Editors’ Preface

The aim of the English in Focus series is to develop in students who are entering higher education an ability to handle the kind of written English that they will be concerned with as an integral part of their specialist subjects. The approach that has been taken is one which recognizes that learning a language is not merely a matter of learning sentence patterns and vocabulary but must also involve an understanding of how people use these linguistic forms in order to communicate. The purpose is to make students aware of the way English is used in written communication, and thereby to help them develop techniques of reading and to provide them with a guide for their own writing.

The book is based on the belief that intermediate and advanced students who are studying English as a necessary part of their specialist studies need a distinctive type of textbook: one which reflects the nature of the learning problems actually encountered at this stage, and which presents the language as an aspect of the subject they are studying. We feel that a textbook directed at students at this level should attempt to do more than simply repeat the formulas in elementary language teaching material. Most courses of English concentrate on teaching the language system and fail to show how this system is used in communication. As a result, students may know about such formal items as affirmative sentences or modal verbs, but not know how these items are put to use in the making of different kinds of statements and in the production of continuous pieces of discourse.

The principal purpose of the books in this series is not to teach more grammar, but to show students how to use the grammar they already know. In writing these books two basic assumptions have been made. Firstly, it is assumed that the students have had a good deal of instruction in grammar and that they have a considerable dormant competence in English. The books are directed at activating this competence, and extending it, by leading the reader to relate his previously-acquired linguistic knowledge to meaningful realizations of the language system in passages of immediate relevance to his specialist studies. Secondly, it is assumed that students either already have some knowledge of their specialist fields of enquiry or have the capacity to acquire such knowledge without difficulty. The aim is not to teach specialist subject-matter but to develop in the reader an understanding of how this subject-matter is expressed through English. In designing the reading passages care has been taken to make the subject-matter easy to follow. In this way students can concentrate on how the language is being used communicatively without having to puzzle over unfamiliar or complex ideas at the same time. It should be emphasized that these books are not designed to teach either language in isolation or subject-matter in isolation but the manner in which both combine in meaningful communication. The belief is that by relating content and expression in this way, the subject-matter takes on a new interest and the linguistic difficulties are reduced.

In order to ensure a natural communicative function, language is graded by focus rather than by exclusion. Since we assume that the users of books in this series already have a fairly wide knowledge of English grammar, and also have access to a standard dictionary and other reference books, it has been possible to avoid an unnatural step-by-step presentation of grammatical patterns and vocabulary, and to show how a fluent writer uses the whole resources of the language in performing various acts of communication. At the same time, care has been taken not to overload the student with new material, and complex structures have been avoided except where they are necessary in maintaining a natural use of language. The belief is that the book will prepare the student to cope with greater linguistic complexity by developing in him a reading strategy which he can bring to bear on the material in the textbooks he has to read.

In the exercises there is an avoidance of mechanical drills and repetitive pattern practice. The users of these books will be people whose minds are directed towards rational thought and problem-solving and the exercises have been designed to take this fact into account: wherever possible, exercises have been devised which require the same kind of mental activity as students would naturally be engaged in as part of their specialist studies. It is hoped that this type of exercise will make the student see the relationship between expression and content, and will therefore persuade him of the relevance of English learning to his own speciality. In the last resort, we depend on the student being prepared to teach himself, to concentrate diligently on the features of language exemplified in the texts, and to approach the linguistic content of this book with the same spirit of enquiry and desire for knowledge as he would be expected to bring to his main area of study.

It is appreciated that, even in a course whose primary concern is with the written language, the teaching process must inevitably bring in the spoken form as well. Therefore, in order to assist both teacher and learner, the texts have been recorded on cassette.

J. P. B. A.
H. G. W.