

---

## VanPatten, Bill, James F. Lee, and Terry L. Ballman. *Vistazos: Un curso breve*. 2nd edition.

New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 2006. Includes: Textbook, Workbook, Video on CD, Instructor's Manual and Testing Program, *Quia* Online Manual (textbook and workbook), Audio CDs, and CD-ROM. ISBN: 0-07-299050-3.

Bill VanPatten's, James F. Lee's, and Terry L. Ballman's *Vistazos* is an abbreviated introductory Spanish program intended for college students. The *Vistazos* program includes a student workbook, instructional video, instructor's manual, and testing program, as well as student and teacher audio CDs, and an online version of the program and supplemental online activities.

The main textbook is divided into a preliminary chapter (which contains vocabulary and grammar), fifteen *lecciones* or chapters (which also cover vocabulary and grammar), and a *lección final*. *Vistazos* is organized in a logical manner, according to topical and structural organizational principles, building upon both vocabulary and grammar in each consecutive chapter.

The workbook, or *Manual que acompaña*, provides activities that not only focus on written vocabulary and grammar, but also on listening and pronunciation. In the first version of the *Manual que acompaña*, the authors included a *Prueba de práctica* at the end of each *lección*, which assessed student knowledge and skill development. However, in the second version, the authors have chosen to remove this component, which was a poor decision since the *Prueba de práctica* offered a student self-evaluation of the *lección*. In general, the workbook activities follow all structured input and output guidelines and also include

a variety of referential and affective activities, such as binary option, matching, supplying information, selecting alternatives, surveys, ordering and ranking, making lists, filling out grids, indicating agreement, determining veracity, responding with a scale, and answering with a question. For the aforementioned reasons, the workbook is the most pedagogically sound of the ancillary materials.

While the *Vistazos* textbook and workbook clearly complement each other, the remaining ancillary materials are not as well integrated. The audio CDs to accompany *Vistazos* contain dialogues that are too advanced for an introductory course, primarily because they do not present one thing at a time, nor do they keep meaning in focus. These reviewers had significant difficulty opening and navigating the first edition's student CD-ROM and the online version of the *Manual que acompaña*. The CD-ROM would not run properly on all platforms, nor were there directions on how to run or trouble-shoot the program. However, in the second edition, the CD-ROM functioned without complications, and in addition, a technical support Website and hotline are included. Although most of the four-part lessons contained on the CD-ROM exhibit a concrete connection to the text, the activities are mere electronic duplications of written workbook and textbook activities. In addition, more than half of the culture is isolated and not presented in a meaningful way because there is no consistent thematic organization of cultural topics in the *Vistazos* program. Most of the output activities are adequate, but the activities should be expanded and diversified to make the CD-ROM more beneficial to students through a variety of output activities. Furthermore, these reviewers encourage the authors to fully utilize the electronic platform to create activities that take advantage of the technology available, through which students may be more inclined to learn. In the new online *Quia* activities included in the second version of the program, these reviewers had hoped to find more technologically engaging activities, but were disappointed to once again discover replications of the written textbook and workbook. Lastly, the video has little educational value to teachers and students because it consists of the same dialogues that are on the audio CDs, merely spoken by a person in a chair. Although the video is now in DVD format, it could be even more useful with additional visuals; these reviewers were surprised and disappointed to discover the unappealing set of a person sitting in a chair and speaking to the camera. Within this video, we suggest more form-meaning connections, direct binding, and extra-linguistic aids to enhance student comprehension.

*Vistazos* wonderfully connects the Spanish language with other disciplines, such as art and literature. However, the presentation of this material in the program is problematic. As mentioned above in the description of the ancillaries, just like the CD-ROM, the textbook also treats the concept of culture as an isolated topic. Although these reviewers were pleased to find newly included opportunities for students to check their comprehension of the cultural information presented through follow-up activities, the text should more adequately integrate cultural information into the presentation of material.

With regard to the content of *Vistazos*, the preliminary chapter is filled with information such as exchanging names, asking about majors, classes and subjects, subject pronouns, gender and number of articles and nouns, numbers, and verbs such as *hay*, *ser*, and *gustar*. Although all of this information is useful and necessary to learn, it is too much material to cover in a preliminary chapter, especially

one that is less than twenty-five pages in length. The text itself should supply adequate activities for the students to practice this material and should include references to where in the supplementary materials more activities can be found. The fifteen *lecciones* and *lección final* that make up the rest of the textbook also possess very few activities after introducing new material. For the majority of the grammatical points introduced, students should be given many more input and output activities to thoroughly grasp and master the concepts presented. The text also lacks activities that would encourage students to interact with each other, such as information gap activities or conversations with a partner. In order to provide students with sufficient practice, the teacher will have to devise supplementary activities that are not found in the textbook or the Teacher's Manual.

Finally, there are some serious issues with regard to the actual design of the student textbook: visuals are few and outdated, the color scheme is visually unappealing, important information is not properly highlighted, and there are not enough visuals to break up the abundant amount of text. Although the second edition of *Vistazos* has shown improvement to the text design, in general, the color scheme, proliferation of text, and poor graphic layout fail to adequately support student learning.

The *Vistazos* program has the potential to be successful with some editing and reworking of the ancillary materials, the visual layout of the text, and the presentation of culture. It would be best used in a high school course or a beginning Spanish course in college in which a lot of material is covered in a short period of time. A high school teacher or elementary Spanish professor who is under time constraints, and who has to strictly follow a syllabus, would benefit from the succinct organization of this program. For future editions, these reviewers suggest a clearer graphic and text layout, better use of the ancillary materials, and a more connected presentation of culture, as well as the inclusion of more varied input and output activities, to truly support the proficiency goals of a beginning Spanish program.

Lauren Hartmann  
Bethany Pulaski  
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures  
University of Delaware

## **Publisher's Response**

McGraw-Hill is delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the review of *Vistazos: Un curso breve*, 2nd edition, written by Lauren Hartmann and Bethany Pulaski. As noted by the reviewers, *Vistazos* is an abbreviated introductory Spanish program, and, in fact, is a brief version of *¿Sabías que...?: Beginning Spanish*, now in its fifth edition and also published by McGraw-Hill. We are pleased that the reviewers have highlighted certain characteristics of the philosophical and methodological approach of these materials, and in particular the emphasis on structured input and output, which is informed by the authors' considerable body of research on second language acquisition. Likewise, it is also gratifying that the reviewers have noted so many significant changes and improvements in the second edition of *Vistazos*, and we thank them for having taken the time to review so carefully not only the second edition but also the first

edition. Of course, we also appreciate the reviewers' suggestions for further improving *Vistazos* in the next edition, for it is only through this sort of feedback that we are able to respond to changes in the profession and in the market.

McGraw-Hill World Languages is committed to publishing high quality foreign language textbooks and multimedia products, and we are proud to include *Vistazos* and its rich package of ancillary materials among our many titles. We again thank Lauren Hartmann and Bethany Pulaski for sharing their review of *Vistazos* with the readership of *The NECTFL Review*.

William R. Glass, Ph.D.  
McGraw-Hill