

## *The American Language Academy's ALA Lab System: Bringing All the Language Skills to CALL*

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### **The American Language Academy**

For almost two decades, the American Language Academy (ALA) has been known worldwide for excellence in English language training, TOEFL preparation, and, more recently, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). ALA began teaching English in 1971 to students and professionals who come to the United States to attend college or to work. From the time of its first academy in Washington, D.C.—to its ten locations throughout the United States today—ALA's team of respected courseware developers continues to create innovative text and computer materials for high-quality English language training in America and international markets.

### **The ALA Laboratory System**

Recently introduced by ALA and billed as the "next generation in language-learning technology," the ALA Lab System's computer technology is said to have made the traditional language laboratory obsolete. To CALL, the ALA Lab System adds the elements of speaking and listening. Traditional language laboratories handle information in a linear fashion; learners using any linear technology are limited by this linearity in terms of what functions they can expect such technology to enable the user to perform. Because it is a computer-based

technology, the ALA Lab System allows learners to randomly select from a computer menu the exercises to be practiced. Once the text appears on the screen, learners can listen to it, zero in on particular phrases, and practice such phrases in comparison with a natural-sounding digitized voice that is CD-quality. Learners can work not only on repetition of what is being heard, but also on a particular phoneme—the smallest sound in the language. This kind of versatility is non-linear; this kind of versatility is new.

When using the ALA Lab System, the learner listens to real, human speech; speaks and hears, compares and practices his own speech; reads with or without hearing the text read; and, writes texts for creative writing assignments. The ALA System turns any personal computer (IBM PC or true compatible; DOS 2.1 or higher; 384K RAM) into the most sophisticated language laboratory available, adding interactive sound and dynamic graphics to the process of language acquisition.

### **ALA Lab System's Four Integrated Components**

#### *AudioLab*

This component of the system enables the learner to hear a complete passage and study the passage in detail, phrase by phrase. It also enables learners to listen to, record, and compare their voices with the original or target language model. Furthermore, learners are able to analyze, record, and compare the sounds within any phrase forward, backward, and at any isolated point. AudioLab also includes a writing component where the student listens to a passage—phrase by phrase—and types the required input; learners are free to correct or

repeat. Teachers are free to create their own passages and make their own recordings.

AudioLab Components include the following: AudioLab for listening/speaking; AudioWrite for listening/writing; SoundSort for aural comprehension; and authoring program for teachers. Also included are the PC Audio Board; headset with built-in microphone; 1 Teacher Disk; 1 Student Disk; 1 Teacher Handbook; 1 Student Poster; and, 5 CourseWare Disks (*America*—5 Units).

### ***SongLab***

This component of the ALA Lab System provides learners with eight American folk songs and introductory texts for use by learners and serves as a supplement to AudioLab's *America*. SongLab offers *all the features of AudioLab* plus learners have a choice of listening to the songs four different ways. The Stereo Audio Cassette accompanies SongLab so that learners can show what they have learned with SongLab on their computers.

SongLab Components include the following: 8 SongLab Disks (1.2mb) or 16 Disks (360K); 8 AudioLab Disks; 1 TextLab Disk; 1 Handbook; 1 SongLab Cassette; 8 WordLab Disks; 8 XWord Disks. (SongLab and *America* are also available on CD ROM).

### ***TextLab***

This component of the ALA Lab System is designed to help develop reading comprehension skills, both intensive and extensive. It provides an easy-to-use, basic one-page word processor for creative writing, and offers teachers an easy way of writing and modifying texts as well as creating an infinite variety of customized exercises. Testwords may be chosen using any combination of the following options: manually, cloze (0-9gaps), whole word matching, and prefix, suffix, or mid-word matching.

TextLab Components include the following: 1 Teacher Disk; 5 Student Disks, each containing Student Programs and 10 different *America* programs; 1 Teacher Handbook; and, 1 Student Poster.

### ***WordLab***

This component of the ALA Lab System assists learners in vocabulary building through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It enables learners to choose preselected items, to see a written form of the meaning and/or listen to pronunciation, and then record and immediately compare pronunciation with the original. Crossword puzzle clues can be either written or aural; with the authoring system, music or sound effects can also be generated as clues.

WordLab Components include the following: WordLab for vocabulary, listening and pronunciation; WordLearner for vocabulary; XWord, a unique crossword game; and, Classroom Concordance for reading, writing, structural, and lexical skills. Also included are 1 Teacher Disk, 1 Student Disk, 5 WordLab Disks—to complement AudioLab America Disks, 5 XWord Disks—to complement AudioLab America Disks, 1 Teacher Handbook, and, 1 Student Poster.

### **ALA Lab System Special Features**

The system is designed for teachers and learners with minimal computer familiarity or expertise. As such, the system can be used to teach all languages based on the Roman alphabet, to students of all ages and abilities. Automatic redefinition of U.S. and U.K. keyboards for up to seven character sets is also available.

### **ALA Lab System Future Directions—Available Spring 1990**

#### ***TestLab***

This ALA Lab System component of the immediate future is a comprehensive program for creating an infinite variety of different forms of questions on any subject, such as matching, multiple choice, gap-filling, transformations, and closed writing. It will permit the use of Help windows; any combination of receptive audio can also be chosen with TestLab.

## **ALA Lab System: Applications Beyond Teaching**

ALA's patent-pending laboratory system technology product has applications beyond teaching almost any language. The obvious market for the ALA Lab System is the established educational sector. There is, in addition, a parallel market, namely, corporate training environments. For example, an accounting firm with foreign-born associates who need to improve their English can benefit from the ALA Lab System: With an abundance of PCs available, such a firm can provide English language education in-house.

The ALA Lab System is the newest product in a series of very successful computer courseware

and books for English language teaching developed and produced by ALA. Grammar Mastery, Vocabulary Mastery, and Reading Mastery—in three series each—are among ALA's most widely used and popular computer courseware offerings. ALA has also developed a comprehensive TOEFL course which is unique among TOEFL preparation materials.

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