AP SPANISH        2019-2020
SUMMER WORK
This letter is for those students that intend to take AP Spanish in 2019-2020. In lieu of a meeting with you after school, I will describe your Summer Work in detail here. Please read this carefully and thoughtfully, as I wrote it to be as descriptive and as helpful as possible. If you have any questions as to its content, however, please let me know immediately, via email or in person. Now, not August, is the time to read and start this, and to ask any questions that you may have as a result.

In 11 months, you will be taking the AP Spanish Exam, a thorough and exhaustive assessment of your communicative proficiency in Spanish. This exam includes all modes of communication (listening, reading, writing and speaking), in all registers (formal and informal), and within every context of the human experience, as they relate to the Spanish-speaking world. According to the College Board, this course is the equivalent of a fourth semester of Spanish in college.

One of my recent AP Spanish students experienced an example of this equivalence. She worked hard throughout the course, and also got a 4 on the AP Spanish exam. That same year, she took her future college’s language placement exam. The results of that assessment placed her in their 5th semester Spanish course.

So, the rigor and comprehensiveness of this course will require your consistent and systematic work. Whether you were specifically recommended for this course, or whether you asked to take on this challenge, I have assured you all that I will support your desire to further your proficiency in Spanish at this level and in this way. In all cases, however, you will need to exercise dedication and serious effort, and this begins here with summer work.

As I hope you have realized already, frequent and consistent contact with the target language is essential to becoming proficient. This summer work will allow you to practice and develop your skills and knowledge, as well as to identify and address areas that need development before beginning the course. So, in order to achieve these goals, I have assigned a two-part summer work assignment, described below.
PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

The first part is based on an easily accessible and free way to learn and practice Spanish; namely, Duolingo. This app has proven itself effective in helping to lay a broad foundation in my students’ knowledge of Spanish. Some of you can already personally attest to the benefits of investing time in this program. I have been recommending this program for years, and some of my very best students have also become Duolingo maestros.

The utility of Duolingo was highlighted by a recent AP class that performed very well on the exam. In that cohort, a number of these students threw themselves into achieving a high level on this app. Over that summer and then throughout the year, these individuals kept working with it, achieving higher and higher levels. These were some of the most competent and proficient students in this class, with a well-rounded sense of the language. All of these particular students also did very well on the AP exam as well. Of course, this relationship of Duolingo work and AP achievement is not causative, but it is certainly correlative, and I am convinced of its utility and helpfulness for you as well.

Here is another specific example of my experience with its effectiveness with my students. One 8th-grader in particular developed a remarkable fluency and knowledge of Spanish by his junior year, and this was very much influenced by his dedication to Duolingo. He was an excellent student in my classes, but he also did Duolingo on his own, thoughtfully and consistently, including over his summers. The results of this were truly significant and impressive, and he ultimately became one of the most proficient speakers of Spanish I have ever had.

Regarding the app itself, Duolingo takes a broad approach to content and construction, exposing you to a wide range of vocabulary and structures, in a linear fashion. Breadth, not depth, would be a fair assessment of its focus; and such a panoramic view certainly has its place and value. I also appreciate the variety of tasks it offers as it presents information; for example, one task will be to transcribe what you hear, the following will be to repeat what you hear, the next will be to translate what you read, and a final one will be to choose the best translation.
Duolingo’s explanations are minimalist, however, so it does require your careful analysis of the words and structures presented. There is often a Tips and Notes section at the bottom of a unit’s section (under the lessons boxes). Minimal as they may be, these explicit explanations and presentations will allow you to identify and work with content and grammar that you have seen, but not necessarily have identified or named.

So, if you want more grammar explanations of the topics you encounter, there are a number of more grammar-based, explanation-rich websites for reference that you can use to supplement the Duolingo work. For example, SpanishDict.com has useful grammar presentations, including practice quizzes. Also, StudySpanish.com has some thorough explanations on many aspects of Spanish structures and concepts, including practice tests. Furthermore, many YouTube creators such as SpanishDude.com have enjoyable presentations on a variety of topics and concepts.

Regarding the skills and lessons presented in the Duolingo Spanish course tree, you will see that you can get up to five “Crowns” for each lesson or skill. I would not recommend trying to get all five crowns per lesson, because you could get exhausted and de-motivated. But I would suggest getting at least 2 or 3 Crowns in a skill, so that you get more difficult tasks to complete with the particular content of that lesson and skill, thus strengthening your competence overall. Later, if you were to finish the whole course tree of skills and lessons, you could always go back to practice or review by getting more Crowns.

Having said that, it is imperative that I clarify this praise. No matter the potential value of any program, what you get out of it depends on what you put into it. You could approach Duolingo with an attitude of passive, or even detached, compliance, pursuing only XP points & levels, and not seeking true understanding. Consequently, you would have achieved very little with those points, but you will have paid very dearly for them. To spend an irreplaceable resource (your time), without getting any real value for that investment, is a tragic loss for your life, both now and for your future.

I am personally aware of at least one student who did such squandering recently; they got the points, but they did not acquire the knowledge or skills. They just mindlessly
racked up points by such by repeatedly putting in answers until they figured out the answer for that task, rather than understanding the concept or acquiring the word for future use. They did not develop their skills in the individual lessons, but focused only on acquiring XP’s. Needless to say, this did not improve their proficiency in any way, and this was likewise evident in class.

So, if you mindfully approach the challenges and content of Duolingo, thoughtfully engaging in all the lessons and tasks (including the audio and speaking portions), then you will gain in knowledge and grow in proficiency. The audio and speaking parts are actually key, in that you need to practice both your oral comprehension and your ability to speak. Most of you do not have the opportunity to speak much Spanish in a consistent or systematic way, so this practice is essential to your technical, physical speech development.
PART ONE – ASSIGNMENT

So, regarding this assignment itself:

Due by 7:30 AM, August 28th, 2019, you must have reached Level 13 for Spanish on Duolingo. So, your first gradebook assignment for this class will an exam grade based on your achievement of this level; i.e. 13/13=100%, 12/13 = 92%, 11/13=85%, 10/13=77%, etc.

The first thing to do now is to sign up with Duolingo now (if you haven’t already), and add me as a “friend”. My Duolingo account is Señor Sacco (SeorSacco). You have to search for me in the Friends box on the right side of the page. Type in SeorSacco, and you will see Snoopy. (The O.G. Snoopy, not the other one.)

Level 13 would be about 75 XP’s per day, 5 days per week, for the months of June, July, and August. Or, it’s about 50 XP’s per day, 7 days per week. This first milestone is very achievable if you start now, and if you work consistently at it. Some of you have already achieved Duolingo levels in Spanish. But in all cases, none of you are new to Spanish, so achieving the necessary XP’s does not take the time it would take if you were doing a whole new language.

I would also suggest a placement test to get out of the more basic skill and content tasks, if you find it too easy and want to jump ahead. You probably should read and review the Tips and Notes explanations that are often at the bottom of many sections, even if you are testing out of that unit. If you have any questions about the format, layout, activities or sections of Duolingo, please email me, and I will clarify. Of course, this inquiry should be done at this end of the summer, and not at the other.

This summer work is a great way to diversify your exposure and allow for independent, meaningful time with Spanish during all those little blocks of time that we all have. If you sleep the recommended 9 hours a night, for example, you may have up to 15 hours per day of wakefulness. At some point that day, you can invest 15 minutes into one section of Duolingo, and do a couple of its associated lessons. Perhaps tomorrow you decide to play for 25 minutes, and at another time you may end up just “immersing” yourself and swimming in this pool for an even greater while, forgetting about the time altogether.
The key is to pick it up and play regularly – not trying to cram at the end, and not investing unrealistic amounts of time daily, either. What’s more, the accessibility of Duolingo makes it a real treat to snack on anytime. With such online nourishment available to us instantly and always, we can satisfy those hunger pains of both our “ignorance and want”.

EXTRA CREDIT WORK BASED ON PART ONE

Given this program’s generally-good approach to exposing you to a wide range of content and concepts, the levels you acquire through this summer work will help serve as a foundation for the rest of the year. In order to encourage you to continue building on this foundation, I will reward you with extra credit (equaling a quiz grade) for each additional level that you achieve from levels 14 to 25.

This opportunity will be processed in the following manner. On the first of each month, Sept. through May, those students that show me that they have achieved these subsequent levels will receive credit for up to two of them for that month. So, for example, on Sept. 1st if you show me you already reached level 14 or 15, (perhaps because you went beyond the minimum over the summer), then you would get an extra credit grade worth a quiz for each of those levels. If on October 1st, if you showed me you had achieved subsequent levels, you would get an extra credit quiz grades for up to two of these levels. This would continue till May 1st.

To illustrate this, here are two scenarios:

**Student A** does the 13 levels for Summer Work (not optional, not extra credit), due by 7:30 AM, 28th August. Student A gets an exam grade of 100%.

Student A also happened to achieve level 14, so on September 1st, shows me this achievement, and I give Student A an extra credit quiz grade of 100% for this achievement.
Student A continues along with Duolingo voluntarily, and achieves levels 15 by October 1st, and shows this to me on that date. Consequently, Student A receives an extra credit quiz grade for this achievement.

This pattern continues until up to and including May 1st.

Student B also does the 13 levels for Summer Work (not optional, not extra credit), due by 7:30 AM, 28th August. Student B gets an exam grade of 100%.

But Student B really got into developing their skills over the summer, and achieved levels 14, 15, and 16! So, on September 1st, Student B shows me this achievement, and receives 2 extra credit quiz grades. (The third extra credit quiz grade for achieving level 16 would be applied on October 1st, and if Student B happened to achieve Level 17 by then as well, she would also get an extra credit quiz grade for that too.)
PART TWO - INTRODUCTION

This brings us to our second part of the assignment. In addition to your Duolingo work, I also want you to access one of the following apps to develop your skills in the Interpretive mode, and especially your listening comprehension. By doing so, you can exponentially increase your understanding of Spanish and prepare yourself to achieve the goals for our course. For example, regarding listening comprehension in particular, the target proficiency level for AP Spanish requires you to demonstrate that you can:

1. Identify and summarize the main points and significant details and make appropriate inferences and predictions from a spoken source, such as a broadcast news report, podcast, or a lecture on an academic or cultural topic related to the Spanish-speaking world.

2. Identify and summarize the main points and significant details and predict outcomes from an everyday conversation on a familiar topic, a dialogue from a film or other broadcast media, or an interview on a social or cultural topic related to the Spanish-speaking world.

Developing these audio comprehension skills, especially for non-heritage students, is especially daunting, but is absolutely necessary for both AP students and for anyone that wants to be able to have productive conversations in Spanish.

Thankfully, there is a bountiful harvest of online programs and opportunities for this, but as with all things online, separating the chaff from the grain is essential. So, I have personally done a bit of winnowing for you, and I have tried and recommend any of the following 5 programs for you. They have passed my criteria of being:

1. Engaging, challenging, and meaningful experiences.
2. They all focus on developing your listening comprehension, and do so in differing yet effective ways.
3. They also use authentic materials as their source and the context for your interaction.
4. And, in almost all cases, the app version of the program is fantastic. I imagine that you appreciate the ease and simplicity of opening an app on the phone and just spending 15 minutes listening, reading and interacting in Spanish, rather than having to open up the computer in a particular place at a particular moment.
This last feature appeals to the fact that summer has a lot of leisurely moments where you can do a lot on your phone that is enriching, empowering, and skill-developing.
Alternatively, you can play PokemonGo! 😊

So, here are my top 5 for you, tested and suggested:

1. **News in Slow Spanish**
   This app uses real, current news and presents it at a speed, as the name indicates, that will allow you to process and acquire both the information as well as the relevant language and structures. It’s great as an app and has decent free features. I preferred it to the online site.

2. **Yabla**
   Feature rich, but primarily a paid service, it seems. (Not that it isn’t worth the monthly fee, but my experience has been that the other freemium sites may offer more free content overall. However, you may have more money than time, and just want a one-stop-shop experience).

   I enjoyed some of Yabla's grammar explanations that they have cleverly presented in a clear way, which are linked to the videos that you can watch. I think they do a great job at that, even though they are primarily a comprehension-development site, not a grammar one. I used the online site, I don’t know if the app is as good.

   Check out this little lesson that I thought they approached well by explaining both the rule and the exception, highlighting in an open-minded way the approach that most natives will take to this particular situation. I really like that part, because motivated students often get frustrated by natives' ignoring rules that non-natives hoped would empower them to speak "perfectly", but in fact this approach explains the norm, and shows how often it is OK to simply not follow and still be "native".

3. **Coffee Break Spanish**

This was first recommended to me by a former HHS student, and I had a chance to use the app, as well the online version. I really like it! It has various levels, uses news broadcasting as well as a scripted performance, along with apparently unscripted dialogs. The hosts are enjoyable and it feels like listening to a real radio program or podcast in Spanish. It has grown quite a bit since then, and has a number of other features.

In the podcasts section, you would probably want Seasons 2 or 3. They also offer courses, including a newer one, En Marcha, which goes through Spain. Very interesting, but these courses cost money, whereas the podcasts are free. In any case, a very well put together and comprehensive exposure with very pleasant dialogs and discussions. The videos are engaging, too.

Similar to Yabla, it highlights grammar or language structures as they occur, but in comparison to Yabla, its much more guided and works as a cohesive program, whereas Yabla is more of a collage of everything, it seems.

4. **BrainPop**

Brainpop (the Spanish version site, esp.brainpop.com) is subject matter-focused, not Spanish language-focused, and is actually for Spanish kids to learn about a world of topics. But AP students of Spanish also need to be able to understand and express themselves on a variety of such content in a variety of contexts, so this site is appropriate for developing the knowledge and comprehension skills needed to do so.

So, in the sense that this is a site for learning about the world in Spanish for Spanish speakers, this is perhaps the most “authentic” experience of the options. While any news or broadcasts for natives that you would find online or in other apps will also be authentic, but the difference here is that Brainpop is more didactic and specific in its focus, since it is supposed to educate on the topic at hand.

There are comprehension quizzes, etc., at the level of language and difficulty that you would find appropriate for an AP level Interpretive assessment. There is a variety of free content, including a free movie of the day, and as with all of these sites, you can pay for more.
5. spanishlistening.org

This is a very interesting site, partly because it totally free, and partly because it involves volunteer natives all over the world, just talking in short quantities in response to a huge selection of personal questions and topics. A fantastic resource for those of you who just don’t get much opportunity to develop your “ear” for Spanish. Listening comprehension is an elusive skill challenge, and this allows you to do this.

It is unscripted, unproduced media, free and real. Every recording is from a Skype call or something similar, making the whole experience quite authentic, including background noise, etc. I don’t know of an app, but the mobile version of the site is excellent with a clean interface – you can choose the nationality of the speaker, the difficulty level, the topics, etc. You watch and listen, and you can answer the quiz or read through the script.

What I also love about this site and its focus, is that it is also very useful for your interpersonal proficiency as well, since it gives you the questions and format for dialoging and interviewing in a natural way on any number of topics. This site may be the best of these for developing your conversational ear and dialog ability.

You can also check out their youtube channel as well. I really wish I had access to something like this when I was learning Spanish in high school. Unbelievable opportunity here. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtOrEWUnAThTek5aBh5ncPg

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Here is an additional worthwhile site for developing your listening comprehension (but not for part two of the summer work): http://listeningpractice.org/session.php

This site is not for the summer work assignment, but rather it is simply a very interesting practice site, free of charge, for you to tune your ear. Its beauty is its simplicity, as it almost exclusively targets that difficult skill of understanding spoken Spanish. Here is a short video of how you can use it:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h_BoiDs7U2iA2DTkqNORg31nDLzQvIL7/view?usp=s haring

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So, what should you do for yourself to get stronger, faster, better? Access these programs and use them! Engage with each one and figure out which one or ones you would like to focus on. Do it every day, or every weekday. Consistently doing it in moderate quantities over the next 12 weeks will really help you.
PART TWO – ASSIGNMENT

But what do you need to do with these resources, at a minimum, if that is what your goal is? (I realize that you are not motivated by minimal standards, but rather by a desire to truly become proficient in another language. That is obvious by your signing up for AP.) Nevertheless, here is the minimum for this second part of your summer work:

10 mini reports. Spend 30 minutes, 10 different times, engaging with one of the programs above. After each one, fill out one of my Google Forms for these MiniReports, and share with me. This report will include:

1. What you watched/listened to.
2. The main idea of the broadcast/s and the important details. In Spanish, and in your Spanish only.
3. 10 words or phrases that you learned to use from this broadcast.

Filling out and sharing my Google Form is the only acceptable submission format. Here is the link for the MiniReports Folder:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1e1VHSCgQsAAA8ZKWZQTHN_1eaEaLoPtO

Again, that is merely what is required. I encourage and challenge you to engage with Spanish as much as possible this summer!

Atentamente,

Sr. Sacco
**tl;dr:**

By 7:30 AM on Wednesday, August 28th:

1. Duolingo, Level 13. Add me now as a “Friend”.
2. 10 minireports submitted through Google Forms, based on 10 experiences with any of the 5 apps or sites recommended above.