


Interactions 1: Listening/speaking, 6th edition

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Author:	Judith Tanka & Paul Most (2014)		
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The sixth edition of *Interactions 1: Listening/Speaking* is a textbook targeted at Intermediate-level students preparing to enter into mainstream university courses in the United States, or participating in a college ESL program. In this new edition, the topics, vocabulary, and listening materials covered are supposed to represent those most useful to prospective American college students. The book is divided into ten topic-based chapters, such as how academic life differs by country (Chapter 1) and choosing a place to live (Chapter 5), with three chapters revised to focus on university life. Each chapter is then divided into four smaller units: *Conversation*, *Presentation*, *Strategies for Better Listening and Speaking*, and *Real-World Tasks*. There are two appendices featuring the scripts from the book's listening activities and a list of the vocabulary items from each chapter. McGraw Hill continues to support the online component from the 5th edition series.

This textbook is directed towards a university level audience. The conversations that make up the listening exercises are geared towards campus life, for example, a visit to a health clinic at a college, as are many of the activities, like a dating website task that asks students to report their major or favorite course in a questionnaire. The majority of the vocabulary items introduced in *Interactions 1*, though not academic per se, would be useful for the intended population, covering words and phrases important for an American college student's life (e.g. security deposit, do community service, grab something to eat). In addition, the characters that appear throughout the textbook are

clearly intended to be university students taking part in American college activities. The emphasis on these daily activities and college culture will certainly motivate many students to participate in class.

Each chapter in *Interactions 1: Listening/Speaking* begins with a splash page introducing the material covered in that unit, a quote from a notable person, and a picture with a set of questions for discussion to activate students' prior knowledge on that chapter's topic. This is followed by the first section of each chapter, *Conversation*, with nine to twelve activities, comprising a variety of pre-listening questions, vocabulary previews, listening exercises for main ideas/details, pronunciation topics and practice, and a "Using Language Functions" section— often a grammar item (e.g., preposition usage) or language function (e.g., how to give and accept compliments). The second part of each chapter, *Presentation*, features longer listening excerpts, focusing on pre-listening questions and vocabulary preview activities, listening activities for main ideas/details, and activities to encourage students to speak about the chapter themes while using their new vocabulary words. The third section of each chapter, *Strategies for Better Listening and Speaking*, includes a short TOEFL iBT listening test or an additional activity borrowed from the other sections. The final part of each chapter, *Real-World Tasks*, contains additional listening and speaking activities, as well as a self-assessment log for the chapter's vocabulary items and language topics.

The use of strategies for listening is evident throughout *Interactions 1*. The abundance of pre-listening questions and vocabulary preview exercises will help build strategy-awareness of predicting language for different contexts. This is equally true of the note-taking activities, including those with graphic organizers, often found in the *Presentation* part of each chapter, as note taking is a crucial component of academic life.

The activities in this text are also well-developed in terms of their ability to introduce and recycle vocabulary. Throughout a single chapter, several listening clips, pronunciation exercises, and speaking activities integrate recent vocabulary. In addition, tasks such as role-play for making a doctor's appointment (p. 139) may help draw learners' attention to the form and meaning of vocabulary items.

While the listening portions of *Interactions 1 Listening/Speaking* are quite good, the materials designed to improve students' speaking abilities is somewhat of a mixed bag. There are interesting "Language Tips" in the margins. The "Using Language Functions" sections help students navigate English pragmatics—an important concern for low and intermediate-level learners. As mentioned, many activities could be successful in encouraging students to participate in class—summarizing listening passages orally, group debates, a game of "Twenty Questions" and many role-play opportunities to assist students in creating discourse-level interaction with a focus on the suprasegmental aspects of English. However, *Interactions 1* falls short on issues surrounding pronunciation.

Every chapter has nearly identical exercises for identifying stressed words in a sentence and listening for and comparing reduced/unreduced sounds. There are a few additional pronunciation topics (e.g., differentiating *can* and *can't*, intonation of tag questions), but

these are meager at best. With the effort put into creating interesting and, possibly, fun activities for the other portions of this manual, pronunciation instruction is an area that teachers will likely have to supplement.

Other areas of concern for this textbook are its organization and supposed academic focus. On close inspection, the layout of some of the chapters and grouping of activities are hard to reconcile. The decision to divide each chapter into four sections seems arbitrary as the learning strategies aren't necessarily found in the *Strategies* section of the chapters (which usually have a single TOEFL iBT-like listening activity that has students find context clues, or in other cases one or two marginally related exercises, such as discussing an advertisement for an iPod). The *Real-World Tasks* section of each chapter is also questionable because many of the "tasks" stray far from the intended academic focus of the textbook. "Weather" is not a task (Chapter 2), nor is it academic, while the "Directions for setting a table" for a fancy meal in Chapter 6 is potentially thematically inappropriate for the population that would use *Interactions 1*.

Interactions 1: Listening/Speaking is a textbook that has some strong features despite the aforementioned problems of organization and theme. A perfect textbook would be a rare one indeed. All said and done, with careful activity selection and a judicious amount of supplementation, *Interactions 1* would make an excellent resource for many university ESL classrooms.

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