
Jarvis, Ana C., Rachel Lebrede, and Francisco Mena-Ayllón. *¿Cómo se dice...?*

Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. ISBN 0-618-47144-8.

¿Cómo se dice...? (2005) is the eighth edition of an introductory college-level text. This new edition retained what the publisher believed its users liked, notably the “balanced, four-skills approach,” “a clear, logical presentation of grammar,” “an emphasis on practical communication,” and “an abundance of four-skills practice that is both realistic and challenging.” It has added features such as new dialogues, enhanced vocabulary building, and contextualized grammar, to name just a few.

The chapter opener is a dialog linked to the concepts taught. The one for the first chapter, however, is quite difficult and would pose a tremendous challenge to true beginners. Vocabulary is presented soon after, but not all words from the dialog are presented in the Spanish-English vocabulary list. For example, both “mucho gusto” and “el gusto es mío” are in the opening dialog, but only “mucho gusto” is included in the vocabulary list. This may lead to some confusion for students, despite the similarity of the expressions. This reviewer was also surprised at the level of the follow-up activities. After the vocabulary is presented, there are fill-in-the-blank sentences to complete. The second answer requires student to supply “le” in the expression “¿Cómo le va?” Although this expression is presented as vocabulary, the required answer does seem too advanced for beginners.

In the sections that follow, the text becomes more typical of an introductory-level text. The alphabet is presented, as are the numbers 0-30. Colors are presented next, with days of the week following close behind. Next, students are taught the date, months, and seasons. Subject pronouns are presented, as well as the verb “ser.” The end of the chapter has a reading section, which is too easy, especially considering the difficulty of the opening dialog. The chapter closes with useful cultural information, including eye-catching photos.

All subsequent chapters follow this basic structure. After every third chapter there is a self-test which students can use to quiz themselves and then review the material studied. This self-test is broken down into sections that refer to the different chapters being reviewed, so they can be used as needed by students.

Despite the inconsistency of the opening chapter, the rest of the book seems to progress quite logically through the predictable grammar topics. By Chapter 17, the penultimate chapter, students are learning the *pluscuamperfecto* and the subjunctive, having already completed other simple and compound tenses. This text is probably best used over a minimum of two semesters, as there is an enormous amount of material to cover.

The accompanying workbook seems fairly challenging and serves to reinforce the structures learned in the text. There are a wide variety of practice activities, and this is where the four-skills approach seems to really come into play. There are listening activities and then questions that relate to the listening activity. They come in a variety of formats and ask students to match the picture with what they hear, fill in information in a chart as they listen to a dialog, and even do dictation activities. There are also sections on pronunciation, as well as writing activities. These, too, are varied and ask students to fill in the blanks, group words into categories, and write complete answers to questions. Finally, there are speaking activities, in which the student answers a question or modifies a certain sentence in order to clarify it or expand upon it.

One thing to note is that the in-text dialogs are the same as the ones in the workbook. A professor wanting to use them in class will have to purchase the multimedia component, as they are not included on the CDs. Perhaps in a future edition the editor will consider making them available as an audio component as well, for those who may not be as technologically well equipped in the classroom or for those who only want to purchase one CD. The audio CDs are well done, with native speakers saying vocabulary words for pronunciation or reciting verb forms. Occasionally, they have a short listening activity, such as a pronunciation exercise in which words are presented in context. To complete the listening exercises in the workbook, teachers will need to purchase the audio program that goes with it. The standard one that was provided to this reviewer with the text did not have any of the laboratory/audio activities for the workbook.

Overall, *¿Cómo se dice...?* appears to be a comprehensive college-level text. It is packed with information and activities; in fact, it is so packed with information that it would be difficult to complete it in just two semesters, even in an intensive course. There are many ancillaries available, and one bit of advice is to make sure you get all the CD or multimedia components needed if you are planning to

do the activities in the workbook and the text. They are valuable activities for the four-skills approach taken by this text.

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