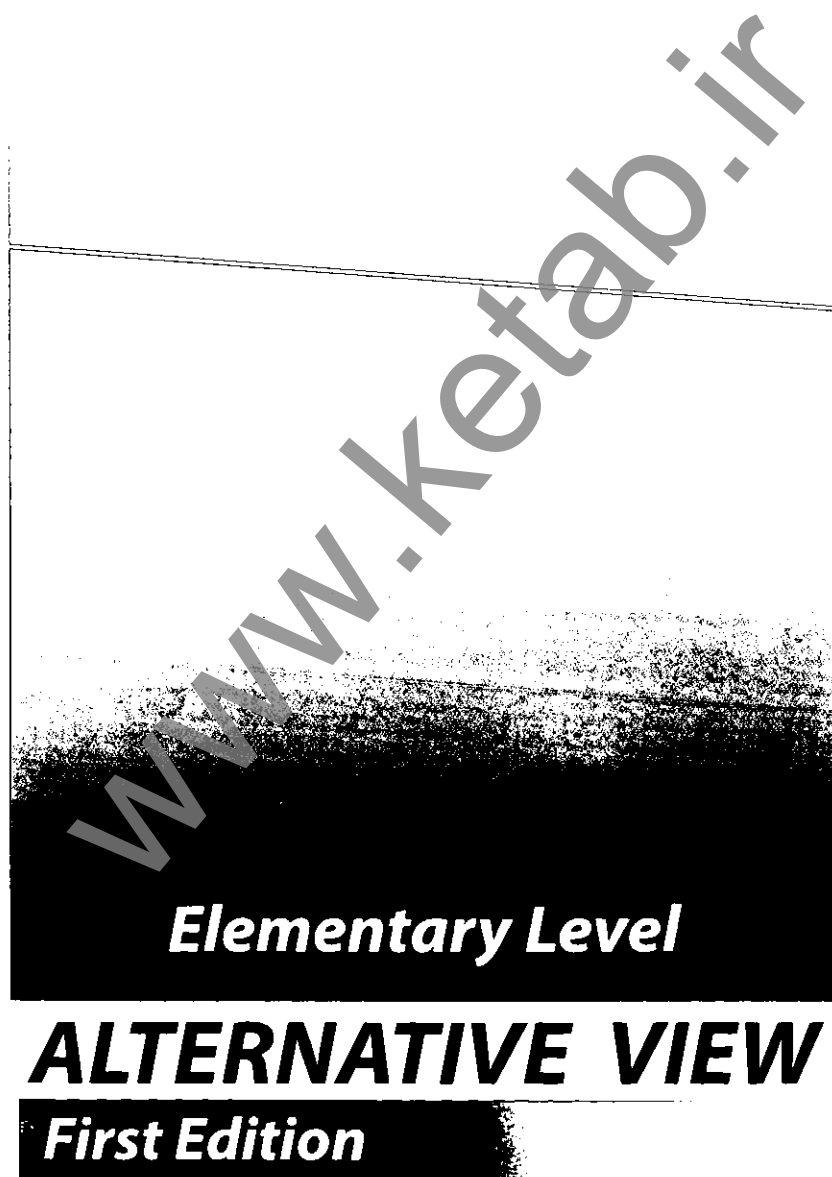


In the name of God



ENGLISH FOR GLOBAL USE
Anas Abdelrahim

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Preface

As its name suggests, Alternative View is designed to offer an entirely different approach to language teaching and learning. It grew out of sense of frustration with the existing English textbooks as they are far removed from the local contexts of students and as they are based on a narrow scope of communicative acts. Alternative View is guided by three principles:

Authenticity has to do with the extent to which a given material reflects actual language use. For instance, the set dialogues, which permeates mainstream English textbook, are designed solely for the purpose of teaching a particular grammar point with the result that it doesn't approximate authentic spoken language. In other words, the content is sacrificed for the form or function. Another artificial feature is the pre-selected closed questions to which learners are expected to give certain responses. This violates the unpredictable nature of language. In contrast, Alternative View focuses more on content and less on form. The idea is that through meaningful and engaged dialogues stimulated by open questions, learners will come to pick up the form incidentally rather than intentionally.

Relevance is another distinctive characteristic of our approach and textbook. While the content of other textbooks is detached from the lived reality of the students, Alternative View is rooted in an inclusive environment where learners, regardless of their backgrounds, can find it easy to relate to it. What's more, it is relevant in the sense that it addresses controversial issues from an alternative perspective.

Meaningful learning is another feature which is defined as authentic, engaged, and relevant to a vision of a better life. The primary concern of Alternative View is to set the stage for a thought-provoking learning environment in which students are encouraged to question their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. Equally important is our emphasis on bridging the gap between our mental conceptions and the level of technological development in the world today. We believe it's dangerously irresponsible to turn a blind eye to what's going on in the world today. In a nutshell, teaching and learning should be geared toward making this world a better place. For that to happen, we need to think outside the box.

Alternative View is unique in the following ways:

- ⇒ It is conversation-based
- ⇒ Its dialogues are authentic
- ⇒ Its content is meaningful
- ⇒ It is relevant to our current global reality
- ⇒ It is thought-stimulating
- ⇒ It is participatory
- ⇒ It offers a different perspective on a wide range of issues
- ⇒ It encourages autonomous and responsible learning
- ⇒ It encourages thinking outside the box
- ⇒ It contributes to a better world by raising critical consciousness

Series Overview

Alternative View is a four-level English textbook designed for students who are interested in learning more than just English and who want to have a big say in their learning process. Each module contains several conversation-stimulating exercises with open-ended questions. Below is a brief sketch of the overall organization of each module.

Module outline

Every module consists of a number of conversation-based exercises and it begins with six pictures related to the topic of the module. The purpose of the dialogue is to set the tone for the whole session and to tap into what the learners already know about the issue at hand. At this point the students sink their teeth into a lively dialogue as they explore different aspects of the topic. Except for elementary level, the remaining levels begin with a lead-in where students answer thought-provoking questions related to the six pictures. This is followed by exercise on some famous quotes or statements related to the topic.

Express yourself

This exercise aims at giving students the opportunity to talk about themselves and their views on the topic. There are five open-ended questions which can be answered differently by different students on the basis of their lived experiences. Each student answers the entire five questions all at once in the form of a mini-presentation.

Vocabulary

This exercise is designed to familiarize students with vocabulary that they will come across throughout the module. A list of vocabulary is presented in a table and students are required to find the odd one out and give reason. The thinking behind this exercise is that students should think about their responses. Sometimes, the choices are almost similar that more than one answer is possible. This is followed by exercise six which is intended to show how the new vocabulary can be used in sentences.

Dialogue

Exercise 5 is a dialogue designed to address some of the issues raised in the module. Students are expected to focus on three elements in the dialogue: the main theme, new expressions, and the grammar. The italicized sentences show the new expressions. Unlike mainstream textbooks which have set and sterile dialogues designed to teach a particular grammar point, the dialogues in Alternative View are again natural where grammar emerges from the dialogue rather than writing a dialogue for the purpose of a grammar lesson. The dialogue is followed by questions intended to turn the dialogue into speaking exercise. It should be noted that the dialogue usually contains the four steps of the dialectic model: analyze, historicize, visualize, and organize.

Indirect Grammar Exercise

Exercise 8 is an implicit exposition of the grammar of the module. Explicit explanation of grammar is given at the end of the module because the emphasis is on the content rather than the form. When grammatical explanation is given somewhere in the middle of the module, it tends to distract students from paying attention to the content.

Discussion

Exercise 9 is a discussion corner which presents some statements and the students are expected to take a stand; either for or against. In keeping with the dialogic and dialectic approach of the textbook, the students usually get split into two groups. This makes for an animated dialogue where students try to get their messages across as they come up with arguments to support their position. It should be noted that the statements usually follow some or all of the four steps of the dialectic model.

Reading

Exercise 11 is a reading passage which begins with pictures that graphically sum up the main idea and the main points discussed in the reading. This is followed by questions related to the reading and students discuss them as a pre-reading exercise. Some new words and expressions in the passage are highlighted for exercise 12.

The reading passage is followed by comprehension questions and then matching exercise (12) based on the underlined expression or words in the passage.

Take-home message

Exercise 14 aims at reviewing the main idea and the main points presented in the module. It consists of five questions and the first question asks students to talk about what they have learned from the module. Ultimately, it is hoped that this exercise will drive home the main theme of the module and will spark enough interest in the topic so that students will want to explore it further.

Direct Grammar

Exercise 14 gives brief and explicit explanation of the grammar point presented indirectly throughout the module. The idea is to exercise to help students get a better sense of the structure and use of the new grammar lesson.

Writing

Exercise 15 is writing in which students are encouraged to either agree or disagree with usually a controversial statement related to the topic of the module. The purpose of this writing exercise is to give the students the chance to write about the topic using some of the new vocabulary, expressions, and grammar that they have learned from the module.

It should be noted that elementary level is structured slightly different. It has 13 exercises instead of 15 as the case in pre-intermediate and intermediate. Aside from the fact that there is no food for thought section, vocabulary exercise, and discussion corner at elementary level, the overall organization of the book is the same.

Acknowledgements

Alternative View was a long time in the making and it would not have materialized had it not been for the collective efforts of family, friends, and colleagues, students and even total strangers.

I would like to thank my mom for having been the embodiment of an alternative way of living that ultimately was the unconscious inspiration of this textbook. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my oldest brother for setting a good example for me by his unstinting support fueled by a genuine love for all of us.

Special thanks go to my friends who have always been there for me whenever I needed them. Extra especial thanks go to Bobby, Anita, Ibrahim, Afsaneh, Mehdi, Farzaneh, Maryam, and many others too numerous to mention here.

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The story of how this textbook was designed is a testament to what human beings could accomplish if they came together and organized around one common goal animated by the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. So, in a sense, the way in which the textbook gradually came into existence points in the direction of an alternative that challenges the current state of affairs.

In a nutshell, each one of the people mentioned above proved to me that we can be the alternative we seek.