
**Donley, Philip Redwine, José Luis Benavides,
and José A. Blanco. *Aventuras: Primer curso de
la lengua española*. 2nd edition.**

**Boston: Vistas Higher Learning, 2007. Includes: Instructor's
Annotated Edition, Workbook/Video Manual, Lab Manual,
Workbook/Video Manual/Lab Manual Answer Key, Instructor's**

Resource CD-ROM, *Aventuras and Aventuras en los países hispanos* DVD Set, Lab Program MP3s CD-ROM, Textbook MP3s CD-ROM, *Aventuras* Video CD-ROM, Testing Program, Overhead Transparencies, Super Website. ISBN: 1-59334-894-0.

The second edition of the *Aventuras* series is intended to be a “user-friendly” introduction to Spanish. It owes its conception to the success of its predecessors, *Vistas: Introducción a la lengua española* and *Panorama*, a briefer version of *Vistas*, and follows the same video-integrated approach of the first two. As is the case with *Vistas*, it would take much more space than available here to describe every virtue and facet of the *Aventuras* series, as it is highly comprehensive and includes extensive ancillaries. Therefore, my goal here is to merely highlight some of its most notable features and unique qualities.

Although *Aventuras* borrows heavily from the content of *Vistas* — some of the images, exercises, and ancillary components, such as the overhead transparencies and the *Fotonovela* are virtually the same as for *Vistas* — it does provide its own unique content, original design, and a full line of fully integrated ancillaries, available in hard copy or online. Some notable differences from *Vistas* are the sequencing of the material, the conciseness of explanations and exercises, and some of the cultural content. Another of its unique features is its presentation of grammar and the fact that exercises are presented on facing pages rather than across several pages, which eliminates the need to look elsewhere in the text to reference grammar. Moreover, the size of the images and print used is larger, and the overall design of the text also is more open than in *Vistas*.

The goals of the Standards of Foreign Language Learning in the twenty-first century, also known as the 5 Cs, strongly inform the content and layout of *Aventuras*. Thus, in each chapter Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities serve as motivational forces for the types of activities provided. These goals are made evident on each page also by small icons that indicate which standard is satisfied with each activity.

Because of its adherence to the 5 Cs, *Aventuras* follows an interactive, communicative approach to language learning, developing the speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills necessary to equip students to use Spanish in real-life situations. Each chapter provides ample opportunities to practice these skills through diverse vocabulary, grammar, listening, and reading comprehension exercises to be done both individually and in pairs or groups.

The textbook is divided in such a way as to approach each of these four skills separately and yet ultimately cohesively integrate them. The sixteen chapters are divided into sections easily identified by a color-coded bar that runs across the top of each page. The first page of each chapter functions as a lesson-opener, explaining its goals and content. The first section, *Preparación*, introduces the central theme of focus for the chapter in terms of vocabulary, readings, and grammar exercises. Here users will find lots of useful images to illustrate the most common or “high-frequency” vocabulary, Spanish-English lists of theme-related terminology, and variations of terms used in different regions of the Spanish-speaking world. A variety of exercises lead the student through stages of utilizing vocabulary begin-

ning with guided responses to more communicative activities. In addition, this section contains a useful segment on Spanish pronunciation and a list of ancillary resources that will further help students polish their pronunciation.

The next section, *Aventuras*, corresponds to the video series that accompanies the text, which I will discuss later. It provides a shortened version of the script, video stills, and activities from each episode. The third section, *Gramática*, presents the grammar lesson of the chapter, integrating vocabulary and *Aventuras* video segments into explanations. As I mentioned above, one of the unique features of *Aventuras* is that instead of exercises directly following the presentation and explanations of each grammar point on the page, the condensed grammar explanations are arranged on two pages facing each other. Thus, each page is separated into two broad panels, the outer panel containing grammar explanations and the inner panel providing the related exercises. Nonetheless, this unique layout can be both a help and a hindrance. Having all the information presented on two facing pages is more practical, but, at the same time, in order to include everything, the spacing is tighter and somewhat overwhelming visually. The grammar exercises, however, like the vocabulary, are sequentially organized to go from directed, form-focused tasks to more interactive, open-ended activities. The grammar segment of *Aventuras* ends with a new review component that allows for more practice, and a music section called *Ritmos hispanos* that introduces artists and their music, which in some way relates to the themes, grammar, or vocabulary presented in the chapter. The last two sections, *Ampliación* and *Lectura*, contain more listening and speaking activities related to the theme of the chapter, but mostly focus on fine tuning writing and reading skills. *Ampliación* also provides a list of related topics that students may research on the *Aventuras* Super Website.

One of the many merits of *Aventuras* is its emphasis on cultural content. Relying heavily on authentic materials, it exposes students to aspects of everyday life in the different countries and regions where Spanish is spoken. This text is accompanied by two cultural video series: *Aventuras*, which I mentioned above, is the same as the *Fotonovela* found in the *Vistas* textbook, and *Aventuras en los países hispanos*. *Aventuras* follows four college students from different parts of the Spanish-speaking world as they journey together on a bus tour to various parts of Ecuador. In each chapter the students and their bus driver have a different adventure that utilizes vocabulary and grammar studied in that chapter. Although the quality of the acting and dialogues in the series at times is mediocre and forced, the video allows students to practice aurally what they are studying in the chapter and to hear Spanish spoken with different accents. Since the text provides a synthesized version of the script, students can familiarize themselves with the content of each episode and practice reading the script out loud before watching the video. Moreover, each episode contains cultural vignettes that show everyday life in the countries that each of the four travelers is from. *Aventuras en los países hispanos* is a documentary of Hispanic culture in several different areas of the Spanish-speaking world, including Hispanics in the United States and Canada, and a segment on Equatorial Guinea. The video is well done; however, the one drawback is that the episodes are entirely narrated, never allowing the natural sounds of the people and places in the video to be heard.

The ancillary components of *Aventuras* greatly enhance its marketability and facilitate course organization. In addition to the Workbook/Video Manual, the Lab Manual, and their corresponding answer keys, the Instructor's Resource CD-ROM is a helpful tool that provides a test generator, print-ready tests for each chapter, semester exams, and the testing program MP3s, as well as the electronic equivalents of the materials also available in print format such as answer keys, the Instructor's Resource Manual, and overhead transparencies.

Perhaps the most distinctive component of *Aventuras* is the *Aventuras.vhlcentral.com* Super Website. This online resource is a new feature available with the second edition of *Aventuras* and is a fundamental tool for both students and instructors. It provides students with additional explanations of the material introduced in the textbook, extensive tutorials in a range of formats that allow for extra practice with instant feedback, online reference tools, and access to supplemental vocabulary and to the video and audio components of the series. For instructors it functions as a course manager. Here instructors can basically plan out their course, assign homework, receive quiz results, track student progress, obtain lesson plans, send messages to students, and so on. This feature will also make it possible for students to be more pro-active in learning Spanish, more in control of the amount of contact they can have with the language outside of class; also, it will free up class time for more hands-on, practical use of the language in communicative situations.

Overall, *Aventuras* is a wonderful and timely addition to the Vistas repertoire of quality texts. Its conscientious adherence to the national standards, its emphasis on culture, the streamlined design and visual appeal, along with the addition of the Super Website, make this series a practical and valuable tool for teaching and learning Spanish.

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