

Opening Doors to English

Keys to Learning: Skills and Strategies for Newcomers

by Anna Chamot, Catharine Keatley and Kristina Anstrom

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Some may prefer to teach without a supplementary

workbook, but for those who do prefer one, *Keys to Learning* provides the ideal support. As the title implies, the book is intended for newcomers, specifically those who have minimal English grammar skills and vocabulary, but more advanced learners can also use it as a reference.

Keys to Learning is a colorful workbook full of pictures and boxes that may seem elementary to many; while it is a certainly a worthy text to aid younger learners, it is also a great practice resource for adolescent and adult learners as well.

The workbook begins with the ABCs and ends with comparatives. Lessons in between include: Articles, pronouns, questions, tenses, adverbs, and adjectives. This book gives students a broad range of essential topics to learn and practice. Teachers can use the book's layout as a guideline to plan lessons, or use the book as support material as desired.

Each lesson, or chapter, is divided into several sections that cover the most aspects of practicing English. Each begins with a school-related dialogue practice that emphasizes the lesson's grammar point. Not only do the scenario and dialogue allow the students to be primed for the grammar lesson ahead, they also introduce newcomers to American school culture and etiquette.

The second part of a lesson usually consists of a two-section grammar lesson. The first section introduces the basics of an aspect of English grammar; the second section introduces different and advanced usages of the aspect. There is also another more advanced grammar section further in the lesson. All three grammar sections are accompanied by written exercises that allow the learners to start practicing immediately.

The book is not all about grammar. The third part of a lesson, called "Word Study," presents pronunciation and English sound recognition. Even though this section is meant to be practiced with a teacher or a class, individuals should be able to learn from it without being in a classroom.

The "Reading" section allows the learners to practice reading more than just sentences. Each selection is usually a short story about school or social situations that aim to stay relevant to what newcomers experience when living in a new country. The reading is followed by carefully considered comprehension questions that encourage the learners to grasp the content.

The next section aims to develop the learners' writing skills. A prompt is given and the students are instructed to write a paragraph according to the grammar checklist provided. The checklist is an

important idea that allows the learners to be consciously aware of important grammar points before, during, and after writing.

A lesson ends with what is called "Learning Log." This is the section that combines vocabulary, grammar review, and reflective writing in one. The reflective self-evaluation section is particularly interesting because it asks questions, such as, "What is easy in Chapter 10? What is difficult in Chapter 10?" and "How can you learn the things that are difficult?" Now only do these questions make worthy conversation openers in class, they also allow learners to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and how they need to adjust their learning focus.

Keys to Learning, as a workbook, serves the purpose of exposing newcomers to essential grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and pronunciation. Whether the students are beginners or advanced learners, all may benefit from the workbook's excellent direction and fun approach to learning English. **X**

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