

BOOK REVIEW

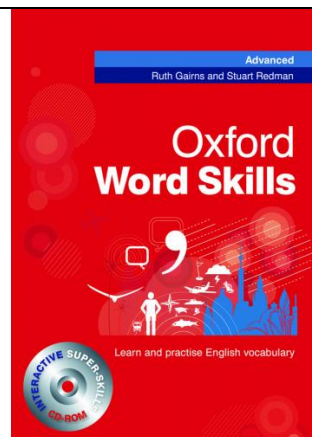
Oxford Word Skills (Advanced) 1st ed. (2009)

Ruth Gairns and Stuart Redman
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Vocabulary is an integral part of almost all aspects involved in a language learning process. Proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a second language requires a certain level of vocabulary knowledge and enhancing word skills is a non-stop process at each level learners attain. Wilkins (1972) puts the significance of vocabulary quite well stating that “. . . while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (pp. 111–112). Likewise, Wallace (1982) states that "not being able to find the words you need to express yourself is the most frustrating experience in speaking another language" (p. 9). Furthermore, Schmitt (2000) highlights that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (p. 55). Aiming to serve teaching and learning English vocabulary *Oxford Word Skills (Advanced)* is uppermost among the three-book vocabulary series by Oxford University Press and addresses C1 and C2 levels under The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Although the book is not a fresh publication on vocabulary, with its distinguishing features it possesses an evergreen quality in helping learners learn and practice English vocabulary, thus maintaining its potential to be a strong option for vocabulary classes in many countries.

The book consists of 80 units each of which covers a 2- or 3-page study on vocabulary. The units are categorized under 12 thematic modules, each composed of 5 to 10 units. The book begins with a starter part that introduces six steps to a wider vocabulary like adding new meanings to familiar words, understanding the figurative meaning of vocabulary items, expanding knowledge of collocations and so on. This part is quite important for both self-use and classroom use because it presents an overview of the vocabulary enhancement steps to be covered throughout the book.

The book possesses a vocabulary-intensive nature and it is really hard to cover all units in a single semester. At this point, its modular organization enables teachers to select or skip some of the units and assign them for self-study. The modules cover a broad scope ranging from lifestyles and institutions to current affairs and spoken and written English. Therefore, the included units touch on a wide range of topics like physical movement, food, health services, prisons, and job benefits; concepts like touch, smell, and taste, past, present, and future; realms of academic English like literature, scientific and technical English; styles of English like (in)formal English and English in journalism; idiomatic expressions and other aspects of language like collocations, discourse markers, and prepositional phrases. The covered vocabulary items were meticulously selected by the authors based



on frequency analyses and corpus studies so that the book would offer useful and real-life related vocabulary for learners.

Each unit is entitled with a can-do statement like *I can talk about meaning and style, I can describe physical movement, I can talk about competitive sport, and I can describe medical advances*. These motivation-enhancing statements resemble the can-do statements put at the end of the units in textbooks as an assessment tool in accordance with the principles introduced by CEFR. The signs of the motivating approach adopted by the authors can also be observed throughout the book with colourful, glossy, and visually-rich pages, copious and clear explanations, plenty of exercise with straightforward instructions, and glossary support for almost each unit.

As a random example, in double-paged Unit 32 entitled *I can talk about migration* there is an introductory table that gives some key migration-related vocabulary like *flee, refugee, asylum*, etc. with meanings and contextual examples. The table is followed by two exercises which successively ask learners to circle the correct words in two-option items (e.g. The villagers took *refugee/refuge* in the nearby towns, p.90) and add the missing word to the given sentences (e.g. Racial and sexual is against the law in matters of employment, p. 90). In the second part of the unit there is a one-paragraph speech bubble on a personal migration experience. The lexical items in bold are defined in the accompanying glossary that also provides synonyms and derivations for some. It is followed by two exercises in which learners are expected to cross out the wrong word and replace it with the right one (e.g. The government policy is to aid newcomers' integrity into society, p. 91) and complete the given dialogue with suitable words.

As is the case with Unit 32, there are purple spotlight boxes in almost all units of the book. The to-the-point information provided in these boxes address some tricky points about the English vocabulary covered in the units. The spotlight on page 90, for instance, attracts attention to the subtle differences as to the usage of *migration, immigration, and emigration*. The boxes sprinkled throughout the book cover a broad scope; for example, while the box on page 73 provides some verbs that are constructed with the prefix *out-* like *outspend, outlive, and outnumber* and related examples, the box on page 102 addresses the different usages of *comprise, make up, consist of, and compose*.

As part of the broad diversity of the offered exercises, the book also covers personalized exercises at the end of some units. These include open-ended questions that ask learners to establish links between the vocabulary they learn and their personal lives, countries or languages. At the end of Unit 25 on shopping habits, for example, the learners encounter questions like 'How often do you go on a spending spree?' and 'Would you describe yourself as a shopaholic?' (p. 73).

At the end of each module there is a review part in which learners find further exercises about the lexical items they have learnt. The exercises here possess a broad range from rewriting and sentence completion to matching and crossword puzzles. The most outstanding thing about the review units is that they offer *more words* for each unit covered, which orients learners to conduct extra study on additional related vocabulary autonomously.

At the end of the book there are vocabulary building tables that present extra alternative derivations of the words covered in the book, answer key for all the exercises except the personalized ones, a list of the spotlight boxes, and an index of all the covered vocabulary with their phonetic descriptions.

The book comes with a CD-ROM through which learners attain access to a pronunciation model for every lexical item covered in the book and further exercises ranging from click or drag-and-drop to gap-filling ones. These extras are quite important in that they help the book realize its assertion to serve as a self-study resource as well as its classroom use.

Along with its several merits discussed above, one possible criticism that may be addressed to the book is about the purple card provided inside for learners to cover up some parts of the pages and



check their learning. The book gives the statement ‘remember to test yourself’ with an icon of the card as a footnote on every page except the review parts. Although the card can be used as a simple and effective tool by the learners to test their understanding of the vocabulary covered in the units, its flashy introduction on the back cover may mislead people to suppose it to be a product of cutting-edge technology.

All in all, *Oxford Word Skills (Advanced)* turns out to be a highly valuable resource for learning and practising English vocabulary both inside and outside the classroom. With its rich content and user-friendly organization, the book enables both teachers and learners to touch over 2,000 advanced words or phrases in English in a systematic and smooth way. Therefore, it deserves to be counted among the must-have vocabulary resources for English language teachers and learners.

References

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