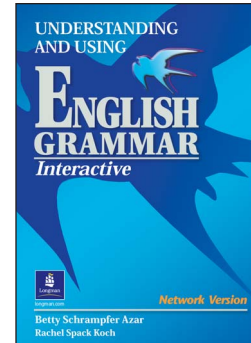




Review of Understanding and Using English Grammar, Interactive CD-ROM, 1st edition

Betty Schramper Azar and Rachel Spack Koch
White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman, 2005

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Understanding and Using English Grammar Interactive CD-ROM brings audio and interactivity to an already successful grammar text. It brings the teaching of grammar into the 21st century. This CD-ROM lives up to its name; it really helps users understand the form, meaning, and usage of English grammar. In a comprehensive study, Azar and Koch have created a fine device to teach adult intermediate or advanced level students, and at the same time, monitor their progress. This interactive version is going to make an ESL teacher's life easier.

The CD-ROM is packed with features, and it makes outstanding use of any personal computer's capabilities like graphics, animation, and speech recognition. Nevertheless, the software is written in a manner that is useful for the expert or the novice computer user alike. There are 20 chapters, which average more than twenty-five exercises each. The first chapter has a helpful review of verb tenses; the following chapters cover subject verb agreement, nouns, adverbs, and modals among other subjects. In addition to those 20 chapters, there is also a section on basic grammar terminology, a section on questions, another section dedicated to contractions, a section on negatives, and finally, a section on preposition combinations.

The CD employs an innovative cast of characters to introduce the various components of English grammar. Each topic has been given a personality. The character is a 2D animated figure that talks. The character introduces him/herself, describe what its name means, and gives examples of that particular aspect of grammar. Characters have names like *Simple Present* or *Present Perfect*. A preview of the chapter that can be read or listened to follows the introduction. In this section, grammatical concepts are highlighted, and by rolling over the computer mouse, one can see a description of it. A familiar chart (from the Azar textbooks) follows. The chart introduces verb aspect in a very concise, easy to understand graphic manner. Next is a dialogue that highlights the use of forms. Every explanation is followed by an exercise or a series of exercises covering the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. New words are highlighted and are linked to a glossary that gives a definition.

The drills use different techniques, like drag and drop, type in, or multiple-choice for the written component. These exercises provide immediate feedback. Yet, there is much less writing exercises than in other Azar's textbooks. Listening exercises appear in two variations; first, students have the opportunity to listen and fill in the blanks; or second, they can listen to a text or conversation, then respond, and record their voice. The exercise can

then be played back and the student will find him or herself in a conversation. To finalize the chapter, and before going into the test, there is a game in each chapter; these games cover concentration, and vocabulary skills exercises. A test of 20 questions follows. The test is scored immediately, it also provides the option of going back, review the chapter, and take the test again. Each section of a chapter can be covered in a few minutes, facilitating its use as a mini-lesson. Another great feature of the CD-ROM is that each topic is contained in one page, making it very easy to follow. In each page, there is an option to navigate within the chapter or go back to the outline, the glossary, or the help feature. An additional capability of the program is that students or teachers can monitor the progress and even record it in a diskette or in the hard drive of the computer. The program also provides a separate progress report for each student.

The CD-ROM includes an orientation on PDF, which covers the mechanics of the program; this can be printed for reference. It also has a section of FAQs (frequently asked questions) that deals with all the technical problems that might arise. The program worked beautifully and seamlessly, there were no technical malfunctions. On the other hand, if you run into trouble, there is free teacher support provided at the publisher's website.

Even though the material is accessible and the computer interface proved to be easy to work with, I would still dedicate one class to explain its use and the mechanics of it. Printing the orientation and the outline proved to be helpful. In addition, I would have liked to see numbered pages as in a real book, and a glossary with links to the various grammatical concepts, not just new words. *Understanding and Using English Grammar Interactive* will be a powerful asset in any ESL classroom or language lab. It can be used for guided practice or independent studies. It is an exceptional addition to the ESL library.

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