



Edited by
Wayne Trotman

Materials reviews

This month we bring reviews of two highly-regarded exam-practice materials on CD, plus a critical look at an interesting-sounding classroom resource. I managed to drag myself away from following international cricket long enough to enjoy reading Keith Richard's very readable work on classroom research. My usual offer of lunch for anyone dissatisfied still stands. (Thanks to the two key *Issues* reviewers who took me up on this last time!) WT.



FCE Interactive CD-ROM

Delta Publishing, 2003
ISBN 900783630

The *FCE Interactive* CD-ROM is a very flexible tool. As well as the practice exercises themselves, it has many other features such as a notebook for noting language points, 'My record' of scores, an on-line dictionary which you operate simply by clicking on the word and lots of hints including practical information on language, the exam itself and how to find examination centres.

The main menu shows how the CD is organised, with four modules each for Listening, Reading and Writing and five for Use of English. At the end of each series of modules there is a practice exam, which you can take either under exam conditions, with no help and have marked at the end, or alternatively you can switch to practice mode and get instant feedback on your answers.

In the Use of English modules, it offers instruction, with grammatical explanations, of the transformation exercises, and gives you detailed analysis of your answers, for example whether your answer is worth one or two points, and any missing words which you should have used. One slight problem is that it is looking for one specific answer; all others are marked wrong, possible or not.

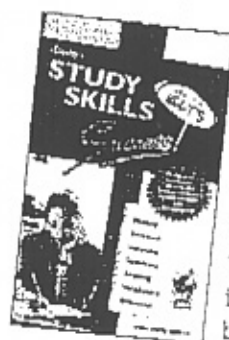
The writing section 'marks' your written work, which you type into a box on the screen. Although it does not claim to replace the teacher, it does give you feedback on things like average sentence length, adverb and pronoun use, as well as a word count. Also it offers a self-assessment check-list for writing, making it a true self-study resource.

Reading activities are varied and the material reasonably interesting. Each practice section has a demonstration which shows you how to answer, usually typing a word or letter directly into a box or dragging sentences into the correct position.

A big advantage is that you can load it onto your hard disk, which means you can use the disk to create many copies of the programme. Each user logs on with his own password, and you keep your own score records and notes.

Very occasional spelling mistakes, and no way of minimising the screen are the only slight disappointments in this otherwise well-produced, informative, user friendly CD-ROM. A demonstration version is available at: www.deltapublishing.com

Simon Mumford, Izmir, Turkey.
Email: Simumford@yahoo.com



Study Skills Success CD (v34)

Clarity Language Consultants Ltd,
1997-2003

www.clarity.com.hk

ISBN 962-960-2768

This CD provides not only a wealth of interactive practice in the four skills, but the opening menu also includes components on Grammar, Vocabulary, Research and Visuals. It's aimed at the more advanced learner and it is 'ideal for IELTS'. However, I am sure that the material could be exploited with any group of advanced ESP/EAP learners interested in improving their existing skills.

The Reading and Vocabulary development components are all based on authentic texts and focus on the essential skills of prediction and scanning for specific information. This reviewer was somewhat peeved, though, to find that she got two answers wrong in one exercise: a text-based gap fill failed to accept 'plant life' for vegetation and 'volcanic activity' for volcanoes. However, as access to correct answers is immediate, I was soon able to see where I had supposedly gone wrong!

As far as Writing is concerned this unit is excellent and guides students through the process of planning, organising and note-taking before presenting them with five practice assignments of the more discursive type and is nicely complemented by Visuals, where the focus is on writing a report based on graphic input. Speaking is of particular interest to IELTS candidates, since it takes them through the four steps of the speaking test, providing examples of both strong and weak performances and students may also record themselves and even practise giving a short talk. I also found that the menu which appears on the right-hand side of the screen throughout – including an IELTS tie-in feature providing more information and advice about the exam, a useful web link, a scratch pad for note-taking and a progress icon which enables students to have an overview of the exercises they have completed – would be especially valuable for self access.

The version sent to me included both an Authoring Kit and Results Manager. This is an excellent product and one which, as an IELTS examiner, I would have no hesitation in recommending to students and teachers alike.

Heather Kempson, Université Libre de Bruxelles.
Email: Heather.Kempson@pandora.be