



Reviewed work:

*Longman Academic Reading Series* (Books 1–5). (2014). Elizabeth Bottcher (1), Kim Sanabria (2), Judy L. Miller & Robert F. Cohen (3, 4), and Lorraine Smith (5). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education. Pp. 149 (1), 257 (2), 243 (3), 287 (4), and 303 (5). ISBN 10: 0-13-276067-3. \$50.65

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<http://www.amazon.com>

Written by Elizabeth Bottcher (Book 1), Kim Sanabria (Book 2), Judy L. Miller and Robert F. Cohen (Books 3 & 4), and Lorraine C. Smith (Book 5), this five-book series by Pearson Education provides a diverse selection of high-interest readings on academic subjects. The texts draw from book excerpts, oral history, magazine articles, newspapers, online articles, and poetry, providing a wide range of “authentic” texts across the series. The books are aimed at learners of English for Academic Purposes, ranging from low intermediate to advanced. A teacher’s manual featuring notes, answer keys, and chapter quizzes is available at [www.pearsonelt.com/tmkeys](http://www.pearsonelt.com/tmkeys).

The introduction to the format of the series explains the concept of academic work as an “in-depth” treatment of texts. Students are able to sample various types of academic content, and then given opportunity to discuss and write ideas they have discovered. The reading skills and strategies are divided into four sections: Effective Reading, Vocabulary Building, Note-Taking, and Critical Thinking. An activity for each of these sections is provided for each reading. For Books 2-5, there are three readings per chapter. Book 1 features two readings per chapter. The end of each chapter concludes with a speaking/writing activity that helps students to review the content, synthesize information, and further explore their investigation of the content. In addition to the four skill areas mentioned above, Books 4 and 5 include a Grammar for Reading activity at the end of each chapter that is helpful to practice grammar structures commonly found in academic texts, such as the use of parallel structure and hedging language.

Effective Reading is achieved through practical reading strategies and comprehension checks. All five books survey many generalizable strategies, such as skimming and scanning, as well as strategies localized to the specific texts, such as understanding scholarly references (Book 3). These strategies reappear throughout each book, offering students repeated practice of strategies on different texts. It could also be useful for teachers to discuss with students how to choose the most effective strategy, based on the text in question for future use in their academic careers.

The comprehension exercises that are found after the texts remain largely the same from reading to reading, providing continuity for student and teacher. Overall, we appreciated the layout of the reading strategies and subsequent reading checks. These exercises provide before-and-after opportunities to familiarize the readers with the texts and cultivate deeper levels of understanding.

In each of the readings, the target vocabulary is highlighted in boldface blue, which helps the reader to notice the words. Vocabulary is recycled in activities and other readings throughout the book. This offers students many opportunities to encounter the target vocabulary, which is essential for learning (Nation, 2008). Among the vocabulary activities are definition matching, recognizing positive/negative connotation, semantic concepts, collocations, and parts of speech activities. The presentation of the activities is well organized and reinforces vocabulary learning as well as content learning. There are also activities for Guessing from Context that direct students' attention towards context clues and help build fluency with guessing word meanings. The Guessing from Context activities in Books 1 and 2, allow students to choose the correct meaning from a list of possible answers. However, it could be more engaging to allow students to freely guess the word meanings, as is done in Books 3, 4, and 5. The series vocabulary activities also include examples of dictionary entries, which we believe are useful for building fluency with dictionary use. Each chapter ends with a table of the target vocabulary, which provides an effective way for students to review. Among the words, academic word list (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000) items are denoted with an asterisk. We recommend that teachers direct additional attention to AWL words, as they occur frequently across academic disciplines.

There are two Note-Taking exercises per chapter that are placed after the comprehension checks, providing another opportunity to increase reading comprehension. As presented in the series, note-taking encourages additional readings of the text as well as an active engagement with content and rhetoric. While common examples such as charting and paraphrasing are applied throughout the series, we found that the exercises are individualized in each book with the needs of the readers in mind. The layouts are well-designed in a clean and simple format. As was mentioned in the review of Effective Reading activities, it could be useful for teachers to explicitly draw students' attention to *how* to select effective note taking strategies based on the text in question. Finally, the grammar exercises included in Books 4 and 5 supplement the note-taking skills practice by drawing attention to particular structures and how they are used to enhance the presentation of content in academic texts.

The Critical Thinking activities encourage the students to analyze and evaluate information from the readings and give an opportunity for students to express their opinions about the subjects. For the most part, the activities consist of a list of questions that delve deeper into the content and ask the students to consider reasons for facts or opinions in the readings. There are also a variety

of alternative Critical Thinking activities that appear here and there throughout the series. For example, in “The Benefits of Studying Abroad” (Book 1, Chapter 1, Reading 2), the Critical Thinking activity requires students to read the perspectives of five students who are studying abroad and reflect on their distinct viewpoints. In addition to activities that consider various perspectives, there are also inquiries into authorial intent, and creative thinking activities about hypothetical arguments between characters. We noticed there were a few Critical Thinking questions that could possibly lead students towards a single, predetermined answer. In these cases, the teacher could propose alternative viewpoints to keep the discussion expansive and exploratory.

With placement at the end of the chapters, Speaking and Writing activities offer application and synthesis of the underlying ideas of the chapter through individual, group, and pair work. Discussion questions, paragraph writing, and variations of freewriting are recurrent tasks in Books 1-5. Role-playing and debates factor heavily into the discussion options for Books 1-4, while Book 5 features primarily writing assignments, such as three paragraph essays (four paragraph essays in Chapter 9 and 10) and a narrative from the point of view of a person living in the context being discussed. These distinctions could be important for teachers when planning an integrated reading curriculum. As with the rest of the activities in the series, the writing and discussion prompts are at a level appropriate to the readings and promote an insightful exploration of the big ideas at play.

Although it is possible to selectively teach separate readings, the strength of the series may lie in completing an entire chapter from start to finish. The four sections of Effective Reading, Vocabulary Building, Note-Taking, and Critical Thinking activities work together with chapter-end Writing and Speaking activities to build fully upon the content, thereby producing constructive comparisons, connections, and differing perspectives.

We feel that the scope of the activities sampled, combined with clear organization and consistent structure, makes this series a practical choice for both veterans and teachers who are new at teaching academic reading skills.

## References

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- Nation, I. S. P. (2008). *Teaching vocabulary: Strategies and techniques*. Boston, MA: Heinle ELT.

## About the Reviewers

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