



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How many teaching sessions a week is this program designed for?

A. This program was designed for a typical elementary foreign language program, usually about twice a week for approximately 20 to 35 minutes.

Q. How long should I use your materials each lesson?

A. About 20 minutes per Symtalk lesson. We suggest taking another 5 minutes at the beginning and at the end of class for greetings, counting, days of the week, songs or other cultural elements.

Q. My students only meet once a week. Would this work for them?

A. The method is ideal for classes that meet once a week. Why? Because the retention of vocabulary is so strong that students remember information from week to week. This allows teachers to conduct a quick review of previous materials, and immediately begin teaching new information to students! Also, students are purposefully exposed to a limited amount of vocabulary in the Symtalk Method which facilitates their long-term memorization of the language. This enables them to explore many possible sentences using the language, based on their genuine understanding of the words.

Q. Is there enough content in each package to last me for a year?

A. Using Symtalk Symbol Cards, books, and games, the program is designed to last one instructional year, based on an average of two to three lessons per week.

Q. I already created my own program. Can I integrate Symtalk with it?

A. Symtalk can be used as a supplemental aid to most foreign language programs. Using Symtalk in conjunction with your own program will reinforce student sentence structuring skills. The method is fun and students excel in their ability to communicate comfortably in the target language—even after only a few lessons! The chances are good that the Symtalk book you would select already features themes that you introduce—such as foods, sports, household objects, etc...

Q. How does this compare with TPRS?

A. Many TPRS (Total Physical Response System) users enjoy the Symtalk Method since it agrees with their philosophy of having students first acquire strong communicative skills before introducing them to reading and writing. Symtalk flash cards allow TPRS users to support their own lessons with more concrete images. (Some teachers have nicknamed Symtalk "TPRS on paper.") However one major advantage of Symtalk over TPRS is that we emphasize immediate language production. Specifically, the program is designed to help students produce language (orally) even after the first lesson. This is not the case with TPRS (as we understand it), as language is thought to be acquired over months of exposure to the method. Symtalk requires that students produce the effort of recalling vocabulary with minimal teacher intervention, allowing them to memorize language and store it in their long-term memories—the key in truly acquiring a new language!

Q. Is this a good fit for exploratory programs?

A. Symtalk is a great fit for exploratory programs since it provides students with immediate communicative skills and they can become functional within a very few lessons. This is particularly important to students, teachers, and parents because students experience great success with the new language, and they have more information and a good experience to decide which foreign language to study in future years!

Q. How about after-school or summer school programs?

A. Symtalk is excellent for both after-school and summer school programs. Why?—Because of its effectiveness in teaching new students to communicate immediately. Any situation in which language instruction is only available once a week (common in after-school programs) or for a limited amount of time (summer school programs for only a few weeks) is an ideal fit for Symtalk. Vocabulary acquisition is accelerated, because of the extremely effective visual memory system, so that students retain what they have learned in previous lessons. A teacher simply reviews (quickly) the information from a previous lesson (even if it was a week ago) and moves on to integrate new information (words) into the previously learned materials. Students are able to retain and use this information immediately, giving them a sense of accomplishment, something that is pleasing to teachers and parents!

Q. I would like to use Symtalk in my school from Kindergarten to 5th grade but my older students are not familiar with your method. Do they also have to start with the beginning levels?

A. No. All levels of the Symtalk program are entry-level programs, so students who are not familiar with Symtalk can begin at any of these other levels. This is one of the strengths of the program. Learning is accelerated with the Symtalk Method, so that students new to foreign language instruction will quickly narrow the gap with those who have had a year (or more) of instruction. Symtalk is designed to allow flexibility in teaching at the elementary level, as many schools begin to teach world languages at different grades (there's no such thing as a "typical" elementary foreign language program and sequence of instruction—schools will begin at any of the elementary grades: K, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5), so we have entry levels at all of these grades!

Q. Actually, my 5th graders are really strong in Spanish.

A. The higher levels of Symtalk (Levels 4 and 5) are very challenging and one of these levels would be appropriate for upper elementary students, even if they have had foreign language instruction since kindergarten. Remember...the strength of the Symtalk Method is that it teaches students to speak in the target language—immediately—and fluently, over time, so that even students who have had a lot of language instruction will benefit in their ability to communicate in the target language!

Q. Our middle school teachers ask how this will transition into their existing program.

A. Students who exit elementary school having used the Symtalk Method for one or more years will be equipped with strong communicative skills. Their reading skills in the target language will also be more intuitive than those who have not been in Symtalk classrooms. They simply will be better prepared to begin a traditional middle/high school level foreign language program. They are comfortable and confident in the new language!

Q. How do you introduce the verbs? Do you have different cards to conjugate these verbs?

A. We offer one visual for each verb. It is important that the student produce the effort to conjugate the verbs in the context of the sentence. This facilitates the genuine memorization of the words needed to effectively communicate in the language. We have developed a simple and effective method to introduce the phonetic change of conjugated words. (This is easily demonstrated on the training DVD.) Verbs are initially introduced in the third person singular form (Symtalk levels 1 and 2.) In Level 3, verbs are introduced in the first and second person singular forms. In Level 5 of the series, students are formally introduced to dozens of verbs in both the singular and plural.

Q. Would younger students be confused by conjugating early in the program?

A. We do this gradually. Once students are familiar with about seven or eight verbs, ten objects, and a few places and characters, we introduce them to the first person singular—followed by the second person singular forms of the verb. The training DVD shows students (even very young ones) conjugating comfortably as they interpret the symbol sentences. More examples of students in action are seen on our website: www.emcp.com/symtalk, as video clips highlight students in the classroom.

Q. I've seen your video. Do these kids really understand what they say?

A. In most cases, yes! How do they know what they say? The visuals (Symbol Cards) are self-explanatory, and the students derive meaning from the pictures. This is an essential advantage to the Symtalk Method. There is no need for students to “translate” in their heads (for example, from English to Spanish) in order to understand what a sentence means. The visual symbol sentence is clear and meaning is derived from the pictures!

Q. Do students get bored of the picture system? I mean, it seems very repetitive!

A. The sentences are not as repetitive as they look since every one is different and you will discover that students love to volunteer to read them. They see this method as some kind of a memory game. But just like any other tool you use in your class, we recommend that as soon as attention declines, you switch to a new activity, whether it's a Symtalk one or not.

Q. OK, so students learn vocabulary by “reading pictures.” When do they start learning without pictures?

A. We help students transition away from the reliance on symbols very quickly—often in the first or second lesson. The symbols are used to facilitate memorization of the vocabulary (encoding of information into the long-term memory.) Once it is there (in other words, once a student has learned the words and is comfortable using them in sentences), teachers can help students by directing them with more open-ended questions. This enables students to produce language in a “very real way,” as they describe scenes, for example. At the end of many lessons in the Symtalk student books are scenes for students to interpret—all in an effort for them to demonstrate genuine use of the language!

Q. I see in the books that nouns are introduced with articles? How do children understand the difference between la and una, for instance?

A. Nouns are introduced with their most commonly found articles so that these nouns can be used immediately in the context of sentences. This is critical! Students must be able to experience immediate success in using the new language—and the ability to correctly

use articles is an integral part of the process of gaining oral fluency. Then, as students progress through the program they are introduced to new verbs and situations, and some of the nouns are used with different articles. The teacher should provide an explanation of when to use the different articles. By this time, students have already mastered the first example (learned previously), and the new use of the article is easily learned as well. These concepts are addressed in the teacher guides of the Symtalk program, so that the teacher is prepared to teach rules at the appropriate time.

Q. I like your method but our curriculum requires that we introduce reading and writing.

A. In addition to helping students communicate orally in the classroom, Symtalk introduces writing in the books—as young as first grade, if this is required in a school’s language program. Each Symtalk unit begins with an introductory page where symbols (pictures) are introduced along with the text form of the word. The following pages feature symbol sentences which encourage students to interpret meaning by orally “reading” the series of symbols. A space under each symbol is available so that, when a teacher wants to introduce writing, the students can write the words under each symbol. The same applies for the end of each lesson, where scenes are introduced in the book. Students are able to write words in the lines under each scene as they attempt to describe each scene using the vocabulary they have previously learned.

Q. When do I start introducing writing?

A. Before introducing writing skills in the books, we recommend that students have genuinely learn to speak using the vocabulary. Teachers must ascertain that students are ready to proceed—that they enunciate properly and conjugate verbs correctly—before introducing the written form of the word. Otherwise **(and this is a critical factor in teaching students to speak comfortably in the target language)** students will tend to read the text words which hampers their ability to learn to create sentences (speak) on their own.

One helpful suggestion is that teachers proceed with Symtalk lessons initially, without introducing writing, until they have completed a few weeks (many lessons) of work. Then, if they are satisfied that students are communicating comfortably in the new language, teachers can assign writing assignments which refer back to lessons covered previously. For example, after teaching eight lessons or so in the Symtalk book, a teacher may want to assign homework and have students write the text form of the words under the symbols in the student workbook. By this time (and after much repetition) students should have memorized the vocabulary and will not rely on the text form of the word as a visual cue. Remember, reading is not speaking. A student’s ability to read text is a different skill from their ability to learn to speak in a new language.

Q. This seems expensive to me. Do I have to buy the whole system?

A. Classroom packages are available (a teacher guide, 25 student workbooks, a set of Symbol Cards, and two communicative games) and save money over buying items individually (classroom package prices are approximately \$800 each, depending on the level.) However, Symtalk has been designed to allow any teacher to begin using the program, so another option is for the teacher to get a starter package (a teacher guide, a set of Symbol Cards, and 5 student workbooks.) This will allow the teacher to begin using the method with small groups (or students can share the workbooks for larger groups.) Cost for the starter sets is between \$200-300, depending on the level. Most teachers have funds available to purchase a starter set, even if it must come from their individual classroom funds.

Q. We would like to try your method with our different grades. If we can only buy one classroom package, what should we buy?

A. If your school introduces world language instruction at the elementary level (from Kindergarten to 6th grade), we recommend level 3 of the series. This level introduces students to approximately 150 words, including 20 verbs. With younger students (K-1st) teachers can use Symbol Cards and create simple sentences based on the first lessons of the workbook. The workbooks can be added to the curriculum for middle and upper elementary students (2nd-6th grades.) Level 3 allows teachers to use this level with a wide age range of students.

Q. What about the following year—what levels should we get?

A. In subsequent years, materials at different levels can be purchased, so that, gradually, teachers will be able to begin teaching the method using ideal age-appropriate materials. The following guideline illustrates this plan:

- Level 1: Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten
- Level 2: Kindergarten/1st Grade
- Level 3: Grades 2-4
- Level 4: Grades 3-5
- Level 5: Grades 4-6

Q. I have seen some of your games in a catalog or at a trade show. Can they be used if I don't currently use your Symtalk Method?

A. Yes, the Symtalk dialogue games can be used as a stand-alone item to be used in any foreign language classroom. The games offer a variety of themes, with each one designed to complete a specific task (usually in a competitive setting with students.) For example, Symtalk game topics include: ordering foods in a restaurant, finding directions in a city, going to the prom, and visiting a mall. Games stimulate lively classroom conversation in the target language. They require minimal teacher intervention and are available for all learning levels.

Q. When do I start using the games?

A. The Symtalk dialogue games were created to give teachers one more forum to help students use words (in a very real way!) to communicate with each other. The games were designed to practice words already learned, as well as to introduce new words to facilitate communication. **Important:** Teachers do not need to require that students reach a certain level before using these games. The games are intended for use in classrooms as a lively and fun alternative to "book work"—and are ideal if students need a less-structured activity to facilitate learning.

Q. What about themes? Our program requires that we introduce many themes.

A. Themes are introduced in all Symtalk components: Symbol Cards, Workbooks, and Games. However, we generally introduce these themes gradually, as we emphasize communicative skill-building exercises in our instruction. This is done deliberately in an effort to mimic real-life situations. (For example, in life, we do not learn about all types of clothing at one time, all types of food at one time, etc.) It is also critical that instruction be laid out in this manner, as all vocabulary introduced in the Symtalk program is repeatedly used in future lessons (spiraling!) This enables students, over time, to learn the words (after repeated exposure) in a natural way, without the emphasis groups of words that, although they may be related, are difficult to memorize in such groups!

Q. What about culture?

A. Cultural items are integrated naturally throughout the Symtalk books at each level. Cultural items include items of clothing, foods, places, celebrations, and places. The Teacher's Editions offer suggestions for cultural discussions during the lessons.

Q. What about assessment?

A. Each Teacher's Edition features comprehensive oral and written assessment (in the form of blackline masters) for teachers to assess student progress.

Q. What is available in digital format?

A. Symtalk offers the Digital e-Library of Symbol Cards which includes the digital images of the Symbol Cards specific for each level and language. These can be used with an interactive whiteboard or a computer with projector. The ability to create and save lesson plans, design activity handouts, and manipulate images is all at your finger tips.

Q. Do we need an actual Spanish teacher to use this method?

A. Yes. Because the Symtalk teacher will need to model correct pronunciation for students in the target language, it is necessary that this person be very comfortable (if not fluent) in the language. However, it is not necessary that the teacher be a certified foreign language instructor (though this is ideal!) Any person who is competent in the target language can be effective as a teacher, providing they also have classroom management skills and are skilled in working with children.

Q. Symtalk is available in what languages?

A. Symtalk is available in seven languages:

- Spanish: 5 levels
- French: 6 levels
- Chinese: 3 levels
- German: 2 levels

Q. What kind of teacher training is offered for Symtalk?

A. Symtalk is the simplest foreign language instruction method. If teachers have ever introduced vocabulary using flash cards, they are already in tune with the idea. With Symtalk, the difference is that we have created images representing verbs, allowing teachers to use the traditional flash card system in the context of sentences. The Teacher's Edition offers many suggestions on every page. In addition, each package comes with a training DVD which clearly explains and demonstrates use of the Symtalk Method in the classroom.

Q. Do you offer in-services or workshops? If so, what is the cost?

A. Depending on the size of an adoption, Symtalk has consultants available to train teachers on the use of the method. Costs will depend on the size and scope of the adoption as well. In addition, Symtalk has plans to offer summer training sessions for teachers in the near future. These training sessions will be strategically located throughout the U.S.—where demand for instruction is greatest.

Q. Are there any schools using this method in our country?

A. Hundreds of schools throughout the U.S. have begun using the Symtalk program over the past few years. Symtalk is used in public and private schools; at all levels of elementary schools, as well as at the middle and high school levels. Symtalk is used as both a core and supplemental program in elementary schools. The Symtalk Method enhances communicative skills and is used primarily as a supplemental program at middle and high schools—where students are beginning a language program.