ENGINNEERING INFORMATION by
Michael Kitto and Richard West
London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1984
Pages 60. Price £2.75.

The authors of Engineering Information claim to adopt a skills approach to ESP (English for Specific Purposes) in their aim of providing "practice in understanding authentic texts" for engineers. Unlike most textbook writers, they sensitize students to the interrelationship between language and engineering without trying to teach them the English of Chemical or Process Engineering. They do not offer teaching material so much as reading material.

Michael Kitto and Richard West have collected twenty-six pieces—all un-edited, unsimplified, unmodified—from such branches as civil, design, process, chemical, electrical, computing, production and electronic engineering, and offer practice aimed at developing some of the skills required to read professional journals published in English.

The student learns to scan an engineering text by responding to true/false statements and exercises related to locating specific information. He studies vocabulary in a variety of forms, often matching a word or phrase to the appropriate meaning in the article and/or predicting the answer. He develops reference skills by seeing how a part of the article is connected backwards or forwards to another part. He also learns the skills of information transfer by constructing/completing a diagram, table, flowchart, or summary. The last exercise type relates to language use; by practising grammar in context, for example, tense forms, prepositions of time/sequence, cause and effect connectors, etc., he learns to relate language forms to their underlying meanings.

The exercises are designed to make reading communicative, though I have my reservations about the assumptions and expectations of ESP learners for academic purposes in the SL situation. Their perception of the world is so different from that of the FL learners to whom the book seems to address itself. Their degree of involvement with the material, however original or authentic, will differ from that of the FL learner in ways which have a bearing on their reading strategies, interpretations of the text, predictions etc. In this respect, the book may not be presenting an adequate communicative challenge to learners in the ESL context.

However, it makes a good self-study material with a pull-out key to the exercises on the centre pages and an index of topics as well as an index of language points and exercises at the back. The authors also offer the student a one-page introduction, explaining the rationale of the course, though no additional guidance is provided for the teacher.

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