

# Abax - Review

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## Top-Up Listening - “Tip top listening!”

*A new course that actually teaches the skill of listening, rather than just testing it!!*



What a breath of fresh air! At last a set of books for lower level students which actually sets out to teach language learners how to listen rather than just testing their skills. This series consists of three books with CDs from elementary level to the top end of pre-intermediate in American English. They are aimed at teenagers and reach out to their target audience well in terms of topics, graphics and activities.

What I really like is that the authors have taken the time to highlight the link between spoken English and what students are able to comprehend, and this sets the series apart from others I've used. How many times have we heard students complain that they can't understand people in the supermarket, when they can understand us perfectly well?

So it follows that pronunciation is a major element of each unit and there are two language clinics in each with revision at the end of each book. What I find refreshing is that the authors have done away with traditional terminologies and have made the language more user-friendly. Elision, for example, has been renamed 'lost sounds', which explains exactly what it is. I'm a little worried though. Unless students are introduced to the traditional phonological terms at some stage, when they run into them in other books, they might not realise that they are the same thing.

Another great thing about this series is that it promotes learner 'independence' because, let's be honest here, no matter how dedicated a teacher we are, we don't want to have to hold our students' hands every step of the way. We're all kind of hoping they'll take responsibility for their own language development at some stage. The books include a comprehensive glossary called 'In Your Own Time' where students complete definitions in their own words and choose words that are important to them to define and revise.

The actual tasks the students do in each unit are good too: there is a lot of repetition and opportunities to use the phrases and speaking skills are introduced. There is also a fabulous mix of post-listening tasks that are extremely creative. Each unit of each book follows the same pattern, so students are guided through tasks and not just thrown in at the deep end. The instructions in bold are very clear and the cartoon artwork is both colorful and appealing. All in all the text and graphics are well distributed on each page, giving an uncluttered feel, and the covers are extremely enticing.

As well as the tasks, there is a first-class mix of types of listening: for example, where the student needs to interact in an everyday situation such as buying a train ticket and non-reciprocal situations where a response is not needed like listening to a weather forecast. However, authenticity is a problem: there is certainly a wide mix of accents, American, Spanish, Japanese and British, but they are all artificial and stereotypical. The recordings are obviously scripted, as they show few features of natural spoken English, (I didn't hear a single . . . erm) and are quite slow at times.

I also had some trouble understanding the grading: Book 1 would only be suitable for a strong elementary class, as it includes some difficult vocabulary and detailed grammar in the first few units and Book 2 actually appears to be at the same level as the first one. All that said and done, Top-Up Listening would be a perfect choice for students studying American English or planning to go to the United States. It could be used in the UK, as it practices many valid skills, but personally I'd want a British English version.

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