

# Abax - Review

The English Language Institute, Hanoi, Vietnam Issue 8, March 2002

## Freestanding

**“ . . . Freestanding is a quality asset that is definitely worth getting”**



A lone teacher can devise only so many ingenious classroom activities that don't rely on a textbook. Fortunately, the author of *Freestanding* has taken into account that a language teacher in Asia is never guaranteed to have much more than a chalkboard to use in the classroom. As its title suggests, *Freestanding* is ready to assist the TESOL instructor with complete lessons that require minimal teaching materials.

The book is packed with creative activity ideas, all organized into topical lessons with common themes such as family, jobs and free time. The table of contents gives an excellent overview of all the lessons, including a list of materials needed. Half the lessons require nothing more than a chalkboard, while the rest need only photocopies or blank paper. For those lessons that call for handouts, there are reproducible masters. Of the 36 lessons, 15 are geared toward beginning or low-intermediate students, 16 are for low-intermediate to intermediate students and the last five are aimed at intermediate level or above learners. Typical components of a *Freestanding* lesson are: warmer (warm-up), speaking, listening, vocabulary and language focus. This is not a formula - the number and order of these exercises vary from lesson to lesson. Each "language focus" targets a specific point of grammar in order to help students use language more accurately. For example, in a lesson on the home, students work on using prepositions of location by correcting true/false statements about the teacher's room. This lesson also includes a variation where students plan a dream house. Other lessons incorporate reading or writing activities, such as having students write a biography of another student without mentioning the person's name. The writings are redistributed, then students circulate around the room searching for the person who matches the biography they were given. As you can see, one of the book's strengths is that it often takes what might seem an ordinary idea for an activity and infuses it with a more interactive twist.

*Freestanding* commends the "language pull" approach, a method whereby students take responsibility to elicit necessary language from the teacher, rather than the teacher pre-determining everything that will be taught. This approach lends itself well to the book's premise that effective lessons need not start with a textbook, though the lesson ideas found here can also be used to supplement an existing curriculum, syllabus or textbook.

To use this book effectively, an instructor must be prepared and have a clear idea of what will happen in the classroom. Without other materials to fall back on, giving directions in a way that students understand becomes more important, particularly with lower level students. Thankfully, this is a book that will help you do so. Whether your classroom resources are ample or few, *Freestanding* is a quality asset that is definitely worth getting.

Julia Baurain