

1. An Overview of *Conéctate Second Edition*

A. The Philosophy Behind *Conéctate*

The philosophy behind *Conéctate* is simple: take what we know about second-language learning, combine it with the best practices in second-language teaching, and infuse it throughout with stimulating cultural content that challenges students to see themselves and the world in new ways. The structure, content, and activities in *Conéctate* are all based on this formula. Our overarching goal is to help instructors teach a highly effective, consistently engaging, and truly inspirational course in Spanish. In order to achieve this goal, all of *Conéctate* is **meaning-based**, uses an **active-learning** approach, follows a careful **input-to-output sequence**, incorporates plentiful **review**, and integrates **authentic language and culture** throughout.

We know that at its core, language is a way of expressing meaning, so all activities in *Conéctate* are **meaning-based**. That is, all activities guide students through the process of using Spanish meaningfully, either by understanding the meaning of sentences that they hear or see, or by producing sentences that express the meanings that they want to communicate. Students are given myriad opportunities to engage in meaningful activities within a rich cultural context in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In all of the vocabulary activities, for instance, students connect the word and its associated meaning, regardless of whether the word is written or spoken. In grammar activities as well, students learn to associate a verb ending with its meaning, for instance, and they practice understanding or producing the ending and its meaning in all four skills. At no point are students manipulating words or sentences without knowing what they are saying. Language does not work that way, so if students want to use Spanish in real-life situations, they need to always have the meaning in mind. We also advocate using Spanish as the medium of instruction, so that both the instructor and the students are using the language meaningfully from the very first day. (Making oneself comprehensible while teaching entirely in the second language can be a challenge for inexperienced instructors, whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language. The Annotated Instructor's Edition of *Conéctate* and this *Instructor's Manual* provide ample tips to assist you.)

We also know that students learn best when they are fully engaged with the material, so we take an **active-learning** approach throughout *Conéctate*. Students should not be bystanders in learning; they should be actively participating in every stage of the process. There is strong evidence that learning improves when students try to anticipate what is about to be learned or test themselves on what they have just learned, so *Conéctate* incorporates these techniques in every chapter. Rather than simply presenting students with a vocabulary list, for instance, leaving students with nothing to do but try to absorb the words and their meanings passively, a vocabulary activity in *Conéctate* might ask students to figure out which word goes with which meaning, requiring students to engage actively with the material. A grammar activity, similarly, might have students using a grammar point in meaningful ways right from the start, allowing them to uncover some basic grammatical properties on their own before these have been explained to them. These activities are carefully designed so that students can complete them successfully, and yet there is enough challenge that students find the activities both fun and satisfying. More importantly, we know that this type of challenge leads to better learning outcomes.

At first glance, active-learning techniques like these might seem to be very time-consuming, but in the long run, they actually save time. Far too often, a passive presentation of material results in little more than a fatigued instructor and inattentive students, with very little learning to show for it. The same amount of time spent on active learning activities, on the other hand, leads to energized students who have genuinely learned something and are ready to move on. If we think of how much learning takes place, then, rather than how much material was covered, there is no question that active learning techniques are a more efficient use of instructional time.

In addition, active learning is a more enjoyable experience for both the students and the instructor. Students like to work together to solve problems, acquire new knowledge, and engage in meaningful communication, while instructors find it rewarding to organize this experience and guide students through it. Students can feel the learning that is taking place and the progress that they are making, and instructors naturally can, as well.

All activities in every section of *Conéctate* are carefully arranged in an **input-to-output sequence**, which means that students focus on comprehension in the initial activities and then transition to production. This structure ensures that students are fully prepared to do each activity. The activities are interesting, challenging, and fun, but they are still definitely within reach of students at that stage. This sequencing of activities also follows a well-known principle of language acquisition: you learn to understand before you learn to produce. This fundamental principle, observable in children and adult learners alike, is applied throughout *Conéctate*. In learning vocabulary, for instance, students first learn to understand the words before beginning to produce them. In learning grammatical structures, the same procedure applies. With the present tense of verbs, for instance, students first learn to understand the difference in meaning between forms such as *como* and *comes*, and then they begin to produce these forms. As discussed above, all of these activities, whether focused on input or output, are solidly meaning-based. In the initial activities, then, students see or hear the words and need to understand them, while in later activities, they need to speak or write the words in order to express an idea. At no point are students simply listening for the sake of listening or speaking for the sake of speaking. As in real life, the goal is always to understand or express meaning.

The exact mix of input and output activities varies according to the needs of the particular topic. With present indicative forms of *ser*, for example, which we know that students at the introductory level can begin to produce spontaneously, there are plentiful activities that allow students to practice output in a variety of contexts. With the present or past subjunctive, on the other hand, which we know that learners will not produce spontaneously until after a few more years of intensive exposure, the transition from input to output activities is more gradual and the output activities more structured, so that students can use the subjunctive to express what they mean, but without the need to do so spontaneously (which would be beyond the reach of learners at this stage).

Another guiding principle in the sequence of activities in *Conéctate* is the importance of **review**. We know that students learn best when they revisit topics on a regular basis (what psychologists call “spaced practice”), so *Conéctate* builds in review as an integral part of the program. Each

grammar section, for instance, is preceded by a brief active-learning activity that refreshes students' awareness of a related grammatical point that they have already seen. In addition, for certain topics that are known to be very difficult, such as object pronouns, students build up their knowledge incrementally over the course of several chapters, always reviewing what they have seen previously before proceeding. The result is that students end up with a strong foundation that has been very carefully laid. To further solidify their knowledge, the final chapter of *Conéctate* (Chapter 16) is devoted to review of some of the most important grammatical topics, but juxtaposed in new ways and in the context of new vocabulary, so that students feel appropriately challenged but also satisfied that they are up to the task.

Students will ultimately be using their Spanish in the real world, not in a classroom, so *Conéctate* is infused throughout with **authentic language and culture**. This is not something added on as an afterthought; it is an integral part of *Conéctate* and has been so from the beginning. Before we authored a single chapter, we flew to six different countries with a professional film crew and interviewed hundreds of Spanish-speakers from all backgrounds, wherever we found them: on the street, at their workplace, in a park, and so on. We talked to them about all aspects of their lives and in the process, we collected an enormous corpus of Spanish as it is actually spoken. This corpus forms the basis of *Conéctate*. From the very beginning, students learn to understand *buenos días*, for example, the way people really say it, and as they proceed, they learn to understand more extended discourse as well, all spontaneous, unscripted and natural. The video activities based on this are always carefully designed and meticulously placed within the larger sequence of activities, with the result being that students can easily understand and engage with this natural speech, despite the fact that it is “real Spanish,” not language artificially created for a textbook. Students can tell the difference, and after working with *Conéctate*, they feel a greater sense of confidence that they can understand Spanish as it is spoken in the real world. This spirit influences the treatment of grammar as well. A simple example comes from the treatment of future tense in *Conéctate*. In everyday speech, the future tense is more often used to speculate and express conjecture than to talk about the future, so the section on that verb form gives students ample exposure to that more common usage, in addition to the more traditional usage, leaving students with a realistic sense of how this form is used and what it means.

The video interviews that are at the heart of *Conéctate* inform the approach to culture as well. As with language, the emphasis here is on the Spanish-speaking world and its culture as they really are. The people speaking in the video are real people, not actors, and they are presenting their own stories and their own perspectives, not reading scripts written for them by textbook authors. The visuals of the video on their own are enough to deliver a powerful cultural lesson to students, who will be able to see that Spanish-speakers come in all colors, all ages, and all social classes, and that they are from many different countries. Building on that, *Conéctate* as a whole attempts to show the Spanish-speaking world for what it really is: an exciting, vibrant, complex, and fascinating place. Students see this through a large variety of activities dealing with topics such as molecular gastronomy in Spain, the extinct *sapo dorado* of Costa Rica, or marriage customs in the Inca civilization. All of these activities develop cultural knowledge, but they do it while also developing students' language abilities.

The Spanish-speaking world is, in fact, so diverse that no single course can do it justice, but *Conéctate* treats this diversity as a virtue to be embraced. Rather than trying to smother students' curiosity with an array of disconnected facts (Asunción is the capital of Paraguay, they grow coffee in Nicaragua, etc.), *Conéctate* develops students' ability to explore and think critically about the world. What is it about Asunción that makes it a likely capital (hint: it's a port)? Why doesn't Nicaragua produce wine, which would be much more profitable, instead of coffee (hint: it's the climate)? In thinking about questions like these, students are lead to think about other countries, including their own, and why they are the way they are. *Conéctate* thus develops students' ability to understand not just the Spanish-speaking world, but the world in general, a crucial skill in our globalized reality. This includes the ability to think about their own world and how others on the outside might view them (known as "transcultural competence"). The emphasis on critical thinking about culture also extends to language, where *Conéctate* encourages students to think of Spanish not as a random collection of unrelated grammatical properties, but as a coherent system for expressing meaning. The fact that nouns in Spanish have gender, for instance, strikes many students as being a bizarre and pointless complication, but in fact, it makes it easier for the brain to process language as one is listening to it (which is one reason, no doubt, why so many languages in the world have this property). The larger lesson that students extract from *Conéctate* is that languages and cultures are complicated, certainly, but one can learn how to explore them and one can begin to understand them.

B. *Conéctate*, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, and the 5Cs

As described above, the activities in *Conéctate* have a number of properties that promote fast and effective acquisition of the language in all four skills: they are meaning-based, use active learning techniques, are carefully sequenced, and contain frequent review. Because of this, students completing *Conéctate* can readily achieve Intermediate Low proficiency on the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) scale for speaking and many will reach the Intermediate Mid level.

Since comprehension tends to precede production, their listening skills may be slightly higher, especially given the extensive exposure to real spoken language that *Conéctate* provides (in the videos in **Comunicación**, **Vocabulario** and **¡Escuchemos!**, in the film clips in **Conéctate al cine**, and in the music clips in **Conéctate a la música**). Here is a summary description for Intermediate Mid and Intermediate Low level speakers (adapted from the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines at www.actfl.org):

Intermediate Mid

- Can handle a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks.
- Conversational topics tend to be limited (family, home, daily activities, personal preferences, food, shopping, etcetera).
- Speakers tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information. However, they are capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information.
- Speech may contain pauses and self-corrections as fluency is limited.
- Due to inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, misunderstandings can occur, but speakers are generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

Intermediate Low

- Can handle a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks.
- Conversational topics tend to be limited (family, home, daily activities, personal preferences, food, shopping, etcetera).
- Speakers tend to function reactively and may struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information, but they can ask a few appropriate questions.
- Speech contains frequent pauses and self-corrections as fluency is limited.
- Speech is strongly influenced by first language.
- Interactions may require repetition or rephrasing, but speakers are generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

These levels are roughly equivalent to the A2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (www.coe.int/lang-CEFR).

The “five Cs” are from the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, also published by ACTFL (www.actfl.org). The Cs stand for *communication*, *cultures*, *connections*, *comparisons*, and *communities*. They provide a roadmap for the types of competence in language and culture that students need in order to engage with the world. These standards are integrated

throughout *Conéctate*, but the following table lists each standard and shows the section in *Conéctate* where it is particularly emphasized.

COMMUNICATION: Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes	
Interpersonal Communication: Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.	Comunicación, Vocabulario, Estructura, ¡Hablemos!
Interpretive Communication: Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics.	Cultura section in Estructura, ¡Leamos!, ¡Escuchemos!, Conéctate a la música / al cine
Presentational Communication: Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers.	¡Escribamos!, ¡Hablemos!
CULTURES: Interact with cultural competence and understanding	
Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.	Estructura, ¡Escuchemos!
Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied.	Estructura, Conéctate a la música, Conéctate al cine
CONNECTIONS: Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations	

Making Connections: Learners build, reinforce, and expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the language to develop critical thinking and to solve problems creatively	Estructura, ¡Leamos!, Conéctate al mundo profesional boxes
Acquiring Information and Diverse Perspectives: Learners access and evaluate information and diverse perspectives that are available through the language and its cultures	Comunicación, Estructura, ¡Leamos!, ¡Escuchemos!
COMPARISONS: Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence	
Language Comparisons: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.	Estructura
Cultural Comparisons: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.	Estructura, ¡Escuchemos!
COMMUNITIES: Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world	
School and Global Communities: Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world	Comunicación, ¡Escuchemos!
Lifelong Learning: Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement	Objetivos