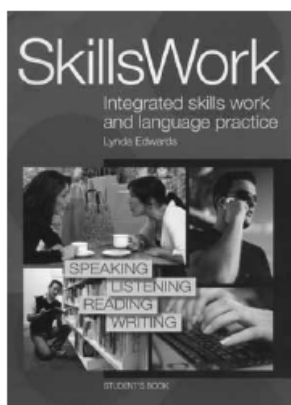


SKILLS WORK: INTEGRATED SKILLS WORK AND LANGUAGE PRACTICE (Student's Book)

Lynda Edwards (2009)

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Skills Work is a new language teaching book which offers great opportunities for all kinds of classrooms, not only for teachers, but also for the students themselves. For students, it is a good book to help them in actively participating in their own process of learning a language inside the classroom. For teachers, it is a useful tool for any kind of classroom structure.

For traditional teachers, that is, those who focus on grammar, a lot of vocabulary, and writing, this book can be used to complement a textbook or coursebook. *Skills Work* offers a great range of activities to practice grammar and vocabulary, although it does not provide

theoretical explanations or long lists of vocabulary related to a topic.

For innovative teachers well-versed teaching in communicative and integrated skills, and less concerned about grammatical and theoretical explanations, this book can be chosen as a main textbook because it contains a lot of tips to practice only the skills and expand on already existing knowledge of the language.

In its almost a hundred pages, *Skills Work* has 40 units, ten units per each skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking), and a list of recording scripts at the end of the book, with a CD of the recordings. As mentioned, the book can be used as the coursebook itself, or as a supplement for a coursebook, because each unit can be used separately. The range of topics is very broad. The book has been designed to cover levels B1 to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, in this case, of course, English.

Each unit has the same structure: pre-, while- and post- activities. Each unit begins with a "lead-in" part: always working in pairs, students discuss different questions to become familiarized with the topic the unit is dealing with or with the vocabulary they are going to use later in the topic. The lead-in is followed by a "word work" part. In these activities, the focus is on vocabulary; that is, by means of different kinds of exercises (gap filling, underlining, matching, etc), students work on the vocabulary expressions that can be associated with the topic when writing or speaking about it.

Depending on the skill the unit focuses on, there are two or three activities related to the skills themselves, called "read/write/talk about it" or "listen". At the same time, every unit has a writing section. Working mainly in pairs or small groups of three, students develop different reading, speaking and writing activities. Most of these activities are also designed for work in pairs, even the

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writing activities.

As an example, in Unit 34, devoted to listening, there is a discussion exercise as a "lead in", eliciting knowledge about scams, the topic of the unit. In the "word work" part, there are two exercises about vocabulary; in one of them, students work with a set of words related in meaning to scams, and in the other students complete a gap-fill with some of these words. It is followed by "listen", with a phone conversation to complete a short text and several sentences with different expressions; "talk about it", with two exercises to talk about the listening, and a sample related to the same situation; "read about it", with a newspaper reading accompanied by two exercises for vocabulary work and discussion of the text; and finally "write about it", with a pair exercise writing a dialogue or an article, following the examples previously presented in the unit, with a presentation of the final product to the class. This is an extremely complete unit called "What's the catch?".

The topics proposed by the author are easily related to our daily teaching practice, such as British food, films, 'now and then', gossip, environment, etc. The book does not have specially revealing topics, but they are good for our day-to-day classwork.

Most of the activities are designed for pairwork. This can be very positive if you want your students to work following the cooperative work trend, but maybe negative for the students themselves, because if they have to do the same activity on their own, they might be unsure how to do it because they lack the support of their classmates.

Another possibly negative point about the book is that units are too short. *Skills Work* is a book designed for classwork; it is not a reference book for students to work alone, because 90% of the activities are designed

for pair or group work. While English teaching has changed a lot, our students still need some tips to practise skills, and this book needs more of them. Sometimes, there are tips indicating useful phrases to start a conversation, a text, etc, which are helpful for the students; however, at times some students are lost in the development of skills, especially speaking and writing and can use more guidelines to start writing or speaking about something.

At the same time, *Skills Work* is beneficial in that it only focuses on skills work, as the name states, unlike other books which mix the listening activities, for example, with grammar or vocabulary activities that are not usually necessary for our teaching practice. The distribution of the units and the different topics makes the book an easy-to-use tool for our classes.

In conclusion, although it is not a revolutionary book in terms of content and structure, I think it is a great skills reference book to have in our personal libraries for work in class. I'm sure that I am going to use it in my next course.

Reviewed by

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