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Downtown Basic: English for Work and Life		
Author:	Edward McBride (2009)	
Publisher:	Heinle ELT	
Pages	ISBN	Price
	978-1-4240-1656-3	\$24.95 USD



Downtown Basic: English for Work and Life (2009) is a part of a five-level series for teaching English to adult learners. This basic level is designed to teach survival English to low beginning ESL adult learners. It comes with audio CD, workbook, teacher's edition, transparencies, and assessment CD-ROM with exam view. *Downtown Basic: English for Work and Life* is especially suitable for adult immigrants and refugees in the United States who need to develop language skills that help them manage their daily life routines including workplace. The book consists of ten theme-based chapters; (1) Numbers and Names, (2) School, (3) Time, (4) Shopping, (5) Home and Family, (6) Housing, (7) the community, (8) Health and Safety, (9) Work, and (10) Future Plans. Each chapter covers three lessons related to the theme of the chapter.

Teachers of English as a Second Language might find this textbook valuable. It provides the necessary English language skills that learners need in this level to help them function successfully in their everyday conversations such as asking for and telling addresses, make purchases and count money, ask for and give prices, and read housing ads. Chapters have a uniform layout and paced progression. Each chapter starts with a picture dictionary and a clear list of goals that are covered in the lessons. It integrates the four language skills; reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as other

language components such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. All lessons are supported by a sufficient number of visuals, authentic and cartoon, which are important in the basic level to help them comprehend the meaning of words in context and make connections.

The book draws heavily on the communicative approach. The first lesson of each unit focuses on listening and speaking. Students are engaged in different exercises in which they have to listen and repeat. They also practice pronouncing words with an emphasis on stressed syllables. In addition to listening, speaking, and pronunciation, learners practice reading and writing in the third and fourth lessons. The third lesson focuses on work-related English. Furthermore, grammatical points are highlighted in each chapter. The book covers grammar rules needed in the basic level such as verb to be, pronouns, possessive adjectives and nouns, singular and plural nouns, Wh and Yes/No questions, prepositions of location and time, adjectives to describe people, imperative, definite and indefinite articles, parts of speech, the simple present tense, the present continues tense, the past simple tense, and “going to” for future plans. In addition, constructing contractions such as *is not; isn't*, and writing abbreviations of, for example, *Ave.; Avenue* are clearly highlighted in the lessons.

To accomplish the objectives of the communicative approach, in addition to individual work, students are required to complete some tasks in pairs or groups. This gives them the opportunity to communicate in English and learn from each other. Moreover, there is “Game Time” such as Bingo at the end of each lesson in which students are tested on the points learned in an enjoyable and interesting way. It provides them with a kind of competition, and they have to think critically in order to arrive to the correct answer. Additionally, at the end of each chapter, there are a review section and a comic book story which synthesize what students have learned and tests their understanding of the topics covered in the chapter. The exercises examine reading, listening, writing, pronunciation, and speaking.

Moreover, what we think makes *Downtown Basic: English for Work and Life* more interesting is that it does not only focus on language but also culture. The textbook provides learners with the opportunity to be familiar with some cultural norms that they would face in the United States such as the difference between credit cards and debit cards, clothing sizes, punctuality for appointments, and full-time versus part-time jobs. This is given either directly in the form of “Culture Tips,” or implemented in the lessons such as learning the appropriate way of saying phone numbers and the differences between avenue, road, boulevard and street.

All in all, we believe that *Downtown Basic: English for Work and Life* is a great resource for both teachers and students to teach survival English to beginner learners since it covers most of the topics needed at this level in an interesting way. Students are guided throughout the activities until they are ready to take control. The textbook supports the use of critical thinking through problem-solving activities as well as teamwork. It also integrates different languages skills and gives an emphasis to culture. However, there

are not enough grammar exercises for students neither in the textbook nor in the workbook since the focus is more on acquiring communicative competence. Therefore, teachers could incorporate extra materials if more grammar practice is needed.

Reviewed by

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