The correct answer is a synonym or brief definition. Crucial to the vocabulary acquisition process is the initial noticing of unknown vocabulary. ELLs must notice the vocabulary in some way, and this noticing then triggers awareness of the item and draws the learner’s attention to the word in all subsequent encounters, whether the word is read in a passage or heard in a conversation or lecture. To facilitate noticing and then multiple retrievals of new vocabulary, we have included a chart listing 25 key vocabulary items at the end of each unit. This Vocabulary Log has three columns and requires students to provide a definition or translation in the second column and then an original example or note about usage in the third column. As demonstrated in Vocabulary Myths (Folse 2004, University of Michigan Press), there is no research showing that a definition is better than a translation or vice-versa, so we suggest that you let ELLs decide which one they prefer. After all, this log is each student’s individual vocabulary notebook, so students should use whatever information is helpful to them and that will help them remember and use the vocabulary item. If the log information is not deemed useful, the learner will not review this material—which defeats the whole purpose of keeping the notebook. In the third column, students can use the word in a phrase or sentence, or they can also add usage information about the word such as usually negative, very formal sounding, or used only with the word launch.