

# Abax - Review

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## Freestanding

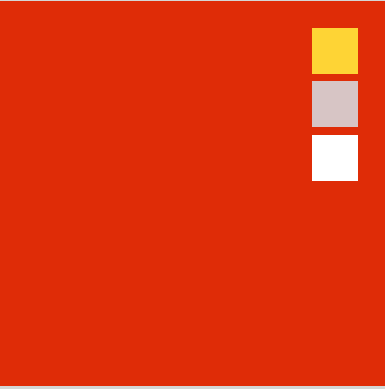


Freestanding by Maurice Jamall is a resource book designed, as the title suggests, to offer teachers and students 'freestanding' lessons which add variety to the standard fare of textbook lessons. The 36 lessons covered in the book need little or no resources and are aimed at students acquiring knowledge for themselves rather than the teacher presenting it to them. This is described as 'Language Pull' as opposed to 'Language Push'. The purpose of the book, then, is to increase the involvement of students in the language learning process. The teacher still provides an important role but becomes more of a source from which the students can take information. The book caters to most students ranging from elementary to upper intermediate and above. In its design and purpose Freestanding is an innovative resource book for teachers. It provides the teacher and student with interesting lesson plans and is successful in promoting the role of the student in language learning.

Each of the 36 lessons in the book is designed to cover between 60 and 90 minutes of classroom time, providing the teacher with a good warmer or fill-in lesson, should the need arise. The most important asset of this book is that it can be used almost by itself. It does not involve the use of a student textbook and for most lessons no photocopying need be done. Thus teachers will not be left high and dry - sometimes the case when their lessons rely on handouts. The topics are centred on those which occur frequently in the classroom such as talking about free time, jobs and talking about different countries. The lessons integrate all four macro skills and are generally divided into a warmer, practice of target language, drilling of target language, monitoring of practice, feedback and finally a role-play. Variations of the lesson are also provided in the lesson plan.

In writing a book designed for ease of use, and one which requires almost no resources, Maurice Jamall has been extremely successful. For an inexperienced teacher, this book would be very useful as it is easy to follow and requires little lesson preparation. For a more experienced teacher, this book could be used to stimulate interest or simply to introduce something new into the lesson. I would not recommend it as a set text and this is not the aim of the author. It is rather something to complement a lesson - and this it does very well. On the other hand, students often enjoy lessons which involve hands on activities rather than too much reading from the board. Therefore, I sometimes found students losing interest in the lessons which required a lot of writing.

In terms of the idea of 'pulling' the language from the student rather than the teacher 'pushing' it on to the students, Freestanding is quite effective. The lessons are certainly student-centred and focus on the students generating their own ideas, but in my experience, any task-based activities still require a large teacher degree of involvement as students often become stuck, confused or just plain bored, if left too much on their own.



They also tend to wander off on to different topics or conversations about totally unrelated subjects.

The topics that Jamall has covered in the book are the most common ones which occur in the classroom. This was something of a disappointment to me as I had hoped that such an innovative book might actually come up with a different approach and fresh ideas. Too often students go through different levels in a school, repeating the same topics. They become bored with tired, overused themes, such as talking about habits. And this applies to teachers, too. I would have hoped for something more adventurous, as a lesson with few resources needs to generate extra interest for the students.

Overall, my experiences with the book have been positive. My students have been able to get as much, if not more, out of Freestanding as they would have from our set textbook. It also provided them with something different, while I found the book easy to follow and the lessons well-structured. What's more, I spent less time on lesson preparation - a bonus for any teacher! Recommended.

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