

Series Overview

Four Point is a four-volume series designed for English language learners whose primary goal is to succeed in an academic setting. While grammar points and learning strategies are certainly important, academic English Language Learners (ELLs) need skills-based books that focus on the four primary skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a realistic, integrated format, as well as the two primary language bases of vocabulary and grammar. To this end, the *Four Point* series offers a unique combination of instructional material and activities that truly require students to read, write, listen, and speak in a multitude of combinations.

Four Point has two levels. Level 1 is upper-intermediate (TOEFL® PBT 440–480). Level 2 is advanced (TOEFL® PBT 480–520). While academic listening and speaking skills are covered in one volume and academic reading and writing are covered in another, *all four skills are integrated throughout all books*, so a given task may focus on speaking and listening but have a reading and/or writing component to it as well.

Developing the Four Skills in *Four Point*

The series covers the four academic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking while providing reinforcement and systematic recycling of key vocabulary and further exposure to grammar issues. The goal of this series is to help students improve their ability in each of these four critical skills and thereby enable the students to have sufficient English to succeed in their final academic setting, whether it be high school, community college, college, or university.

Many ELLs report great difficulties upon entering their academic courses after they leave the safe haven of their English class with other nonnative speakers and their sympathetic and caring ESL teachers. Their academic instructors speak quickly, give long reading assignments due the next day, deliver classroom lectures and interactions at rapid, native speed, and sometimes balk at the excessive errors in their ELLs' writing. In sum, the ELL who has gone through a sheltered classroom setting is in for a rather rude awakening in a new learning situation where English is taken for granted and no one seems to understand the new reality of the dilemmas of ELLs. Through these materials, we hope to lessen the shock of such an awakening.

The activities in *Four Point* achieve the goal of helping our ELLs experience what life beyond the ESL classroom is like while they are still in our sheltered classroom. This chart explains some of the activities in *Four Point*:

Reading	Listening
Students will read longer, more difficult readings on interesting academic topics that represent the array of interests in a classroom. Extensive pleasure reading is good, but ELLs need practice for the types of reading they will find in their academic course books as well.	Students will have to listen to both short and long lectures to not only pick out details and facts but also practice picking up on speaker intentions or attitudes from gestures. Students will also gain experience listening to multiple native speakers at the same time.
Writing	Speaking
Students will write both short and long assignments that can be organized around more traditional writing templates such as the model paragraph or five-paragraph essay.	Students will practice both short and long extemporaneous speaking and thereby develop their speaking fluency, an area often overlooked in many ESL books. Students will also practice interrupting, maintaining the floor, and adding speech to another speaker's ideas on the spot.

Maximizing Coverage of the Two Primary Language Bases

ESL materials have come a long way from the old days of equating repetitive grammar drills for speaking practice or copying sentences for writing practice. However, in the ensuing shift from focus on language to focus on communication, very little was developed to address the needs of academic ELLs who need to do much more in English than engage in conversations about daily events, fill out job applications, or read short pieces of text for pleasure. It was the proverbial “baby being thrown out with the bath water” as emphasis on grammar and vocabulary was downplayed. However, in order to participate in academic settings, our ELLs certainly need focused activities to develop and then maintain their use of vocabulary and grammar. Toward this end, the *Four Point* series provides reinforcement of key grammar issues without overt practice activities.

More important, these books focus very heavily on vocabulary because ELLs realize that they are way behind their native-speaker counterparts when it comes to vocabulary. Each book highlights between 125–150 key vocabulary items, including individual words, compound words, phrasal verbs, short phrases, idioms, metaphors, collocations, and longer set lexical phrases. In learning vocabulary, the two most important features are frequency of retrievals (i.e., in exercises) and the spacing between these retrievals. Spaced rehearsal is accomplished in two ways. First, after words appear in a textbook, they will reappear multiple times afterward. Second, interactive web-based exercises provide more than ample opportunities for ELLs to practice their vocabulary learning through spaced rehearsals at the student's convenience (www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/4Point/).

General Overview of Units

Each of the books is divided into six units with numerous activities within each unit. The material in each of the volumes could be covered in ten to twelve weeks, but this number is flexible depending on the students and the teacher, and the depth to which the material is practiced.

Using the Exercises in This Book

Each unit includes two reading passages on the same topic within a field of academic study. The exercises accompanying the readings are meant to strengthen a range of reading and writing skills, notably:

- comprehending of details
- developing vocabulary
- paraphrasing
- summarizing
- synthesizing information

Practice with TOEFL®-format questions is also provided.

Pre-Reading Activities

The discussion questions before each reading passage should prompt students to begin thinking about relevant topics and issues. These discussions should be allowed to range freely. A tighter focus to the pre-reading stage is introduced through a pre-reading strategy for each unit. This is articulated before Reading 1 and practiced again before Reading 2.

Strategy/Skill Boxes

Other types of strategies and skills—related to reading, writing, and vocabulary—are highlighted at various points throughout the units. Each appears in a display box with a short explanation. In some cases, an activity follows to explicitly practice what has been learned. In other cases, the skill or strategy is applied more generally in reading or writing.

Comprehension Questions

Each reading in a unit is followed by ten multiple choice comprehension questions. Except for the first question in every set (which asks about a main idea in the reading), these questions are of types that appear on the TOEFL® Internet-based test (iBT). These have obvious value as practice for the iBT, but that is only a secondary reason for including them. The main reason is that questions of this type are dependable gauges of reading comprehension. Whether or not an academic-English student has any interest in preparing for the iBT, he or she should be able to answer objective (fixed-answer) questions about such basics as pronoun reference, inferences, and supporting details. After these ten questions is a “reading to learn” task—either completing a chart or completing a summary. These tasks are also similar to items on the iBT.

Vocabulary Activities

Vocabulary-oriented activities appear in each unit. These include at least one Vocabulary Expansion activity, which may involve filling in blanks with the proper items from a list or completing paraphrases by using specified items. Taken together, the sentences in a Vocabulary Expansion exercise add up to a paragraph on a topic related to that of Reading 1 or Reading 2. Optionally, a teacher could spend extra time on this paragraph and generate two or three comprehension questions about it. In addition, the vocabulary section may present a Vocabulary Strategy and an exercise to practice it. Each unit also has one Vocabulary Focus box. This presents five or six words or phrases that differ from one another only in fine shades of meaning. It is meant to be a high-level vocabulary bonus, something that particularly eager or proficient students could work with in an extra-credit writing or speaking assignment.

Paraphrasing to Simplify Statements

Every reading is accompanied by an exercise in recognizing and producing focused paraphrases. These represent only the “core” of meaning in the origi-

nals. As in any paraphrase, the student has to recognize and produce alternate wording for the concepts in the original sentence. In a focused paraphrase, however, the student also has to distinguish the sentence's central proposition(s) from the "distractions" of extra modifiers, parenthetical asides, lists of examples, and so on. Each Paraphrasing to Simplify exercise starts with three recognition items, in which students choose the most accurate focused paraphrase from three options. Then there are three production items, in which students compose their own focused paraphrases. The recognition items are similar to a type of question (called Sentence Simplification) on the TOEFL® iBT.

Summarizing

Some units include a summary writing exercise. Students are given a list of target vocabulary items and asked to use them in writing a short summary of a reading. This provides two main learning opportunities: (1) a comprehension check regarding the main ideas of a reading and (2) an opportunity to "touch" the vocabulary one more time.

Short Writing Tasks

Each unit has three prompts for writing short pieces related to the topic of the unit. Suggested lengths range from a few sentences to two or three paragraphs. Most of them could generate longer pieces of writing if the teacher wishes. The main aims at this point in the unit, however, are to reinforce vocabulary learning and to encourage students to manipulate concepts that have been under consideration. Larger projects should probably wait until the end of the unit.

Rapid Vocabulary Review

Some summative exercises appear at the end of each unit to help bring together material from the entire unit. The first of these is a review of all the target vocabulary in the unit. It is divided into two sections—synonyms and combinations and associations. The first is straightforward: One item out of three is closest in meaning to the target item, and students indicate which one it is. The second section involves more lateral thinking. The correct answer may stand in any of several relationships to the target term. It may complete a phrase involving the target item, it may name a category to which the target item belongs, or it may state an effect of which the target item is a cause. Some students may be unfamiliar with such a non-linear form of vocabulary review, but it is an essential part of comprehensive vocabulary study. Students should be encouraged to persevere.

Synthesizing Writing Projects

The second type of summative task is a larger writing project that relates to both major reading passages. Students are expected to proceed from what they learned via the reading passages to writing a multi-paragraph essay. One or two prompts are for pieces (about five paragraphs long) that could be written in a one-hour class period. Typically, these prompts encourage students to do some planning as homework before the in-class writing. There are two prompts per chapter that require more outside reading and a longer product. They are meant to be assigned as homework assignments. The directions in such prompts ask students to do some light research in a library or online.

These long writing assignments are not meant to be formal term papers. This book does not address issues of formal academic citation, instead discussing ways to informally acknowledge the sources of one's information (see unit 5). Teachers are free, of course, to turn one or two of these writing projects into something longer, more formal, and with higher stakes. They are also free to skip these longer projects if time is short. It is, in fact, hard to imagine a course with enough time to do a long writing project after every unit.

Vocabulary Log

Crucial to the vocabulary acquisition process is the initial noticing of unknown vocabulary. ELLs must notice the vocabulary in some way, and this noticing then triggers awareness of the item and draws the learner's attention to the word in all subsequent encounters, whether the word is read in a passage or heard in a conversation or lecture. To facilitate noticing and then multiple retrievals of new vocabulary, we have included a chart listing approximately 20 to 25 key vocabulary items at the end of each unit. This Vocabulary Log has three columns and requires students to provide a definition or translation in the second column and then an original example or note about usage in the third column. As demonstrated in *Vocabulary Myths* (Folse 2004, University of Michigan Press), there is no research showing that a definition is better than a translation or vice-versa, so we suggest that you let ELLs decide which one they prefer. After all, this log is each student's individual vocabulary notebook, so students should use whatever information is helpful to them and that will help them remember and use the vocabulary item. If the log information is not deemed useful, the learner will not review this material—which defeats the whole purpose of keeping the notebook. In the third column, students can use the word in a phrase or sentence, or they can also add usage information about the word such as *usually negative*, *very formal sounding*, or *used only with the word launch*, for example.