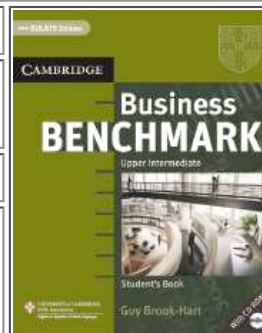
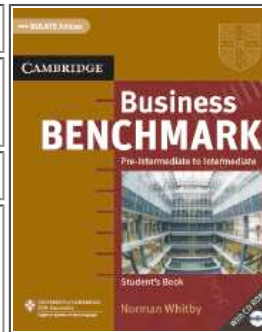


<p><i>Business Benchmark Pre-Intermediate to Intermediate</i> <i>(Student's Book BEC Preliminary Edition)</i></p>			
Author:	Whitby, N. (2006)		
Publisher:	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press		
Pages	ISBN	Price	
Pp.183	ISBN-0-521-67117-5 (paper)	£15.00	
<p><i>Business Benchmark Upper Intermediate</i> <i>(Student's Book BULATS Edition + CD ROM)</i></p>			
Author:	Brook-Hart, G. (2006)		
Publisher:	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press		
Pages	ISBN	Price	
Pp.184	ISBN-0-521-67289-9 (paper)	£20.00	



On the CUP website (<http://www.cambridge.org>) Whitby's and Brook-Hart's books are introduced thus: "Business Benchmark is a brand new 3 level Business English course for BEC or BULATS exams and can also be used independently of these exams for general Business English courses." The first thing I find interesting about this description is the use of the "and" when *which* or *that* would seem the more obvious choice. I have to admit, I re-read the original sentence repeatedly asking myself, is the "and" a deliberate marketing ploy to make the course sound like it has something extra to offer the teacher and student, or was it just a simple error? Either way, having a somewhat unnatural sounding sentence as the first sentence describing a new English Language course book is perhaps not the best advertisement.

Language usage aside, according to the website descriptions of *Business Benchmark*, there are two levels of course book available: (1) pre-intermediate to intermediate level and (2) upper intermediate level. What is unusual about *Business Benchmark* is that there are two versions of the Student's Book for each level, one aimed specifically at the BEC Exams (Cambridge ESOL Business English Certificate Exams) and the other for the BULATS Exam (Cambridge ESOL Business Language Testing Service). Each version of the Student's Book has its own accompanying audio cassette/CD. However, despite the fact that there are separate Student's Books designed for the BEC and BULATS exams respectively, there is only one Teacher's Resource Book per level, which, according to the publishers, can be used in conjunction with either the BEC or BULATS versions of the Student's Book-or both. And finally, it is curious to note that there seems to be only one level of the Student Personal Study Book (a pocket-sized workbook) available at present, the pre-intermediate - intermediate level, again meant to be suitable to accompany either or both Student's Books. Would one presume that an upper-intermediate Personal Study Book would follow?

As you have probably already gathered, *Business Benchmark* is an ambitious attempt to meet the needs of students preparing for the Cambridge Business English Exams, whether BEC or BULATS. Obviously, the choice of course book for students studying specifically for one exam is clear cut, for example, an intermediate level student preparing for the BULATS exam would logically chose the pre-intermediate to intermediate Level BULATS *Benchmark* textbook. But what about teachers like myself, preparing undergraduate business students for using English in their future working lives: which course book should we choose, BEC or BULATS? How can we really know which exam will be most useful to our students in the future? For me, a real innovation would have been a course book that introduced both exams side by side. Also, if the Teacher's Book and Personal Study Book can cover both exams at the same time, why not the Student's Book? As things stand, one possibly effective way to use this course book for general Business English students might be to run a two level course, using the BEC version for one level and the BULATS version for the other level. That way students could see both exam formats and have some variation in the style of textbook as well, since the layout, type of activities and most importantly, the exam preparation and practice activities do vary from one book to the other.

Moving on to the content of the two textbooks under review, it has to be said that they are both undoubtedly excellent exam preparation manuals, offering a variety of stimulating topics and tasks that cover all four skills, vocabulary, grammar, and exam technique and preparation. Both books, in my view, also are particularly strong in lexis and structure building.

However, I am not convinced that using these books in general Business English courses would be so effective. I believe they could be accessible and motivational for working adults/job-experienced adults, but I suspect they may need some supplementing for students who have had no real work experience. Both books do attempt to address pre-work students by suggesting alternative topics/tasks that students with no work experience could do, and there are also supplementary photocopiable activities in the Teacher's Resource Book available. However, if you, like me, have pre-work undergraduate business students, many of whom have not yet really developed a genuine interest in business or in learning functional business language, you might need to supplement the course with more general-interest subjects to keep them motivated.

Some of the things I particularly like about the *Benchmark* Student's Books are:

1. The variety of business topics covered in the 24 units of each book, leaving plenty of scope for choice in study topics;
2. The introductory pages, which in the pre-intermediate book explain what learning Business English involves (p. 9) and in the upper-intermediate level book introduce students to the CEF (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and the BULATS exam (p. 3). For those unfamiliar with the CEF, it is a useful reference tool, created by the Council of Europe, which can be used to help teachers and learners describe, compare and evaluate language learner levels of foreign languages across Europe.
3. The very comprehensive Exam Skills and Exam Practice units at the end of each book, which include, amongst other things, a comprehensive overview of the exams and authentic practice papers from Cambridge Exams; and lastly,
4. The Sample Answers to the Writing Exercises section, which can serve both as an excellent student reference guide as well as a valuable teacher resource.

Overall, I would highly recommend these two books as preparation manuals for the BEC or BULATS exams, as well as for use in general Business English courses for adults with work experience. However, for those who teach pre-work students, I think the success of these books in the classroom could depend a lot on the level of business interest and motivation of the individual students in question. Therefore, for pre-work students, I would recommend that teachers study the content of the units very carefully to make sure there is enough material of relevant interest to their prospective students, before deciding whether or not to incorporate these textbooks into a course of study.

Useful Websites

Business Benchmark: http://www.cambridge.org/elt/elt_projectpage.asp?id=2500130

BEC Exams: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/bec.htm>

BULATS Exam: <http://www.bulats.org/>

CEF: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/Common_Framework_of_Reference/

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