

Using the Platiqemos Program for Self-Study

The Platiqemos Program is a very effective tool for self-study if used consistently and systematically. (It is also very well adapted to classroom use.) The only absolute requirement for success is persistence. Learning another language for communication is probably different from many other things you've learned. It is almost inevitable that after the beginning (Level I) when it's all new and exciting and it seems like you're learning a lot, you'll enter into a period where it may seem like your efforts are not getting you anywhere. This is because you're assembling the pieces (think of a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle), and until you get quite a few of them together, the picture doesn't begin to appear. If you work through this stage, Spanish will start to come together for you, and to make sense—usually at about Level III or IV.

The Introduction. Each volume of Platiqemos contains in the beginning a modified version of the introduction written by the original authors of the FSI program 50 years ago. The introduction explains the methodology of the program, and gives instructions for using each part. It is worth taking the time to read.

The Text. While the audio portion of the program contains almost everything that's in the text (the basic sentences, drills and exercises, and conversation stimuli); there are some good reasons for having a text and not just audio (*a la* the *Pimsleur* program). One is that some people are visually oriented, and profit from seeing things written. While there are some pitfalls to this (Spanish frustratingly uses the same alphabet as English, but many of the letters represent a completely different sound), it can be useful. Also, the text contains some grammatical explanations that can be helpful after you've worked with the drills and exercises. Finally, after Unit 16, the text contains increasingly complex reading selections which have been designed to fortify the structures you're learning. Also, reading is an important part of proficiency in a language.

We'd suggest that you read over the Basic Sentences for every Unit before starting with the audio. This is simply so that you'll have an idea of what's coming on the audio. Thereafter, you might want to read the grammar explanations, particularly for structures you're having trouble with. The readings beginning in Unit 16 are, of course, important.

The audio. The primary purpose of the Platiqemos Program is oral proficiency (speaking and understanding), as well as reading. Oral communication requires almost automatic understanding and production of speech. This means having the various structures of the language deeply ingrained, so that producing them happens without conscious thought. Few, if any, of us who learn other languages will ever be perfect at this; but a considerable degree is necessary for effective communication. Vocabulary is also important, but if the structures of the language are mastered vocabulary can be quite easily added, either using a dictionary or just asking for a word.

The drills and exercises in the Platiqemos Program have been carefully designed to give you all of the essential structural elements of the language. The key to assimilating the patterns and structures of Spanish is to repeat the drills and exercises until the responses come almost without thought. The number of repetitions necessary will vary from structure to structure, and between individual students. As a self-directed student, you'll have to be the judge of when you've mastered a particular set of drills and exercises and are ready to move on to the next.

Time. One often asked question is how much time should be spent on each Unit. When used in a classroom situation, with small classes of fewer than ten students, the program is delivered at 45 class hours per Level, or a total of 360 hours for all eight Levels. The amount of time needed for each Unit will vary from student to student, depending on many factors such as previous language learning experience, etc. It will also vary from Unit to Unit for individual students—you'll find that some parts come quicker and easier than others. When pressed, we usually say six to eight hours per Unit. Once again, you have to be the judge. When you feel comfortable, move on to the next Unit. Remember, you can always go back.

We hope that these guidelines, general as they are, will be of assistance to you in effectively using the Platiqemos Program. We wish you great success: *Les deseamos mucho éxito*.