
Aski, Janice M. and Diane Musumeci. *Avanti! Beginning Italian.*

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007. Includes: *Workbook/Laboratory Manual*, multimedia support material in DVD/VHS, audio CD, and CD-ROM format, including 1 DVD/VHS video, 12 audio CDs, 2 Vocabulary audio CDs, 1 Translating Booklet, and 1 Instructor's Resource CD-ROM. ISBN: 10: 0-07-231206-7 (Teacher Edition).

The multimedia “Beginning Italian” course *Avanti!* includes a reference textbook, a workbook/laboratory manual, and a variety of multimedia support material in DVD/VHS, audio CD, and CD-ROM format. The strength of the program lies in the direct approach to learning a language in a realistic everyday setting where the learner is exposed to an “authentic language” environment. Each chapter opens with a collection of high-frequency expressions and commonly used language formulae in the *Strategie di comunicazione* (communication strategies), immediately giving the learner increased motivation while providing a solid preparation in basic Italian needed to perform a variety of practical functions. The videos that accompany each chapter of the book literally open a window on standard spoken Italian, constantly compared and contrasted with the language spoken in different regions of the country. This specific feature provides an effective overview of the diversified Italian culture and its deep interconnection with the language itself.

The focus on grammatical and structural concepts that are particularly difficult for English speakers mastering Italian represents another great strength of the program. In the section *Strategie di comunicazione*, particular attention is given to idiomatic meanings of certain expressions that might confuse the inexperienced speaker, who naturally has a tendency to literally translate into English. Effective strategies aimed at clarifying the real meaning of expressions taught are always provided in context.

In each chapter, we find several sections presenting new vocabulary (*Lessico*), and a comprehensive analysis of sentence structure (*Struttura*). And every chapter ends with a fully integrated tool (*Cultura*) where students can put all their strategies, vocabulary and grammar knowledge together, engaging in listening, reading, writing and speaking activities at the discourse level in a realistic cultural setting.

In our classroom, we have used the text, selected activities, and the multimedia materials as a complement to the instructional activities our multi-level Italian classes. Although *Avanti!* is primarily designed for “Beginning Italian” students, we found most of the activities to be engaging for both an intermediate and an advanced audience. A key feature of the program is the introduction of real-life situations (the video and the audio programs being the reference tools), fully integrated with grammar lessons, which reinforced the learning of the core components of the specific units paired with the core curriculum content standards.

The Workbook/Laboratory manual provides specific strategies leading to listening (*Ascoltiamo!*), reading (*Leggiamo!*), and writing (*Scriviamo!*) activities. The cultural section of each chapter presented in *Cultura* is enriched in the Workbook/Laboratory manual section *Per saperne di più*, where students can expand their cultural knowledge through guided independent research and practical activities.

The program components that are particularly impressive are the efficient integration of technology and multimedia provided by the multimedia material contained in the two DVD/videos and the audio CD-ROMs. These are clearly the features that make this program superior to other comparable ones on the market today. One might even consider the multimedia package as the core of the course text, while the printed material provides invaluable support and reference. In particular, through the short videos, the audio CDs, and the Online Learning Center Website (www.mhhe.com/avanti), learners can perform interactive virtual activities, practice discussion questions, and become familiar with key terms and phrases in a specific context where they are always naturally and comfortably immersed in a realistic Italian-speaking environment. The interactive material not only provides highlights from situations frequently occurring in a social setting but also addresses the fundamental problems of communication that might arise from common situations, providing many opportunities for further discussion. The Flash™ online interactive activities, including “Concentration,” “Tetris,” and “Drag and Drop,” engage the students in a play/game-setting bringing the learning experience to a new level of full technology integration in the language classroom.

The Quia™, an on-line version of the Workbook/Laboratory Manual, provides a full audio program and real-time feedback to students with interactive exercises that are automatically graded to allow instantaneous assessment of learning.

In conclusion, the potentialities of the program definitely surpass the general requirements of a conventional classroom setting. The structure of the program and its versatility allow for its natural application to on-line distance learning, making it a cutting-edge learning tool. Overall, we would rate the *Avanti!* program as superior, innovative, and extremely versatile. Without hesitation, we would recommend the program as an invaluable core component of a world language program at both high school and university levels.

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Publisher's Response

McGraw-Hill is delighted to have the opportunity to respond to Lisa M. Carlucci and Franco Paoletti's glowing review of McGraw-Hill's newest introductory Italian textbook *Avanti!*, which they describe as a "superior, innovative, and extremely versatile" program that they recommend "as an invaluable core component of a world language program at both high school and university levels."

Firmly grounded in current findings of research in second language acquisition and pedagogy, *Avanti!* offers learners a balanced approach to language and culture with an emphasis on the development of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) through meaningful interaction in a student-centered classroom. Two of the main goals of the program are to give students the linguistic tools and structures they need to communicate right from the start and to expose them to the rich and unique Italian culture. As the reviewers aptly point out in regard to the *Strategie di comunicazione* videos that begin each chapter, the "strength of the program lies in the direct approach to learning a language in a realistic everyday setting where the learner is exposed to an 'authentic language' environment." They also note that these videos "literally open a window on standard spoken Italian" and provide an "effective overview of the diversified Italian culture and its deep interconnection with the language itself." This emphasis on culture is apparent in all sections of the chapter and culminates in the *Cultura* section at the end of the chapter where students can combine all of their skills to engage in listening, reading, writing, and speaking activities at the discourse level using authentic materials, including clips from Italian films.

Carlucci and Paoletti have given high praise to the multimedia package that supports the aforementioned goals. These include the video on VHS and DVD, the audio program, Website practice activities, the Quia™ Workbook/Laboratory Manual, and the online interactive games (ActivityPak). It is a pleasure to see these components acknowledged by the reviewers and to note their appreciation of the tight integration of the technology with the vocabulary, grammar, and culture presentations in each chapter of the textbook. It is particularly gratifying to know that these reviewers, who have used the materials themselves in the classroom, find them engaging, versatile, and applicable to a conventional classroom setting or to a distance-learning environment.

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

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