

**Book Review: Prism Intro Student's Book with Online Workbook
Listening and Speaking, and Reading and Writing** by Sabina
Ostrowska, Kate Adams, Wendy Asplin, and Christina Cavage, Cambridge
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Prism Intro books use American English along with international and American topics to teach reading, writing, listening and speaking in English. Videos and American college life sections keep student interest.

Prism Intro is the first of a five-level (A1, A2, B1, B2 & C1), American English paired-skills series (reading/writing and listening/speaking), created for students who need to develop a range of academic language skills. Inside the front cover is a single-use code for the online workbook that provides exercises for extra practice. The cost for each book is as high as \$64 but is also available online for around \$30 (new or used).

Prism Intro consists of two books, one that develops reading and writing skills while the other develops speaking and listening skills that will prepare non-native English speakers and international college students for success in American academic institutions. Each of the two books is divided into eight content units that include the topics of people, climate, lifestyle, places, jobs, homes and buildings, food and culture, and transportation. Each unit is introduced with a video clip that sets the stage for each topic along with sections to practice skills and for critically. The authors indicate *Prism Intro* is special due to the integration of Bloom's Taxonomy with the intention of developing "well-rounded critical thinkers" and the inclusion of unit "on campus" sections of skills and information important to American college life. Each unit includes activities that promote both lower and higher order thinking skills including remembering content, understanding and applying concepts, analyzing and evaluating information, and creating product.

Each text includes a *scope and sequence chart* at the front of the text after the table of contents. The *Prism Listening and Speaking Intro* text chart indicates what the unit includes for "watch and listen," "listenings," "listening skill," "pronunciation for listening," "language development," "critical thinking," "speaking" and "on campus."

"Watch and listen" sections are content topics in sociology, science, and history that mostly focus on global issues rather than the US. "Listenings" offer video examples of typical American college activities such as students introducing themselves, a classroom discussion and a lecture. "Listening skills" include a variety of skills important to college success including listening for main points (in lecture, videos, etc.), listening for details and understanding key vocabulary. "Pronunciation for listening" includes

phonological applications such as syllable stress, sentence stress and intonation. “Language development” is grammar-based content covering the typical tenses, prepositions, adjectives, irregular verbs and related vocabulary. “Critical thinking” activities include using idea maps and creating a survey. “Speaking” consists of a set of speaking skills such as giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, describing, talking about reports, giving and asking directions as well as additional grammar and pronunciation points. Speaking tasks such as describing photos, interviewing a student for a survey, choosing a person for a job and describing a transportation problem are included in each unit. “On campus” addresses issues the authors deem important to student success in American colleges and universities such as keeping healthy, study skills, time management, recording and organizing information, formal and informal language communication skills, asking for clarification, classroom participation and behavior and finding help.

The scope and sequence chart in the *Prism Reading and Writing Intro* text also begins with “Watch and Listen” video clips from various disciplines (engineering, career services, history/sociology, and architecture). These are followed by “readings” that include book excerpts, articles, web sites, a class schedule, emails, a travel guide and a student report. “Reading skills” introduce or review basic academic reading skills including reading for detail, predicting content from visuals, taking notes, skimming and scanning, annotating and finding main ideas. “Language development” reviews basic grammar found in the readings including nouns and verbs, plurals, adjectives and nouns, noun phrases, non-count nouns, vocabulary such as time expressions and food, superlatives and collocations. “Critical Thinking” sections review using a Likert scale to do analysis, comparing data, brainstorming using idea maps, collecting and analyzing data, analyzing a two-column chart, classifying key words and organizing information. “Grammar for writing” introduces various grammar points such as personal pronouns, possessive adjectives, the verb *to be*, articles, the simple present, comparative adjectives, subject-verb agreement, sentence order and determiners. Each grammar point is practiced using fill-in-the-blank exercises. “Writing” introduces or reviews academic writing skills such as compound sentences, concluding sentences, capital letter use, punctuation, paragraph structure and main ideas and indicates the rhetorical mode (descriptive, comparative, explanatory). Writing tasks ask the learner to write sentences or a paragraph on content familiar to the student and using the rhetorical mode indicated. Each unit finishes with an “On campus” section that applies writing to academic tasks such as taking notes, college classes, writing emails to professors, getting around campus, creating a test study plan, using English measurements and meeting people.

Each unit in both texts begins with a video clip that introduces the unit topic and includes activities to do while watching and listening such as check lists, circling statements heard and filling in vocabulary as it was used in the video. A series of listening activities include the introduction of key vocabulary before each listening or reading/writing activity. Speaking activities follow in a listen and repeat format. Writing tasks require the

learner to incorporate what they have read and learned about the topic into original sentences and paragraphs. Each unit ends with a section on skills for navigating campus life.

Usability

Prism Intro would be suitable to use for newly arrived international students or for those in university bridge programs. These are good 'core' books that are especially appropriate to be used in language programs that separate curricula into the skills of reading and writing, and speaking and listening. The formatting, photos and other illustrations are well constructed, just as one would expect from a Cambridge University publication. The books have easy to read fonts, appropriate content for each page, and clear directions for each activity.

Additionally, the books bring an international feel to the language class but at the same time, provides minimal American cultural and linguistic information. Six of eight units feature international themes such as Asian cuisine, transportation in Tokyo and tribal people of Papua New Guinea. The text also includes important American Cultural elements such as American measurements, seasons, time expressions, test study tips, and transportation collocations.

One problem with the activities is the use of vocabulary that could have multiple meanings; however, these meanings are not explained. In related activities there are multiple possible answers to specific items yet the text indicates only one is correct. Miscommunication could result if students are told there is only one way to say something when there are actually multiple appropriate possibilities.

One of the content areas that seemed short-changed was the unit on home and buildings which almost completely concentrated on large cities. Given that many American colleges and universities are located in rural areas, it would be appropriate to provide content about American college towns and related housing and transportation issues.

The books sufficiently cover the human and geographic diversity of the United States. For example, topic introduction illustrations and subtopics were often international content. If the intention of the text is to prepare students for life in an American college or university then American culture is what should primarily be presented.

Prisms Intro texts exclusively use American English. This is not commonly found in many EFL texts and is an important feature of note for instructors of American English as a Foreign Language who are selecting texts for their classes. The On Campus section in each unit is useful for international students in U.S. based Intensive English Programs to assist students in their preparation for American college life. While the text is well constructed it is limited in content. The text would best be used as part of more complex course that incorporates a larger vocabulary and additional academic, American culture and college life content.