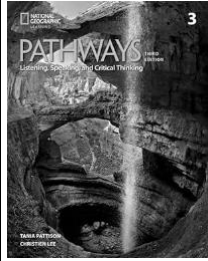


## Pathways 3: Listening, speaking, and critical thinking (3rd ed.)

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| Pathways 3: Listening, speaking, and critical thinking (3rd ed.) |                                       |                      |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Author:</b>   | Tania Pattison & Christien Lee (2025) |                      |
| <b>Publisher:</b>  | Mason: National Geographic Learning   |                      |
| <b>Pages</b>   | <b>ISBN</b>                           | <b>Price</b>         |
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Listening and speaking are widely recognized as complex, integrated skills that require both linguistic knowledge and real-time processing. Despite their importance for academic success, they do not always receive the focus they require in the context of four-skills materials. To address these needs, Pattison and Lee’s *Pathways 3: Listening, speaking, and critical thinking* (3rd ed.) provides a valuable resource at a reasonable price for B2-level adult learners in English for academic purposes (EAP) settings. Now in its third edition, the *Pathways* series incorporates updated scaffolded speaking activities, a review section in every unit for formative assessment, and an online platform to address the evolving needs of the classroom.

The most salient positive feature of the textbook is that it mostly aligns with contemporary research findings related to speaking pedagogy. Many of the speaking tasks reflect principles of task-based language teaching, an approach shown to be effective (Gass et al., 2025), in which learners are expected to focus on meaningfully using the target language to achieve a certain communicative purpose. For instance, in Unit 1, students work in pairs to rank responses to the question, “If you suddenly had an extra \$500, what would you do with it?” (Pattison & Lee, 2025a, p. 8). To complete this task, students first review the necessary language—in this case, conditional clauses. This structure provides scaffolding for the language to be used not only *in*, but also *for*, the task. Coupled with the opportunity to use English in a potentially engaging closed task (i.e., one with a limited number of possible outcomes), it reflects fundamental factors in successful conversation activities (Folse, 2006).

The book is organized into ten units that progress logically in terms of language content. Each unit explores a theme from an academic discipline, ranging from consumer behavior to career values and plant-based medicines. The content covered in each unit can be found in the scope and sequence available on the publisher’s website. All units follow a consistent structure. They

begin with discussion questions and eye-catching pictures from the National Geographic Image Collection, which help draw learners' attention and engage them with the topic. Vocabulary is introduced next, contextualized through audio recordings representing common academic genres (e.g., lectures, classroom discussions). This is followed by focused listening and note-taking tasks, and then speaking activities (e.g., role playing, ranking tasks, discussions about personal opinions) supported by relevant grammar and explicit pronunciation instruction. Midway through, learners watch a National Geographic video and complete further vocabulary, listening, and speaking tasks that explore alternative perspectives on the theme. Each unit ends with a review section featuring self-assessment and practice exercises targeting key content in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and speaking. Finally, two task options conclude the unit, typically involving an academic presentation (e.g., process description or research report) and collaborative speaking practice (e.g., group discussions, expressing and acknowledging opinions).

The pronunciation skills addressed in the speaking sections also deserve attention. Throughout the book, there is a clear focus on suprasegmental features (e.g., stress, prominence), which have been positively linked to improvements in intelligibility (Kang et al., 2020). Segmental features are not neglected, however. In Unit 7, the focus shifts to segmental contrasts, particularly commonly confused consonant sounds with high functional load (Catford, 1987)—i.e., sounds whose mispronunciation can hinder comprehension due to the existence of minimal pairs, such as /p/ vs. /b/ and /t/ vs. /d/. One activity in this unit asks students to identify which word from a minimal pair they hear in an audio recording—an approach shown to support pronunciation development by requiring learners to notice distinctions before producing them accurately (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In the teacher's book introduction, the authors justify their pronunciation content choices using the Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000), emphasizing that “the goal is not for students to sound like first-language learners,” but to achieve “greater intelligibility, clarity, and understanding of others’ spoken English and of their own” (Pattison & Lee, 2025b, p. xi).

*Pathways 3* includes access to Spark, an online platform offering different digital tools that accompany the book. The platform is overall intuitive and user-friendly, with a modern, straightforward interface. For teachers and administrators, it contains a digital teacher's book, classroom presentation tools, an online placement test for incoming students, as well as an assessment suite for creating and administering tests and tracking students' performance. For learners, it includes audio and video files and additional interactive practice. The extra practice activities available on the platform support self-study, complementing the classroom-oriented design of the printed book. The classroom audio, performed by professional voice actors, is delivered at a slow pace and features limited authentic speech elements (e.g., false starts, hesitations, fillers). Many recordings are paired with slideshows or animations that play directly in Spark. For example, Unit 3 features a listening activity on human migration accompanied by a slide presentation that highlights key vocabulary and visual cues. The video materials include 5-minute National Geographic documentaries, narrated clearly by professionals, most of which feature professional narration delivered by voice actors at a clear and calm pace. Interestingly, these videos often feature brief interviews with people from different parts of the world, offering exposure to different dialects. Those interviews consist of an efficient way to introduce learners to more authentic spoken English.

While the textbook offers a solid foundation for practicing listening and speaking, there are some suggestions to consider in order to promote its efficiency. Most speech samples lack features of authentic spoken language (e.g., normal pacing, rephrasing, incomplete sentences) found in real-life communication. As a result, the materials do not fully reflect the demands of real-time production of spoken language use. Moreover, decades of corpus-based research and

discussions about the benefits of using authentic materials have shown that naturally occurring speech often differs significantly from the invented examples typically found in textbooks and grammars grounded in armchair linguistics. This book still largely relies on constructed examples rather than authentic speech, with the exception of its video content, as mentioned above. However, although those videos are rich in both language and content, their potential often seems underexplored as they accompany tasks limited mainly to comprehension checking and vocabulary expansion, with few opportunities for open-ended speaking practice.

It should also be noted that, because the book is organized around themes, not all topics may be relevant to every EAP learner. For example, learners in engineering may find less value in Unit 1, which focuses on the psychology of shopping, compared to those in psychology or marketing. This potential limitation reflects the tension between English for general academic purposes and English for specific academic purposes. While one-size-fits-all materials are more widely available and marketable, they do not fully address the specialized needs of academic learners. In contrast, discipline-specific EAP courses are generally less commonly offered; in this sense, the broad thematic approach of the book can be viewed positively, as it is likely to suit the needs of most existing language programs.

In sum, *Pathways 3* offers a reasonable introduction to academic listening and speaking, serving as a valuable resource for both teachers and learners. Aimed at improving those two language skills, developing critical thinking, and practicing general academic abilities, the book is used at universities and community colleges worldwide. It includes effective conversation tasks, pronunciation instruction, and a comprehensive digital platform. Furthermore, it aligns with expectations for general EAP courses with thematically organized units that include genres students are likely to encounter in academic contexts. The uniqueness of this textbook lies in its presentation, featuring eye-catching and engaging materials from National Geographic. However, instructors who choose to adopt it may need to supplement it with other materials to further explore authentic and discipline-specific language use in their courses. This could include incorporating videos and podcasts from the Internet or creating corpus-based activities using resources like the *Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English* (see Simpson-Vlach & Leicher, 2006). In other words, the book would be best used alongside other texts to prepare students for real-world language demands beyond the classroom.

## About the Reviewer

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