

American Headway: Starter: Student Book.

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American Headway Starter: Student Book

John Soars & Liz Soars (2002)
Oxford: Oxford University Press
Pp. vii + 138
ISBN 019-4353877 (paper)
£14.25

2 Student Book Cassettes
ISBN 019-4353907
£21.00

Workbook
Tim Falla, John Soars & Liz Soars (2002)
ISBN 019-4353885 (paper)
Pp. 76
£7.80

Workbook Cassette
ISBN 019-4379442
£4.20

Learning English is a challenge at any age. With the proper tools, however, students can learn to speak and communicate clearly and concisely. The *American Headway Starter* series is designed for beginner students.

Each of the book's fourteen units is described in terms of "Grammar," "Vocabulary," "Skills work," and "Everyday English." Displaying the units in such a way allows for both an initial introduction to the chapter, as well as a quick search, helping students to find a specific topic rapidly.

The units are graphically very colorful with clear photographs that provide the student with a sense of reality, thus confirming the use of these exercises and topics in day-to-day encounters. The few drawings that appear are unambiguous and facilitate comprehension.

Every unit is divided into six sections. The first, "Starter," introduces the lesson, a

kind of warm-up to prepare the students for the unit. Next, "Presentation," identifies the topic that will be studied, for instance, Present Simple. Within this section appears a "Grammar Spot" attracting students' attention to important aspects of the unit. This is crucial as it makes students aware of possible difficulties or important expressions. The "Practice" provides a variety of exercises that vary in style. A majority of the exercises require the student to fill in the blanks in dialogues, sentences and images. Other exercises involve linking two parts together to make one sentence, or checking the correct answers, while others require the student to add the appropriate word or expression to the pictures. Other exercises ask students to put words in the correct order, allowing them to strengthen what they are taught. "Skills" encourages students to speak by personalizing the topics, thus arousing students' interests. The "Vocabulary" section lists the words seen in this unit or words that relate to it. This allows students to broaden their vocabulary and encourages speaking. Finally, "Everyday English" promotes social interaction and situational language. [-1-]

There are also listening exercises, as practiced under the "Skills" section. While the writing exercises focus on teaching the grammatical and structural part of the language, the listening exercises concentrate on correct pronunciation and communication. The two Student Book cassettes work hand-in-hand with the student book and are, in fact, an important addition. They guide the students through each unit, where repetition is promoted to teach sentence structure and expression through conversation. The cassettes are thorough and concise, leaving little chance for confusion.

What is learned in the opening units is not ignored or forgotten as the students progress through each unit of the book. In fact, repetition is an important aspect as students are prompted to say hello, as well as present themselves throughout. This training strengthens students' understanding, all the while strengthening their confidence. These cassettes are intended for students with no previous English background, since the people speaking articulate, using standard English, thus allowing for good pronunciation, and easy understanding.

A tapescript appears at least once on every page of the Student Book. This provides students with constant listening, which is needed to improve pronunciation and promote conversation. By doing so, it gives students the confidence to hold a conversation on their own.

As mentioned in the introduction, the end of the book provides students with additional resources. The first of these sections, called "Getting Information" (pp. 108-115), supplies additional copies for group activities. The second exercise of "Cities and countries" in unit 2, for instance, requires students to work with a partner. Such activities promote social skills and confidence, since students are required to create coherent statements and questions.

Tapescripts for every unit on the cassette are available at the end of the book.

These provide help, clarification, assistance with pronunciation, as well as allow students to correct their exercises themselves.

"Grammar Reference" provides grammatical explanations to the material introduced throughout the units. The grammar reference of unit 4, for instance, briefly explains and gives examples of possessive adjectives, possessives, plural nouns, and of the verb *to have* in the simple present. Unit 7 provides a list of question words and possible answers for each. It also lists object pronouns in comparison to subject pronouns and possessive adjectives.

This section is followed by a "Word List," which provides a list of some of the new words learned in each unit. They are classified as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, verbs, even as plural or informal, and are given their appropriate phonetic transcriptions.

Among the final two sections, which are one page each, the students find "Irregular verbs" with a list of 41 irregular verbs, in the base and simple past forms. These include be, come, eat, give, know, leave, read, see, wear, among others. The last page explains the phonetic symbols of 24 consonant sounds and 21 vowel sounds very clearly. By using the vocabulary learned throughout, the students are able to learn the correct pronunciation.

This book does an excellent job in attracting people of various nationalities. It caters to people of different backgrounds, since the photographs and exercises provide a multicultural aspect. Lively photographs create a sense of adventure, by portraying some countries while allowing students to identify with others. [-2-]

Exercises are the best way to improve one's grammar and communication skills. The workbook serves as a complement to the student book. And although this exercise book is in black and white, it still provides photographs that provide realistic situations. The hand-drawn pictures are much more numerous and are just as clear.

The "Contents" briefly introduces each unit, and follows the structure of the Student Book. This allows students to progress at the same pace. For instance, if the students have reached unit 11 in the Student Book, they will also be at unit 11 in the workbook. This eliminates confusion and allows for a smooth progression.

The exercises range from crossword puzzles, to putting pictures in the order they appear in a text, to filling in the appropriate questions, and unscrambling words. They are fun exercises that do not appear to be tedious, since they differ from the "normal" exercises we have been accustomed to. As such, the exercises are more pleasing to students, and as much as possible, stress free.

The ethnic aspect continues to dominate even in the workbook, with characters named "Diego" (p. 8), and "Young-soo Lee" (p. 14). It is also encouraged, since students are asked to translate sentences, such as "Why do you hate pizza?"

'Because it's awful!'" in their own language (p. 37). This also deviates from the "normal" way of teaching, since teachers have long encouraged students not to translate. By encouraging them to do so, the frustration they feel is lifted and learning is made easier.

A cassette complements the workbook allowing to further exercise speech and especially comprehension, since a real challenge arises because the tapescripts do not appear at the end of the book. And although the back cover of the book claims that an "optional Workbook Cassette/CD is available for the Workbook" I would suggest that it be mandatory for weaker students, in order to guide them along.

The *American Headway Starter Student Book* and two cassettes, along with the Workbook and cassette, provide an excellent foundation for learning English. By the end, the students should be able to use the simple present and the present continuous, as well as make simple sentences in the past and future.

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