

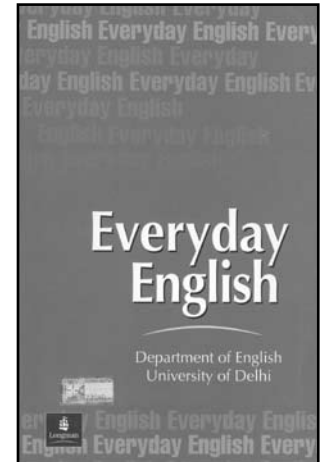
# Everyday English (English Textbook for Stream C)

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The Department of English introduced several new papers this year in Streams A, B, and C as part of the B.A. Programme. While the prescribed textbooks for Stream A were available from the later part of the first semester, those for Streams B and C took much longer getting organized and becoming accessible to teachers as well as students. It was only in December, after a workshop held by the Department, that the texts and the revised syllabi

for both courses were finally made available. *Everyday English* is the prescribed text for Stream C, for the first year students.

Edited by Madhu Gurtu and Kusum Virmani of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College, the text sets out to deal with basic communication and language learning skills. The selection is rather eclectic in terms of themes and genres but the editors have taken care to collate only such pieces as are linguistically simple



*Editors: Madhu Gurtu & Kusum Virmani*

**Published by PEARSON  
LONGMAN, 2005.  
[Pages 115, Price – Rs.55]**

and therefore easy to comprehend for those students who have studied English only up to class 8.

The degree of complexity in terms of language as well as the issues being dealt with increases with subsequent chapters. The first chapter, 'Flowers', uses the simplest language as well as images

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and is placed firmly within the Indian context so that there are no unfamiliar images or words for its target readership. As the chapters progress, the language acquires a slightly more challenging aspect as can be seen in the chapter entitled 'A Sense of Humour' which tries discussing more abstract ideas and therefore uses a more complex vocabulary. Chapters like 'Penny Post', 'The Diary of Anne Frank', 'Through the Looking Glass' and 'The Bag' introduce images from typically European settings and therefore might seem unfamiliar to the average C Stream student but the language ought not to present any problems. In fact, the use of a different cultural context only adds to the richness of the selection and therefore enables the students to get a more informed perspective on 'English' literature.

The 'Pre-Reading Activity' at the onset of every chapter has been kept conversational and can lead to some stimulating discussions. The only problem seems to be that sometimes the questions are too simplistic to generate interest among undergraduate students. Some such examples are:

What flowers do you find in summer, winter and spring? Can you describe

their colour? (chapter 1)

and

Do you ever have dreams? When do you generally dream-during day time

or at night? (chapter 10)

The exercises at the end of every chapter have been constructed keeping in mind the development of reading, writing as well as speaking skills. The emphasis is on

a practical approach and on getting the students actively involved in the issues being discussed. The exercises make use of charts and tables, thereby using visual tools to make the learning process easier.

The themes of the chosen pieces are varied. Some chapters, like 'Chains of Slavery', deal with issues of social relevance while some others like 'Kiran Bedi's Acceptance Speech' and 'What I Wanted to Be' belong to the genre of inspirational writing. Certain others are meant to be educational while some are simply entertaining. The need to allow students to 'enjoy' literature has also been taken care of in the various pieces appended to the chapters, which include poems as also make-believe situations geared towards imaginatively engaging the students in grammatical and literary exercises.

In keeping with the practical approach that marks the book in its entirety, the editors have taken care to include a particularly useful section, one on Dictionary usage, which appears in chapter 8. It defines a dictionary entry and also sets out how to use a dictionary, for meanings as well as pronunciation (pg 38-42). All this information is given through exercises so as to give the students some real-time practice in using a dictionary.

The real value of the text lies in its being not only student-friendly but also teacher-friendly. The learning tools it uses are simple and yet creative and conducive to classroom teaching. Unlike a lot of other ambitious projects, this text sets out with the aim of working on communication skills and efficiently manages the same. Hopefully, access to *Everyday English* from

the beginning of the next academic session will make teaching and learning Stream C English an easier and more enjoyable task.

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Comments of Prof. Alan Durant, Professor of English studies, Middlesex University London, U.K.

**Fluency in English** by Varma, Sanyal & Prasad, Macmillan, New Delhi, 2005

This is an ambitious textbook which builds on established classroom traditions in India but also introduces a range of new approaches. The book retains the idea of core extracts, but adds useful warm-up activities as well as writing, speaking and debating tasks by way of follow-up. The texts are well chosen to appeal to today's young learners, and the commentary is insightful and fresh in approach. A useful textbook.

My only doubt is about the title. The book is much broader - and in a way more interesting - than the title 'fluency', at least as usually understood, suggests.

**Cultural Diversity, Linguistic Plurality and Literary Traditions in India** by Kumar, Chauhan & Prakash, Macmillan, New Delhi, 2005

A genuinely thought-provoking and challenging book for undergraduates, which brings together a selection of influential writing about literary production and understanding in the specific Indian context. Interesting links are developed between the language situation in India, both now and in the past, and different aims and forms of cultural expression. Introductory comments on the extracts, along with notes provided, are succinct and helpful without being obtrusive.

**English at the Workplace** by Sanyal, Sawhney & Varma, Macmillan, New Delhi, 2005

A practical and businesslike course organised around units that consistently show an emphasis on language in contemporary use. Students working with this book are well supported in terms of language skills without being patronised in terms of content. An additional, welcome feature is the book's informative but non-prescriptive attention to *how* language works, even as practical work concentrates on developing proficiency.