

Full Blast Student's Book Level B1+		
Author:	H. Q. Mitchell & Marileni Malkogianni (2013)	
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Choosing an appropriate and useful book for students has always been an essential question in the professional discussions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. All of the four language skills are to be developed during EFL lessons, which should take place in an exciting and motivating format. Therefore, the right book greatly influences the curriculum, learners' future knowledge, and their attitude towards learning English.

Full Blast B1+, which includes a student book, a companion book, a workbook, a teacher book, a CD and teacher's resource, and interactive whiteboard material, is designed to teach using motivating and contemporary topics and to improve learners' ability to communicate. The focus of the book is on real-life situations, and great emphasis is put on vocabulary building. The textbook is designed for Intermediate level (CEFR Independent user / Threshold level) students. It is stated in the teachers' manual that this book is the ideal stepping stone between B1 and B2 levels.

Full Blast B1+ is organized into 12 modules concerning different topics, such as career, environment, world of work, and communication. They are presented from various angles through practical tips and exam-type tasks. Each module comprises a ten-page section presenting vocabulary, grammar, and practice with the four basic skills. The modules begin with a cover page, which can be used as a warm-up, and an introductory phase to a new topic. For conclusion and review, every module ends with a round up section through which learners can revise the learned grammatical structures and vocabulary units. These parts also offer learners the opportunity for self-evaluation.

I have been using this book with ninth graders at a Hungarian high school. It was selected due to desire for change in terms of book structure and focus. The topics of the reading and

listening tasks are thought-provoking for students and can be discussed well, but I feel that students are sometimes frustrated by the seriousness of themes, such as in the module of *World of Work*. Besides, the complexity of grammar sections also discourages students, and they have stated that these parts should be scaffolded by more tasks in the book and in the workbook. As a result, complementary material is used in some cases.

In each module, the reading section consists of five tasks which focus on background knowledge, content (e.g., reading for detail), new vocabulary, and extension of a topic through follow-up questions. There are two vocabulary sections in each module that are presented in situational context and in parallel with synonyms. Two grammar sections are also present in every module and represent a given grammatical structure in context to help learners develop greater awareness of the language use and identify given patterns. One listening task, discussing the main topic, is implemented in every module which is either a multiple choice, multiple matching, or a gap-filling activity. The development of the writing skill is scaffolded by a step-by-step approach. The improvement of the speaking skill concentrates on different language functions, which engages students in meaningful conversations about the main topic with the help of given expressions and detailed pictures.

The goal of the book is to help students exchange information and express their own ideas, attitudes and opinions, which is well-implemented in the modules. Language learners can define the different language functions and differentiate between them with the help of expressions and useful phrases within a topic. The sociocultural goals aim to focus on real-life situations and topics that learners can encounter when speaking the language. A great variety of topics is embedded in the modules from the perspective of a teenager, which may create a stronger connection between the book (English learning) and the learner. There is one topic, *World of Work*, which deals with a theme that would more likely be discussed by higher-grade students because it concerns life after university.

In addition, the authors claim that the book teaches learners strategies for planning time and setting objectives for themselves, and it aims to help students acquire an understanding of the target culture and language. Both of these goals play an essential role in language teaching, and the authors effectively involve learners in their development through tips (e.g., “Read the questions and options carefully before you hear each extract. Pay special attention to question words”) and cultural content. In addition, one of the main goals is effective preparation for all exams. The book emphasizes exam-type activities, which may become demotivating because of the monotonous and repetitive structure. It is not only demotivating for learners but also for educators because they are supposed to make lessons educating and motivating. The tasks can truly prepare learners for an exam but fail to make the process in a varied, colorful, and exciting way, which creates a task-focused rather than a learner-focused environment.

On the other hand, great emphasis is put on vocabulary building, which may seem like a strength. Instead of teaching and practising keywords within a topic, students are showered with an enormous amount of words which are to be learned within a limited time. The teacher is given the task of making the process interesting by adding own activities for practice, but motivated students with a high proficiency level may make visually observable progress in

building vocabulary. According to experience, even the most motivated student questions the exam-type and monotonous tasks and expects to have more fun learning English.

Another problem with the tasks concerns the lack of listening comprehension. One listening task is embedded in every module, which does not provide enough preparation for the module test at the end of every second module. The editors may have the aim to first focus on productive skills and then on receptive ones. Based on own experiences, more practice would be needed especially compared to the difficulty level of the listening comprehension in module tests. The test challenges students to prepare two topics and four types of grammatical structures at a time. After the first test taken, changes have been made concerning the use of module tests with my group. The original tests are used only as bases for the rewritten tests and they are taken after every module. This can confirm that my students are able to get ready for the tests, and the learned structures, vocabulary, and topics can be assessed properly.

Despite these shortcomings, *Full Blast B1+* is a well-structured book that provides a lot of vocabulary. However, it is unsuccessful at presenting the content and the grammar in an exciting and motivating way. The layout of the book is clear, and activities are put in logical order; this improves the clarity of the book by adding pictures and colorful pages. There are usually two to four tasks on a page which are built upon each other and gradually require more productivity and critical thinking; therefore, they can engage learners in step-by-step learning. Especially with lower proficiency groups, complementary materials and extra practice need to be applied. Students are exposed to interesting content with the application and development of reading, speaking and writing skills, but the book fails to promote the listening as one of the basic language skills.

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