About Academic Connections

*Academic Connections* is a four-level skills course designed for students preparing for academic study and standardized tests. Combining teacher-led instruction and Web-based components, this series encompasses a systematic, building-block approach that helps students develop and sharpen their language skills as well as their academic and test-taking abilities.

This research-based program was developed in cooperation with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), creator of the TOEFL® test. The blend of curriculum and assessment is based on a theory of action that as English language learners are provided with authentic tasks, timely feedback and individualized, targeted practice opportunities, these students are better able to develop and integrate their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Breen, 1985; Cumming, Grant, Mulcahy-Enrt & Powers, 2005; Harmer, 2001; Lee, 1997; Mackey & Oliver, 2002; Mackey & Silver, 2005; Rosenfeld, Leung & Oltman, 2001; Russell & Spada, 2006).

The Academic Connections Series Is

**Integrated**

- **Academic Connections** integrates all four language skills and teaches students how to integrate skills and content in real-world academic contexts.

A synthesis of 46 research studies found that blended learning—a hybrid of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction and online learning—results in better student outcomes, especially when the Web-based aspects provide a personalized student experience, additional practice opportunities and time for self-reflection (DOE, 2009)

Research suggests that when English language learners are provided with targeted activities to develop their individual language skills, their English language skills may improve (Garcia, 2009; Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2005). Research suggests that as English language learners practice integrating their individual language skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening), their overall language skills tend to improve (DOE, 2009; Gass, 2003; Sanz & Morgan-Short 2004, 2005).

**Academic**

- **Explicit step-by-step academic skill development leads to student mastery.** With careful instruction and engaging practice tasks, students learn how to organize information, make connections, and think critically.

TOEFL® research (see Rosenfeld et al., 2001) recognizes reading, writing, speaking and listening as key academic competency skills for English language learners.
TOEFL® research findings identify specific tasks important for academic success at the undergraduate and graduate levels, from which *Academic Connections* tasks are based (Rosenfeld et al., 2001).

*Academic Connections* courses cover five academic content areas: Social Science, Life Science, Physical Science, Business and Marketing, and Arts and Literature; these subjects are important disciplines for English language learners (Rosenfeld et al., 2001).

**Authentic**

- **High-interest and intellectually-stimulating authentic material familiarizes students with academic content.** Authentic tasks include listening to lectures, note-taking, participating in debates, preparing oral and written reports, and writing essays.

Well-known theory in the field argues that authenticity should be a primary consideration in designing or using language-learning tasks (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Breen, 1985).

Prevailing language-teaching methodology emphasizes that tasks must involve students in “real” or realistic situations, which is fundamental to the notion of authenticity (Harmer, 2001).

Specifically, tasks should serve as genuine learning opportunities representing “real world” scenarios in order to facilitate language learning (Cumming et al., 2005).

**Assessment-based**

- ***Academic Connections* provides a variety of assessments that result in more effective student practice opportunities based upon individual needs.**

*Academic Connections* includes:

- a placement test that situates students in the appropriate level;
- pre-course and post-course tests that allow teachers to target instruction and measure achievement;
- multi-unit tests that track individual and class progress;
- formative assessments [Checkpoints] that monitor student skill mastery, allowing teachers to assign individualized exercises focused on the specific learning needs of the class.

Developed by ETS experts and delivered online to students, these assessments provide teachers with ongoing, real-time evidence of individual student learning and whole-class progress.

Research shows that when teachers use evidence of student learning to adapt their instruction to better meet the needs of the class, student learning improves (Bergan, Sladeczek, Schwarz, & Smith, 1991; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, & Stecker, 1991).
**Personalized**

- **MyAcademicConnectionsLab**, an integral part of the Academic Connections series, is an easy-to-use online program for students and teachers that saves time and improves results.

**MyAcademicConnectionsLab** offers:
- unlimited access to reading and listening selections
- original activities that support the program and build academic skills and vocabulary
- focused test preparation to help students succeed academically and on international exams
- individualized instruction
- instant feedback
- personalized study plans to help students improve results
- a flexible gradebook to track student progress
- authoring features that give teachers control of content

Research shows that as teachers receive and provide timely, individualized student feedback, they are better able to adapt instruction to meet the particular needs of the class (Capizzi & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs et al, 1991; Jones & Krouse, 1988).

Experts argue that when language teachers are able to adapt instruction to better meet their students’ needs, students’ language skills improve (Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2001; Krashen, 1985).

**References**


