

The Complete Guide to Instant Spanish Immersion

FluentU

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Learning Spanish is an exciting endeavor that can change your life by exposing you to new cultures, people and places. Furthermore, speaking Spanish undeniably opens an array of new doors for you in terms of employment.

But in order to reap these benefits, first you need to learn the language.

So what's the best way to soak up the most Spanish in the shortest amount of time? Immersion.

Now, we know that few have the time and money to simply hop on a plane and head to the nearest Spanish-speaking country right away, and that's exactly why we've put this guide together for you.

There are so many useful ways, tools and tricks to immerse yourself in Spanish *right now*, no matter where you currently live.

Let's get started – instant Spanish immersion is but a page turn away!

[1]

How to Immerse Yourself in Spanish When You Don't Live Abroad

By: Rebecca Thering



Imagine you're in Madrid, Spain.

You hear a celebratory roar erupting from the street, like nothing you've heard before, as the whole city seems to be watching the same soccer game. "*Vamos, vamos, vamos... gol!*"

You're late, on your way to watch said game at a bar with friends. The thought of the fried, salty *patatas bravas* and refreshing, cold *cañas* that you'll soon consume is making your mouth water.

The stairs to the metro aren't far, and once you're down on the platform, joy ensues as the words "*El próximo tren llegará en 1 min*" (The next train will arrive in one minute) flash across the screen in neon green letters.

Being in Madrid, you are constantly surrounded by Spanish. Every day you hear, read, write and speak it, without going out of your way to do so. Through immersion, you're learning Spanish faster than you ever have before.

But we can't all be in Spain right now. Nor Chile, Honduras or Argentina.

So how can you immerse yourself in Spanish when you don't live abroad?

How to Immerse Yourself in Spanish When You Don't Live Abroad

Change Your Digital Language Settings to Spanish

Go into your Facebook settings and change the language to Spanish. That's how I learned the word "*muro*" (wall) back in high school. Then go into your email account – and any other online accounts that you interact with daily for that matter (Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest, etc.) – and do the same: change the language to Spanish. Next grab your digital camera, cell phone, iPad, computer, GPS, Kindle – any piece of technology that you own – and head to the language settings. These changes will get you thinking in Spanish when you otherwise wouldn't, and you are sure to learn new words.

Read Spanish Newspapers Online

If you regularly check the news online, start reading it in Spanish. My preference is the Madrid-based *El País*, since I grew fond of it during the two years I lived in Spain, but there are a number of other Spanish news sources available online. Here are a few to get you started:

- CNN en español
- Google News España
- BBC Mundo

- ABC
- El Nuevo Herald

Choose one and set it as your new homepage today. For smartphone users, most of these newspapers have free apps to download, as well. And to get the most out of your time reading the news, this post with 9 great tips for learning Spanish with the news is a must-read.

Read Children's Books in Spanish

Go to your local public library and head to the foreign language shelf in the children's section. If you're more advanced, pick a young adult favorite and see if your library has it in Spanish (Harry Potter, anyone?). Already knowing the plot will help you understand what's going on as you read in Spanish.

As a Kindle owner, I also like to browse Amazon's free Spanish e-books from time to time. Reading books in Spanish on my Kindle is great because with a Spanish dictionary installed, Spanish definitions of appear on the screen at the tap of a finger. Many public libraries have digital libraries now too, so that's another place to check for Spanish e-books.

Label Items in Your House

I've done this multiple times, when learning both Spanish and French, to master household vocabulary. I simply wrote Spanish words on small flashcards, and then taped each to its corresponding item in my apartment. Both times I had roommates who were much less excited than I was, but ultimately they let the labels stay up for a few weeks. Staring at "*ventana*" every time I looked out of the window while doing dishes, or seeing "*enchufe*" on the electrical outlet took advantage of my visual learning style and got those words ingrained in my brain. Grab a marker, tape, some paper and get started!

Listen to Spanish Radio

Listening to Spanish music on the radio while you're driving, working out, or simply at home is another great way to immerse yourself in Spanish. My favorite Spanish radio station is *Cadena Dial* (97.1 FM in Madrid), which plays Spanish music all the time. You can listen to *Cadena Dial en directo* (live) online here.

If you discover a song that sticks with you after listening, use FluentU to learn the words and meaning. Once you've practiced and studied it for a bit, play Lyrics Training to see how well you know the song.

Here's a quick guide to learning Spanish through songs and music for your reference.

Mix it up and try listening to a talk radio show from time to time. To get accustomed to hearing *castellano* from Spain, I recommend *Cadena Ser*.

Listen to Spanish Podcasts

Similar to Spanish radio talk shows, you can easily find free Spanish podcasts online. Sure, there are many podcasts made specifically for Spanish learners, but you can also listen to podcasts produced by native Spanish speakers about a wide variety of topics. Where can you find these podcasts?

Go to the iTunes Store and scroll all the way to the bottom of the screen. In the fourth column, Management, select "Change Country". Choose any Spanish-speaking country that you want, and then scroll back up and click "Podcasts". Then comes the fun part: Browse through the various categories and "top podcasts" from that particular country, and listen to a podcast that looks interesting to you.

Keep an Agenda or Journal in Spanish

I've always kept some sort of journal, but it wasn't until I first lived in Spain

as a study abroad student that I began to journal in Spanish. Writing in Spanish about your thoughts and everyday activities is a great way to hone the skill, even if you're a beginner. My private thoughts also feel like they have an extra layer of protection when they're written in Spanish!

If you keep an agenda/planner or any sort of calendar, start writing your appointments and events in Spanish.

Watch Spanish Television

I usually feel a bit guilty when I spend time watching TV, but definitely not when it's in Spanish. That's a mental workout! Many Spanish TV shows can be watched online, and will usually be divided into three categories: *series*, *programas*, and *noticias*. *Series* are fictional television series; *programas* include talk shows, documentaries, cooking shows, reality TV and game shows; while *noticias* are news segments. Two more helpful words when navigating these sites are “*capítulos*” (episodes) and “*temporada*” (season). Here are a few Spanish television channels to get you started:

- Antena 3
- RTVE Televisión
- Cuatro
- Tele Cinco
- La Sexta

Watch Spanish Movies

While many Spanish TV shows can be found online, don't forget about your public library when it comes to movies! I love getting DVDs from the library because it's easy to add Spanish subtitles from the main menu. Most foreign language movies that you can stream or watch online will have English subtitles, which is not recommended when you're learning a foreign language. Why not? Your mind will be reading all of the

English and not listening to the Spanish. It takes great concentration to listen – especially in a foreign language – so if your eyes can read the Spanish while your ears listen to it, you're setting yourself up for successful learning through immersion.

Check out these eight useful tips for learning Spanish with movies, which also includes some movie suggestions. Then, here are seven more great movies for learning real Spanish.

Join a Spanish Conversation Table

The only way to get better at speaking Spanish is to speak Spanish. I recommend joining a Spanish conversation table to be surrounded by other Spanish speakers. Search Meetup, Craigslist (Community), and Facebook groups to find an existing Spanish conversation group near you.

Not having any luck? Start your own group! Advertise in the same sites listed above, and then put up a few flyers around town. You could try looking for a one-on-one language exchange (intercambio) too, if you like. And remember: Talk a lot and make tons of mistakes, and then talk some more.

Work at a Spanish-speaking Restaurant

My good friend worked at a Qdoba during part of college, and he got to speak Spanish with the kitchen staff every day. No Spanish skills were required when he applied for the job, but he was surrounded by Spanish while working and picked up lots of slang. If you have time for a part-time job, why not consider working at a restaurant where Spanish is spoken by some of the staff or owners?

Volunteer with Spanish Speakers

Look for volunteer opportunities with Spanish speakers. One semester I volunteered as a childcare assistant for Spanish-speaking children while their parents were in free ESL classes. Playing with the children was a low-

pressure way to use what Spanish I knew, while being immersed in the language. Here are four useful sites for finding volunteer opportunities:

- [Craigslist \(Volunteers\)](#)
- [Idealist](#)
- [United We Serve](#)
- [Volunteer Match](#)

[Watch Spanish Videos on FluentU](#)

Finally, a great place to access authentic Spanish videos online is right here at FluentU. FluentU has put together a collection of the best real-world Spanish video content from the web, and all of the videos can all be watched with Spanish subtitles – score! The videos types range from commercials and music videos to funny homemade mini-movies and speeches – so no matter your interests or level, you’ll find something excellent to watch.

Even when you’re not living abroad, you can clearly still take many measures to immerse yourself in Spanish. So kick that Spanish learning into high gear and use these tips to soak up all the Spanish that you can. There will always be *partidos de fútbol* and *patatas bravas* waiting for you in Spain; they’re not going anywhere.

[2]

9 Great Resources to Learn Spanish Through the News

By: Nick R.



Learning Spanish shouldn't be a chore.

One of the keys to successfully learning Spanish is finding ways to combine your passions with your language practice.

For example, if you like movies, you can learn Spanish with classic Argentine movies.

Or if you like music, popular Spanish songs are a no-brainer.

And if you're a news addict, learning Spanish through the news (or Spanish podcasts) is a perfect addition to your Spanish study routine.

How do you know if you're a news addict? Do you find yourself refreshing the BBC homepage multiple times per hour? Do you get the shakes at the idea of being the last one to know about a major world event? Do you have multiple favorite world leaders? These are all signs of a serious news habit.

Other Reasons to Learn Spanish with the News

Another important key to learning Spanish is regular practice. If you always start your day with a dose of news over breakfast or coffee, or finish it by watching the nightly news over dinner, you have a guaranteed half-hour language learning slot just waiting to be filled with Spanish news.

News is a great way to build useful vocabulary. Unlike works of fiction or even films, the vocabulary used in news is highly formulaic, meaning you won't have to worry that learning the words for basket-weaving (*cestería*) or windshield wipers (*limpiaparabrisas*) will fill up valuable Spanish vocabulary space in your brain. This gives you more opportunities to learn individual words, as well as confidence that the words you do learn will be useful.

For those who aren't super interested in the news, this list includes a few alternatives that break with the serious, detached approach to journalism of mainstream media companies.

Tips for Learning Spanish Through the News

Learning Spanish through the news is not difficult. Beginner Spanish learners may want to start with a news website that offers both English and Spanish versions of major news stories, such as El País or the Miami Herald (Nuevo Herald). Some simple tips to get the most out of your practice include: setting yourself a target of at least one article per day, keeping a notebook with the words you translate each day, and revising this notebook after each news reading session, and again at the end of each week.

The most important thing is to find a news source that actually interests you. You don't have to be addicted to world news to get something out of reading Spanish news. There are 460 million Spanish speakers in the world. With a market that large, you can be sure there is a Spanish language publication for every interest. There are Spanish motor magazines, fashion magazines, celebrity gossip magazines, there's even a Spanish magazine for train enthusiasts (*Revista Tren* if you're interested). Best of all, there is absolutely no reason to worry about highbrow content. In fact, when you're starting out, the lower the brow of your content the better. Simple vocabulary and short sentences are exactly what you want to aim for as a beginner. For best results, combine reading and listening comprehension through print and TV or radio news.

You may want to try summarizing news articles in a few short (Spanish) sentences after you've finished them. This gives you an opportunity to reinforce the vocabulary you've just learned, while practicing your Spanish grammar and sentence structure. If, however, you find this technique turns your reading practice into such a chore that you find yourself making excuses to avoid it, *deséchalo* (throw it out)! We're aiming for quantity and the surest route to quantity is maintaining your continued interest.

If this all sounds like a lot of work, you might want to consider learning Spanish with news videos on FluentU. FluentU has gathered together the web's best Spanish videos — like news, commercials, movie trailers, and music videos — and changed them into language lessons. If you want to take it easy, you can watch the videos with transcriptions underneath. You can hover over any word to look it up. FluentU's "Learn Mode" also converts every video into a quiz which tests you based on video context.

9 Great Resources for Learning Spanish with the News

Noticias Google (Google News in Spanish)

Google News' Spanish Service aggregates content from news media around the world into a scrolling list of articles organized according to

theme. The site includes a variety of customization options to increase or decrease the presence of a certain media provider, region, or theme, in your news feed.

El País

El País is a major metropolitan daily paper based in Madrid, Spain. The site offers three portals – Spain, America (including Latin America), and Brazil (coverage in Portuguese) – which filter content according to region. The coverage is of an excellent quality. El País also offers an English portal with translations of a small selection of articles featured on the main page. This makes it a good option for beginning Spanish learners, as these articles can provide a good first step into Spanish news.

News in Slow Spanish

News in Slow Spanish is the definitive resource for beginning Spanish learners who wish to improve their comprehension. The two hosts go over a selection of news items from the past week at approximately three-quarters of normal reading speed. This may sound strange, but for intermediate students of Spanish this little bit of extra time is all that is needed to dramatically boost comprehension.

Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE)

Radiotelevisión Española is Spain's national public broadcaster. RTVE's a la carta (on the menu) service allows viewers from all around the world to select from its programming list. This includes a variety of news and current affairs programs such as Informe Semanal and the Telediarios. This is probably the best option for those of you who prefer to watch a solid half hour of news over dinner every night.

SBS Spanish News

The website of the Australian Special Broadcasting Service includes content in Spanish in a variety of formats. These include: print news in Spanish, as well as a collection of short news radio programs focusing on

Australian and international news. For Australian viewers, SBS also offers an on-demand viewer for their daily, 1 hour Spanish TV news.

ESPN Football

You don't always have to read serious news! Football is a huge part of the culture all across the Spanish-speaking world. If you're learning Spanish to talk to Spanish people, you're going to need to learn how to talk about football. You can filter your results by country and by region, if you're interested in travelling to a particular region, or are already a fan of a Spanish team.

Juxtapoz

Juxtapoz is an arts and culture magazine with its origins in the lowbrow art scene of 1990s Southern California. Juxtapoz's Spanish language edition continues to feature lowbrow and alternative art forms such as street art and poster art; however its focus is more international, with a great deal of art from Spanish and Latin American artists. If you're passionate about art, Juxtapoz is the perfect way to introduce yourself to the art scene in the Spanish speaking world.

Vogue

Vogue is the most prominent publication in fashion. The Spanish edition of Vogue was started only a few years after its American counterpart, and is every bit an equal in the depth and quality of its coverage. This includes coverage in a variety of media, including short videos. This makes it a good mixed-media platform for those looking to increase their listening, as well as reading, comprehension.

Vice

Vice publishes three Spanish editions: Spain, Mexico and Colombia, though there is substantial content overlap between the three. The editions feature Vice's distinctive style of journalism: focusing on marginal

characters and themes, and many stories written with a Gonzo approach to journalistic immersion.

Vice has recently moved into covering major news stories; however, the approach of their journalists is unlike mainstream news media, and may be very popular among people who don't find major news providers appealing.

[3]

A Quick Guide to Learning Spanish Through Songs and Music

By: Elizabeth and Alan



We've all been there.

Sitting painfully through traditional Spanish language classes.

Desperately trying to memorize vocabulary.

Thankfully there are less conventional and more fun ways to learn Spanish.

Like learning Spanish on YouTube. Or learning Spanish through movies and Spanish podcasts.

And of course, by **learning Spanish through songs.**

We all get songs stuck in our heads – so put that to good use and use it as a learning tool to improve your language skills!

Why Learn Spanish Through Songs and Music?

Songs get stuck in our heads because of our brains. Music activates the auditory cortex part of our brains, and when we do not know the entire song our brains fill in the missing gaps in the rhythm and repeat it over and over. Scientists call this phenomenon a cognitive itch or a brain itch, and by repeating a tune in your head you are scratching the itch.

Unfortunately, our brains sometimes act like stuck iPods, unable to shuffle past the song they are stuck on to move onto something else we would rather listen to! Scientists and researchers all around the world have different names for songs getting stuck in our heads and different theories for why this happens.

Marketing agencies and commercials are constantly coming up with new jingles and tunes to make their product memorable to you by creating a sound or piece of music that will get stuck in your head, and often times it works very well!

We can use these same ideas to help learn a new language: If your brain can remember the music from a commercial or the theme song from a popular show on television, it will also remember a song or chorus line that you have heard even if it is in a different language.

Why Are Songs Helpful for Learning Spanish?

Learning a new language is hard – oftentimes sitting in a classroom is boring, learning from a textbook feels like work, and there is not much interaction with the real Spanish language and culture. By learning Spanish through songs your brain makes the connection between the music you are listening to and the words and language concepts you are trying to learn.

Music allows you an insight into the Spanish culture that cannot be learned from a book. You get to learn what people are singing about and therefore learn more about the culture, opinions and activities of Spanish speakers.

In addition, listening to music is **fun!** Singing along to Spanish music not only increases your vocabulary and knowledge of popular Spanish culture, but will allow you to even out your accent and grow acquainted with local slang.

Tips for Learning Spanish Through Songs and Music

As mentioned above, we get songs stuck in our head all the time. If you listen to something long enough you will begin to recognize the beat, beginning notes and lyrics of the song. With repetition you will soon find yourself singing along almost without trying! However, in order to learn Spanish effectively, there are some tips and tricks to utilizing songs and music to your language-learning benefit.

Choose songs with clear pronunciation: If you find a song has lyrics that blend together or are hard to understand, consider picking a different song or reading the lyrics while you listen. For beginners, choosing simple songs with clear lyrics, choruses and verses will assist you in learning Spanish much better than more complicated songs.

Catchy beat: If the beat and rhythm does not catch your fancy when you listen to it, you probably will not want it stuck in your head. Songs that make you tap your foot and bob your head are the best!

Repeating chorus/verses: The best songs to learn Spanish are ones that have repeating phrases in the chorus or verses that contain the same lyrics. If you can recognize and remember the lyrics you will be able to sing it in your head with more accuracy!

A familiar song dubbed in Spanish: Learning completely new songs in Spanish can be difficult, so sometimes it is more than acceptable to take a familiar English song and find a Spanish version of it. You can do this for

theme songs, your favorite songs, or listen to familiar artists who also sing in Spanish (like Shakira or Enrique Iglesias).

Regional Spanish music: Pick songs sung by artists from the Spanish region of the world whose dialect you are learning. Dialects across the Spanish-speaking world differ and can use different slang, so make it easy on yourself at least at the beginning!

Look up unknown words: It's also helpful to look up words that you're not familiar with, and to write them down and periodically review them.

Use FluentU: If this sounds like a lot of work, you can always use FluentU to learn songs. FluentU lets you learn Spanish through the web's best Spanish music videos. All lyrics are translated, and you can hover over any word or phrase to see the translation. You can even review the words in a review session that uses video context to help embed the words in your memory.

Getting Started with Learning Through Spanish Songs

If you are set to start to **learn Spanish through songs** here are a few good ones to start with. These artists cover a variety of Spanish genres, styles, beats and messages, so you should be able to find something you like.

In order to get the most out of these songs, here are a couple tips for when you listen. The first time through, just listen to the song and the beat and try to pick out any familiar words you might already know.

The second time you listen, pay attention to any repetition that might occur in the song.

And the third time, see if you can spot any unfamiliar words to look up. It will be incredibly helpful to keep a dictionary nearby, as well as having the lyrics available to look at. Make sure to also be in a place where you can really pay attention to the songs; being distracted will not be helpful.

Become familiar with these songs and soon you will find yourself singing along!

1. Julieta Venegas – “Me voy”

This song uses common Spanish words along with a slow, easy beat – which is perfect for Spanish learners. You’ll be able to recognize the majority of the words and the conjugations of the verbs without too much trouble. The song tells the story of a woman who leaves her lover and must say goodbye, even though she doesn’t want to.

2. Café Tacuba – “Eres”

“Eres” also has a steady, slow rhythm with simple, clearly articulated words that are easy to follow. The song is a love song demonstrating the incredible joy of being in love, waking up next to someone, and not having to miss their presence anymore.

3. Jarabe de Palo – “Bonito”

You will tap your feet and bob your head to this song! It has a very catchy beat and a repeating chorus line that you will be able to learn easily, and the lyrics are beautiful (much like the title). This song talks about the beauty to be found everywhere in life, and that the bad things that inevitably happen cannot take away from the overall glory of life. This is a great song for a rainy day!

4. Juanes – “Nada valgo sin tu amor”

Another love song, this smooth and easy jazz-inspired tune tells the story of a man who is nothing without his lover. It is a beautiful confession of a man who is in love and knows what he would lose without it: the wonderful feelings of companionship that comes with a relationship, and the desire to feel that again when love has gone away.

5. Marc Anthony – “Vivir mi vida”

This song poses the question, “Why cry?”. Life is full of ups and downs, but excitement is all around and the only thing we can do is live our lives. Marc Anthony provides a very upbeat song you won’t be able to resist dancing to. Laugh, dance, shout, enjoy and live in the moment! This song is a reminder that the moment is all we have, so take advantage of it.

6. Ricardo Arjona – “La historia de un taxista”

This song tells the story of a taxi driver who picks up a woman on the side of the road. She is crying and he asks why. She says she has just broken up with her boyfriend because he cheated on her. She and the taxi driver begin speaking and telling their life stories. The taxi driver wonders, “What am I doing here, driving a taxi, speaking with this woman, thinking these terrible things?”. They decide to go to the bar where her ex-boyfriend is and find the taxi driver’s wife in his arms; from that night on the taxi driver and the woman meet at the corner and continue their relationship.

7. Shakira – “No”

Shakira’s “No” is slow and steady, and heartbreakingly expresses her reasons why she refuses to be with someone who is constantly causing her pain. She says that no one can live with the venom of this relationship, and that she resents the fact that her lover can still hurt her even when he is long gone. The lyrics are simple and powerful, perfect for learning a variety of new words.

8. El Patio de Tu Casa – “Nuestros tiempos verbales”

This song is perfect for utilizing new conjugations and learning new words, combining life lessons and grammar tenses. You’ll receive a new and clearer understanding of Spanish grammar concepts like gerunds, subjunctive and infinitives, as well as lyrical practice with all of the tenses.

9. Gloria Trevi – “Todos me miran”

Look no further for the perfect Spanish woman power anthem! From throwing off the chains of her inattentive partner to becoming the queen of the city in an evening, Gloria Trevi’s passion is palatable through the music she has created. You’ll dance, sing, and be inspired by the sequins and spotlights that shine from this song, and in the end everyone will love her!

10. Jesse & Joy – “¿Con quién se queda el perro?”

A sad and realistic breakup song, Jesse and Joy pose the question “Who gets the dog if we break up?”. What starts off as a shiny, new and exciting relationship filled with shared joys soon turns ugly. The song leaves us packing bags and splitting material items until the final question of who gets the dog remains. Devastatingly sad but all together relatable, this song will allow you to learn new vocabulary while also being able to hear some words you may already know well.

Great! What Next?

Now that you have a good place to start, you have the tools to find new Spanish artists you like and play around with different genres of Spanish music. Find songs you enjoy listening to, find others like them, and remember to keep a dictionary with you while you listen so you can look up any words you might not know right away.

Also, keep in mind that you do not have to understand the entire song the first time you listen to it! The first time you listen you should be getting acquainted with the beat and rhythm. The second time you should be paying attention to the lyrics and chorus, and the third time try to pick out any words or phrases you do not recognize and look them up.

After you have grasped the concept and idea of the song, you will find it playing in your head and eventually you will be singing along to the words! The benefits to learning Spanish through songs are numerous. You

can download this music onto your mp3 or iPod and listen to it on a run, on the bus, or at home.

Learning Spanish songs can make breaking the ice with native Spanish speakers easier and allow you to find common ground with others. You will learn details of local culture, perfect your accent, and enjoy learning new words, phrases and concepts – good luck!

More Resources for Learning Spanish Through Songs and Music

Here are a few more resources to help you learn Spanish through songs.

Lyrics Training: A great site to learn Spanish as well as other languages, through music videos. Lyrics Training lets you learn the lyrics to songs through fill in the blank questions.

My Favorite Way To Learn Spanish-With Music!: Jessica's blog offering a playlist full of music to help you learn Spanish.

Spanish Songs For Kids: A selection of original songs designed to help children with learning Spanish. The songs include color-in worksheets with lyrics.

Learn Spanish Through Pop Song Lyrics!: A nice site offering popular Latin songs with their lyrics and translations, as well as phonetic guides to some fun Spanish song lyrics & music.

[4]

7 Best Movies to Learn Real Spanish

By: Elizabeth, Jason and Alan



What's the #1 mistake that Spanish learners make?

Learning only from textbooks.

Textbooks are certainly helpful.

But they don't do a great job of communicating the nuances of the Spanish language and culture.

After all, slang, dialects, emotion and humor – that's where the real "soul" of Spanish resides.

One great way to cross that bridge is by learning Spanish with music.

Another great way is to learn Spanish with movies.

Movies give you context via body language, expressions and interesting settings. They also have a plot to follow, enrich your study experience and provide you with motivation to learn outside of just “learning for the sake of learning”. In other words, movies are the perfect form of edutainment, and there’s a whole world of them out there waiting for you already!

How exactly do you know which movies to watch though?

Here are our suggestions for the seven best movies for learning real Spanish.

7 Best Movies to Learn Real Spanish

1. Re-live your youth in “*Tres metros sobre el cielo*” (Spain)

The film “Three Steps Above Heaven” (or literally, “Three Meters Above Heaven”) follows the story of Hugo “H” Olivera as he races through the streets of Spain, wreaking havoc and breaking hearts.

Charged with assault right at the film’s outset, H leads the quintessential teenage rebel’s life of motorcycles, breaking the law, and chasing girls – eventually finding himself caught up in a romance that will change his life forever. “Three Steps Above Heaven” is fun and fast-paced, but predictable and Spanish learners will be able to follow the plot with ease.

2. Experience Mexican tradition with “*Como agua para chocolate*” (Mexico)

The film “*Como agua para chocolate*,” or “Like Water for Chocolate,” is a story about family, tradition, love, life and death. The main character, Tita, finds herself unable to marry the man she loves because of a long-held family tradition and is forever resigned to a life of longing when her sister marries him in her place.

Spanning more than 20 years, the film follows the characters throughout their lives and you'd be hard-pressed not to find yourself touched by their stories. *"Como agua para chocolate"* is not only a popular film for its own sake, but contains tons of high-frequency natural Spanish which makes it great for language learning as well.

3. Be Inspired by *"Diarios de motocicleta"* (Latin America)

"The Motorcycle Diaries" is the story of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who worked in a leper colony while motorcycling around South America and eventually led a revolution that dramatically changed South America forever. His experience on the road and the subsequent exposure to the incredible poverty of the local indigenous tribes, inspires Guevara to think big and try to make a positive difference in the world.

While it can be slightly difficult at times, "The Motorcycle Diaries" is a fantastic watch for Spanish learners of all levels because it contains examples of slang and dialects from all around South America, which are essential for any well-rounded Spanish speaker.

4. Get fantastical in *"El laberinto del fauno"* (Spain)

"Pan's Labyrinth" is the fantastical story of a young princess who finds herself living the life of a young human girl named Ofelia in war-torn 1944 Spain. Part war story, part fairy tale, this strange but touching film will certainly draw you in and is more than worth a watch.

With all its fantasy, "Pan's Labyrinth" can be hard to follow from time to time, so turn those Spanish subtitles on! That being said, it's chock-full of great vocabulary about war, revolution, rebellion, and of course – fantasy.

5. Think deep with *"Mar adentro"* (Spain)

"The Sea Inside" is the true story of Ramón Sampedro, a man from Spain who fought to end his own life legally over a span of 28 years. The film

follows his life as he fights both lawyers and his illness, while all the while learning unexpected lessons about the meaning of life and love.

“*Mar adentro*” has fairly heavy vocabulary, but the sophisticated nature of the plot will keep you interested enough to ensure you soak it all up.

6. Go on a joyride in “*El carro*” (Colombia)

“The Car” is the story of the Vélez family and their purchase of their very own bright red Chevy cruiser. Never having owned a car for themselves before, all five members of the family take turns adventuring out in the ancient car and enjoying the freedom that four wheels affords them.

In the end though, the car means more to them than they ever thought it could. “*El carro*” is fast and funny – perfect ingredients for a fun language learning experience. Even if you don’t understand every word, the ride is worth your time.

7. Laugh and cry with the comedy drama, “*El hijo de la novia*” (Argentina)

In “The Son of the Bride,” Rafael Belvedere is a down-and-out single father taking care of his young daughter while attempting to keep the family restaurant he inherited from his parents open. It’s a funny, yet moving story about love, family, dreams and growing old.

Not only is “*El hijo de la novia*” a fun, yet moving watch, but it’s also a great way to jump into the Argentinian dialect and add a bit of South American spice to your Spanish repertoire.

You can’t go wrong with any of these Spanish films.

[5]

How to Learn Spanish with Facebook

By: Maureen Stimola



665 million are engaged in a daily flurry of friending, liking, tagging, updating statuses and uploading photos.

The billions of likes registered by Facebook every day don't lie.

The people love Facebook and have welcomed it into their homes, computers and smartphones.

Are you a devoted follower or a casual clicker?

Do you exhaust your home feed and take to stalking complete strangers?

Regardless of your level of fandom, you've unknowingly been sitting on a stick of dynamite that can blast you faster and further ahead in your Spanish learning progress.

Hold up.

Dynamite captures the raw energy of Facebook as a learning tool, but in hindsight that sounds a bit self-destructive.

Rather, imagine Facebook as the internet equivalent of a visiting a laid back lounge-café where you always bump into old friends, overhear bits and pieces of conversations and meet new people.

With people and conversations all around you, this strangely friendly café could be the perfect environment to become conversational in a foreign language.

Now, on top of podcasts, movies, news and popular videos, you've got a new trick up your sleeve.

Why Learn Spanish with Facebook?

- **Minimize your study time stress.** Learning Spanish through interacting with friends and looking at photos is a lot less mentally taxing than pounding the books.
- **Make Facebook time double as Spanish learning time.** Guilty of constantly responding to those chat message pings and red notification flags? Redeem yourself by making it a valuable learning experience.
- **Acquire the vocabulary specific to your interests and hobbies.** Whatever your interests are, a Spanish speaker has likely made a Facebook fan page or group to discuss and celebrate.
- **Keep it fresh.** The internet is constantly growing and changing. Information is zipping around the globe at light speed. Every day you will have new, fresh content set before you to keep learning interesting and relevant.
- **Facebook's layout is super easy to navigate.** You can set everything to Spanish and still know what's going on. Be real, you probably could get yourself to your wall blindfolded.

- **Absorb Spanish into your mind naturally.** Passively learn as you scroll down your home page and casually encounter Spanish words used in context.
- **Help out a friend in need.** Your Facebook friends will see your likes, group memberships and activities. Maybe you'll help somebody find a fantastic language learning resource!
- **Facebook is worldwide.** This makes it easier to interact with people in different countries and learn various accents and idioms.

How to Learn Spanish with Facebook

Unleash the Spanish-pocalypse.

Go to your preferences and change your interface language to Spanish. Soon you'll be picking up on all kinds of useful Spanish vocabulary! Here are the must-know words and phrases:

Inicio = Home

Comentar = To comment

Compartir = To share

Etiquetar foto = To tag a photo

Me gusta = I like

¿Qué estás pensando? = What's on your mind?

And just in case you need to bail out and switch back to English:

Configuración = Settings

Get connected with the best companies and educational organizations offering Spanish learning tools.

It may sound creepy that Facebook is totally commercial. On the upside, this means that companies are exposing themselves to the public more than ever. Marketers are trying to reach out to *you*, the customer, using

their Facebook pages. Like pages for companies like Berlitz, Rosetta Stone and Fluenz to get notifications about upcoming language classes, events and discounts and promotions for learning tools. While you're visiting their page, you go a step further and scroll through their wall posts to see what people are buzzing about. Are there tons of outraged and dissatisfied customers? Or is everyone thanking the company for their help?

There's an app for that.

Facebook browsing can be enhanced by apps like New Culture Alley and PlaySay, out there striving to build Spanish learning on top of Facebook. Rather than just reading and translating to yourself, these apps challenge you, quiz you, and keep track of imaginary points to give you that hallmark of technology-age generations: instant gratification. Check out to start playing!

"Like" the right pages.

There aren't just companies out there. Left and right, individuals are uniting to create language learning communities out of sheer passion. Beyond the pages for Spanish students, there are pages founded by native Spanish speakers endorsing political candidates, enjoying Taylor Swift's new hits, cheering football teams to glory, and making fun of hipsters. Find an interesting Spanish page and click "like!"

Getting the right content on your home page is easy when you know where to look. Here are some great pages for learning Spanish with the ability to teach you, intrigue you, and brighten your day:

Transparent Spanish

The mission statement of this powerhouse language software company is to integrate learning into real life situations. Their programs consistently keep speed with rapidly evolving technology, pumping Spanish into people's lives with online courses, social media, forums, smartphone apps, blogs and more. What makes this unique is connectivity. It all flows

together – you’ll never learn something on your online class and find yourself back at lesson #1 in another application.

That same connectivity extends to Transparent Spanish’s Facebook page. People from all over the world are here swapping language learning battle stories, exchanging learning resources, griping and bellyaching about verb tenses, and laughing about how their accents used to sound. From casual blog posts about fumbling through beginning Spanish to articles reviewing polished learning tools, a great deal of helpful content gets posted here. Transparent Spanish itself takes care of its community of followers by posting daily vocabulary words, grammar lessons, and insightful articles. This place is all about the experience of learning Spanish.

Learn Spanish (A Word a Day)

Silently infiltrate your brain by sneaking it one Spanish vocabulary word per day. The method is as simple as it sounds –a new word gets posted daily and slips into your home news feed. You’ll forget you ever liked the page and then, nestled between your friend’s sister’s birthday pictures and your Aunt Anne’s end-of-the-world conspiracy theories, you’ll spot that day’s Spanish word with the translation, part of speech, and example of usage.

1001 Reasons to Learn Spanish

Despite its enticing nominal promise, the 1001 reasons are nowhere to be found. This page doesn’t always make sense, but it knows what makes people smile. It has proven itself to be an amusing grab-bag of humor, music, random trivia and Spanish lessons.

Today my newsfeed was graced by:

- 1) A cartoon eggplant dancing the Macarena – eggplant in Spanish is *berenjena*, which sounds just enough like Macarena to fit the tune.
- 2) Spanish Charlie Brown (Carlos Marrón?) chatting up his elementary school crush.

3) An explanation of the various uses of the word *friolero*.

If you're looking for random bits of Spanish silliness on your feed, this should be your first stop.

Spanish Quotes

Sometimes inspiring, sometimes 50 Shades of Grey, the Spanish-Quotes Facebook page draws its content from a choice assortment of celebrities and celebrated works. In one day you might expect to see Spanish language translations of quotes from Margaret Thatcher, the Big Bang Theory, Frank Zappa and Eminem. This page updates in infrequent spasms, and after a week of absence it will suddenly blast you with 6 posts in a day. However, they've been going for a while so feel free to visit the page and scroll through past entries when boredom strikes.

Me encanta el español

Are you a sentimental person? Step on board the nostalgia train! Colorful, details pictures are overlaid with Spanish vocabulary words, blithely cheerful cartoon characters have Spanish conversations in speech bubbles, and verb tenses are set in structured charts. If you ever took language classes in elementary school, the posts on this page will feel eerily familiar. Like, "did I see this page in my 7th grade Spanish activity book?" kind of familiar. It's actually really adorable, and kids are taught this way for good reason – it works (especially for those visual learners among us)!

[6]

5 Fun and Efficient Ways to Learn Spanish in Your Car

By: Jenny Marshall



Our lives can be busy, busy, busy.

Having limited time forces you to shift your priorities, and the inevitable happens.

Language learning takes the backseat.

Now it's time to shift your Spanish language learning into high gear.

If you've already invested precious time and energy in teaching yourself Spanish, studying Spanish grammar and practicing your conversational skills, don't let all that go to waste.

Language isn't like riding a bike. If you don't use it, you lose it.

That's why it's important to take advantage of every minute here and there to refresh your language skills and get creative on how to keep the practice going, even during the busiest times in your life.

You've already learned about other ways to practice Spanish regularly, so you've got your Twitter, Facebook and Reddit profiles optimized for language learning. Now it's time to bring another daily dose of learning to your life – in the car!

Learn Spanish On-the-go: 5 Tips for Studying Spanish in the Car

So, why should you focus on studying in your car?

Most of us spend a lot of time (probably far too much time!) in the car. Nothing's more annoying than twiddling your thumbs in bumper-to-bumper traffic or getting caught at all those red lights with nothing interesting to occupy your brain.

Why not turn that frustrating down time into your advantage by learning Spanish in the car? Fill in those boring minutes where you just stare at traffic lights and listen to endless radio commercials.

Here are five great tips to try out on your next road trip or quick drive to the supermarket:

1. Tune in to Spanish radio stations

Love Spanish language music? Then you're off to a great start! All across the country, there are Spanish language radio stations. Of course, the exact channels change depending on your region, but they're out there. There are music channels and Spanish talk radio—choose the one that suits your interests and your Spanish level best.

Spanish music stations are like any other music stations, just featuring

artists that sing in a different language. Now there's a shocker! Some slower songs will be perfect for catching the actual words and vocabulary. Faster-paced songs, though harder to understand, may keep you from falling asleep at the wheel.

If you hear a song while driving that you like and is new to you, try remembering a few lines or catching the name of the artist. Later, when you're at home, you can look up the lyrics to the song (maybe with a dictionary in hand), to get a better grasp on the meaning of the song. With this method, you'll work on both your comprehension and reading skills.

The important thing to remember when listening to Spanish music stations is that every little bit of Spanish helps. This means the commercials, too. Although ads for toothpaste or monthly car payments can tempt you to change the channel, resist the urge and remember: you're there for the language exposure. View pesky commercial commentary as a way to focus more thoroughly on sentence structure and pronunciation, two aspects of language that may become the most skewed in songs.

Spanish talk radio is another good choice for learning Spanish in the car. Talk radio is a bit more of a challenge than music stations, because you'll have to keep up with the majority of what is being said in order to stay interested. Radio hosts are known for talking incredibly fast with really strong vocal personalities—after all, they need to keep the attention of their audience without the luxury of facial expressions or hand gestures. Because of this, talk radio is best for those with a bit more advanced level of Spanish. It's great for testing out comprehension skills at a fast clip. Also, many times the commentators will pepper their speech with jokes and idioms, so it's a great way to learn authentic speech (the opposite of those dull textbook dialogues).

2. Bring your favorite Spanish music with you

Here's an easy one! Switch out your English music with Spanish music while driving. Chances are, you already listen to your favorite music in the

car, whether you have a CD collection or a virtual library stored in your smartphone or MP3 player.

If you've never listened to any Spanish artists before, a quick search for already-created iTunes, Spotify, or Soundcloud playlists should yield some good results. Pick your favorites and take them along with you for the ride.

Some of today's most popular Spanish language artists that you might want to check out include: Enrique Iglesias, Romeo Santos, Shakira, Juan Luis Guerra, Alejandro Sanz, Gloria Estefan, David Bisbal, Melendi and Juanes. They've all got their own genres, styles and sounds, so this short list provides a great introduction to essential Spanish tunes.

3. Make it story time with audiobooks and podcasts

This one can be hard if you're in the driver's seat and need to pay attention to what you're doing. If you're the passenger, you can play a Spanish audiobook and really get lost in the narrated stories or lessons (as long as you're not prone to getting car sick). As the driver, you don't have that luxury.

Audiobooks in Spanish should be available at your local library, or you can find them for download or purchase through Amazon. If your Spanish skills are a bit shaky and you therefore prefer to be familiar with the book's plot before diving in headfirst, try searching for one of your favorite English books that has been translated into Spanish.

Keep in mind that audiobooks and regular books will serve different purposes in your Spanish learning process. Regular books give you the chance to slow down and analyze the written word. You go at your own pace. Audiobooks, on the other hand, work well to practice and fine-tune your comprehension skills. An audiobook in Spanish may require fixed attention, since it's easy to lose hold of the plot if you zone out for even a few moments. Remember, don't focus so hard that you neglect your driving duties!

Similar to audiobooks, downloadable talk shows or podcasts are good to listen to in the car. A great thing about this option is that podcasts can be found on any subject, meaning you're almost sure to find one that interests you. Take a look at these highly-recommended Spanish language podcasts for listening practice to get you started on the right foot.

Through FluentU's upcoming iPhone app, you can also listen to audio dialogues on-the-go in your car. Learning Spanish has never been easier!

4. Play word games

Any kind of word game will work, even one you invent yourself. Ever play a game in the car just to pass the time? That's the idea here, but you'll be substituting the usual English words with your Spanish vocabulary. One simple game is a twist on the Alphabet Game, in which you think of a Spanish word that begins with each letter of the alphabet. Better still, tailor those words to the vocabulary you're currently learning. As thrilling as *Cranium* or *Taboo*? Maybe not, but it's foolproof for the car!

You can also play a version of the license plate game. Try making Spanish phrases using words that start with each letter of the license plate in front of you. Just don't focus so hard on the plates that you forget to watch the road.

All of these tips work if you're alone in the car. If you have a passenger along with you, all the better! You can take your Spanish studies a step further by enlisting their help.

5. Have someone quiz your Spanish in the car

With a little planning ahead of time, you can arrange to bring along your class notes and have your passenger quiz you. This can be done with vocabulary lists, flashcards or even sentences out of the textbook. The passenger doesn't need to know Spanish in order to be of help to you.

Of course, getting quizzed doesn't sound incredibly appealing on a road

trip. But if you're trying to kill two birds with one stone — simultaneously driving somewhere and learning Spanish — then quizzes are the fastest way to check up on what you know and what you need to work on. Later, once you're out of the car, you can really hone in on what you need to improve. Plus, your passenger may appreciate the distraction!

Lastly, if all else fails, pick up a hitchhiker and hope they're a native Spanish speaker.

Kidding on that last one. Sort of.

[7]

10 Tips for a Fun and Friendly Online Spanish Language Exchange

By: Maureen Stimola



You wanted to learn Spanish to communicate with people, right?
Yet 95% of the time you're alone, staring at a textbook or laptop screen.
Getting tired of this self-imposed isolation?
Then it's time to find yourself a conversation partner!

The Benefits of Online Spanish Language Exchange

The internet is a beautiful place because it's based on pure, unadulterated freedom. It has brought our entire world closer than ever before. You may feel far from Spain or Peru while sitting on the computer at home, but that distance is virtually insignificant nowadays. Think about it: people from all over the Spanish-speaking world are online right this very minute.

Talking to non-native Spanish speakers isn't going to help you progress. It's easier to understand Spanish when it's spoken slowly or in a strong English accent. Meanwhile, hearing a native speaker will teach you authentic pronunciation, accurate grammar, and good vocabulary. By connecting regularly with a native Spanish speaker, your Spanish skills will improve dramatically.

By engaging with a conversation exchange partner, you also avoid the major pitfalls of complete language immersion. Many new language learners become discouraged by the naturally rapid pace and intense regional variation of Spanish. When doing language exchange, your conversation partner will know your language level and can be more conscientious of their speed and word choice (if necessary).

You may want to brush up on your Spanish listening skills before engaging with a Spanish conversation partner. Get a head start by watching the real-world Spanish language videos provided by FluentU. While watching FluentU's videos, you will get a fantastic sense of what it's like to hear *real* Spanish outside a sheltered classroom environment or scripted podcast.

So, now that you're warmed up, how can you go about meeting that special, Spanish-speaking someone? Believe it or not, there are tons of fantastic conversation partners out there waiting to connect with someone *just like you*. Since you're reading this article, chances are that you've got some sick English skills. Your knowledge of the English language is a very valuable commodity in the modern world.

The concept of language exchange is wonderfully simple: you help them with English, they help you with Spanish. You'll finally get a chance to try out those greetings and idioms you already learned. It's free, it's fun, it's highly effective, and everybody wins!

However, there are some important things to know about the whole process. Together, we're going to explore the best ways to get started and to make sure you get the *most* out of your language exchange experience.

10 Tips for a Fun and Friendly Online Spanish Language Exchange

1. Connect with real-life friends.

The internet is cool and all, but sometimes it's helpful to have friends in the outside world.

Think about who you know. Ask friends and family members if they know anyone who might be interested in language exchange. Do you have a friend who is a native speaker? Distant Spanish-speaking relatives living abroad? A cultural exchange family from that time you visited Chile in high school? Set up a bimonthly Skype date and kill two birds with one stone: maintain your relationships *and* practice Spanish.

You can also explore your network and reach outside your first degree connections. Make social media profiles do the heavy lifting for you by updating your Facebook status or sending a Tweet. Let people know that you are learning Spanish and are looking for a conversation partner! It can be much nicer to speak to someone with whom you have a personal connection.

2. Stalk your Facebook friends to find other Spanish learners.

If you're a dedicated Facebooker like I am, and everyone you've ever met since middle school (and their mother) is currently your friend, well, today is your day to shine. Sign up for Duolingo.

This free language learning website uses fun games to integrate language learning into your daily routine. The best feature is that it syncs up with your Facebook network. This means that you can see who else in your network is on Duolingo and learning Spanish. While conversing with a non-native speaker is admittedly not ideal, it can be helpful for beginning language learners by removing the anxiety. Your conversation partner will bungle things up just as much as you do, so everyone can remain at ease.

3. Talk to strangers.

I know your mom told you not to do this, but that was way back in kindergarten. You're a grown-up now, and there's a whole world-wide web out there full of potential conversation partners. More importantly, language exchange websites are designed with your safety in mind. Here are some language exchange websites that come highly recommended:

Coeffee

A real up-and-comer, this rapidly growing language exchange website has what is arguably the friendliest, most fun-loving network of language learners. Aside from conversational language exchange, this site lets you play educational games in teams with other language learners. How cool is that?

LingoGlobe

Sign up for the adorable cartoon bird on the homepage, stay for the high quality language learning experience. This site offers you learning materials such as vocabulary lists and talking topics, as well as a fantastic network of eager exchange partners.

My Language Exchange

This site goes above and beyond the traditional language exchange via video or audio chat. They also have games, forums, chat rooms for practice via text and a "pen pal" email exchange program. You can even sit in on a live group language exchange to get a feel for the dynamic. You can do it

all for free! However, without paying for monthly membership you'll have to wait for other people to reach out and invite you to chat.

4. Keep an eye on the time.

The golden rule of language exchange is that the experience should be mutually beneficial for you and your partner. Set up a defined amount of time for conversation. Dedicate exactly half of that time to one language, and the other half to the other language. It is bad manners to go over the allotted time for one language. If you do so, be sure to compensate fairly by adding a few extra minutes onto the time destined for the other language.

5. Get into the zone.

By now you're probably more used to reading, writing, and taking notes than conversing with another human for language learning. Remember that language exchange time is best used to improve speaking and comprehension skills. Jotting down notes about newly learned vocabulary is alright in moderation, but don't let note-taking distract you from the conversation at hand.

Another key to mastering Spanish speaking is to remember: the less you think, the better you'll speak. You may also be tempted to keep a Spanish cheat sheet near the computer screen. When you're just starting it can be nerve-racking to imagine flying solo. However, conversation reinforces knowledge by drawing on the information already stored in your brain. I promise, there *is* information logged away in there. When you stop obsessing over *how* to say the right thing, it will come to you easier. Consider yourself a baby bird that needs a nudge out of the nest to realize that its wings work just fine.

6. Pay attention.

It is a very common mistake to ignore what you're partner is saying so you

can focus on devising your next brilliant sentence. Suddenly you'll realize that, while you were brainstorming, they asked you a question and you haven't the foggiest idea how to answer. Remember that to become fluent conversationally it is critical for you to develop both speaking *and* listening skills.

7. Grow a thick skin.

Typically, conversation partners are aware of your language level and are very supportive because they, like you, are stumbling through a new language. Even so, “my language partner laughed out me, I must sound like a fool” is one of the many self-deprecating thoughts that plagues the minds of new Spanish speakers during conversation time. Rid your mind of this idea. Right now.

Maybe you said everything perfectly but your partner laughed because your accent sounded cute, you said something ironic, or you simply had great comedic timing.

On the other hand, maybe you *did* say something funny. Hey, you've got to accept that this happens. Learn to laugh at yourself and move on. Making silly mistakes is all part of the fun. If you want to know why they're laughing, ask them politely if you said something ridiculous. Do this without becoming defensive – that's way more likely to turn a conversation awkward than a few Spanish slip ups.

8. Take your time.

Spanish can be spoken quite rapidly. Even if you know what you want to say in Spanish, you probably find yourself tongue-tied when trying to say it at a native Spanish-speaker's natural pace. It's frustrating when your tongue can't keep speed with your brain. If you end up stammering and stuttering through your sentences, this is a major sign that you're getting ahead of yourself. Constantly speaking like this will wear you down, frustrate you, and make you feel incapable of speaking fluent Spanish. There's one solution: slow down. Speak your sentences slowly, clearly, and

enunciate every syllable with care. When you feel comfortable at a certain speed, push your limits and speed things up incrementally.

9. Liven things up!

Try to steer the conversation away from mindless small chat. Talk about things that get you excited. Look up some vocabulary about your favorite topics like movies, news, or soccer. Tell them about your deep dark secrets or most embarrassing moments. Of course, you may find yourself more limited if you are just beginning your Spanish language learning. That's okay. Actually, that's even better! From the get-go you will be motivated to develop a juicy vocabulary so you can delve into more interesting topics than the weather and what you ate for lunch.

10. Don't forget that you give what you get.

Ultimately, it is up to you to make language exchange a valuable experience. If you enter conversations with a negative attitude or an unwillingness to speak, you are going to be disappointed with the outcome. By maintaining a positive attitude and booting up the webcam with a smile on your face, you are guaranteed to have a better conversation. This is a two-way street, friend! Be attentive, be friendly, and put forward a genuine interest in what your partner has to say. You never know when you may make a lifelong friend!

[8]

How to Learn Spanish with Pinterest

By: Maureen Stimola



Do you want to immerse yourself in Spanish to learn at a faster pace?

Are you a visual learner?

Then in addition to Reddit, memes and Twitter, an absolutely fantastic tool for enhancing your Spanish skills is **Pinterest**.

If you've previously skipped out on Pinterest just because you're not into girly stuff, take note: Pinterest isn't just for the ladies!

True enough, it's hallowed ground for hair twirlers, fashionistas, wedding daydreamers and would-be cupcake artists. But it ain't all sugar and spice.

If used properly, Pinterest can be an excellent interactive catalogue of your favorite Spanish learning resources – and it is perfect for visual learners.

Let's start with a quick rundown of exactly how Pinterest works and why it makes for a unique Spanish learning tool.

Pinterest 101

- **Pinterest is scrapbooking for digital age babies.** Rather than decorating cardboard pages with glitter specks and gel pen scribbles, you can gather images and articles to keep track of your hobbies and personal passions.
- **It's basically the internet's equivalent of collecting decorative spoons or mugs.** Once you've pinned enough, your boards will proudly display your collected items to friends (or publically if you choose).
- **It's focused on engaging users *visually*.** Text is minimal, the name of the game is aesthetics here. You create a themed collage with every one of your personal pinboards.
- **Pinterest is with you as you browse the internet.** Most websites have a "Pin it" button alongside other buttons to share content on social media like Facebook and Twitter. By clicking "Pin it" you will save the content to your profile back on the main Pinterest site – without actually having to go there.
- **You can install a Pinterest extension on your browser.** This means you don't have to rely on the hosting website to have a Pinterest button. With this add-on you can pin anything on the net. Anytime, anywhere.
- **Though Pinterest is technically social media, there is less of a sense of community than sites like Facebook and Twitter.** The extent of socializing done amongst users is following each other, *re-pinning* items of interest posted by other users, and posting together on public boards. For many people, there is relatively little direct user-to-user interaction.

How to Begin Exploring Pinterest

The only real downside to the site is that pinboards are predominantly curated by English speakers from the United States and Canada. (Yes, curated is the correct Pinterest slang, used to make you feel like a hip, turtleneck-wearing art museum director). There's no Spanish-version Pinterest called *Pinteresante* as I originally hoped – seems like a missed opportunity. Are you listening, Pinterest marketing team? Jot that note down for your next meeting.

Despite that, there is a noteworthy albeit small Spanish-speaking community out there on Pinterest. To find them, search for your favorite buzzwords in Spanish. When you go to search for something, you'll notice that you can look through *pins*, *boards*, and *pinners* – in laymen's terms that means you can search through individual pieces that have been pinned, collections of *pins*, and Pinterest users. Here are some popular keywords to help guide your first Spanish language Pinterest searches:

Cakes – *Tortas*

Clothing trends – *Ropa de moda*

Makeup – *Maquillaje*

Photography – *Fotografía*

Recipes – *Recetas*

Technology – *Tecnología*

Of course you're welcome to search based on your own personal interests. That's the whole point! Searching for pins, boards, and pinners via keyword is extraordinarily helpful as you begin identifying things that you want to collect or follow.

Organizing Your Pins into Boards

All these images are swirling around in my brain. There's so much to look at – where to start?

If you're new to Pinterest you might be overwhelmed by the visual overload. Thankfully, you can create separate boards on your account to organize your pins. When you decide to “pin it,” you'll get a drop down menu of your existing boards. I strongly recommend you at least create a “Spanish learning” board to catalogue all your new material. If you want to get fancy, set up some more refined boards like “Spanish vocabulary,” “Spanish grammar,” and so on. Search for boards with these phrases, take a look at what other people have set up to get inspired, and follow other people's Spanish boards!

If you have friends who are also learning Spanish, it's a lot of fun to collaborate on some of these boards. Then ya'll can be pinning and sharing round the clock!

Recommended Spanish Boards and Pinners

Once you've established a board to contain your learning tools, it's time to hit the boards. You'll notice that the majority of boards are made by people, not companies or professional bloggers. This makes for a very personal, humanized feel. I've included how to track down these boards in the following format: **Pinterest Username / Board Name**

Spanish community boards

Pinterest hasn't really developed a strong Spanish-speaking community thus far. Due to the strong visual experience of using Pinterest, it's naturally able to float right over language barriers and Spanish-speaking users typically have no problem curating and enjoying English language content. There are a few noteworthy Spanish-speaking users that curate their boards in their native language. Maybe if you follow them now,

you'll get to see them skyrocket to fame as Pinterest works towards a more international experience!

Antonio Gamez

This social media Community Manager from Spain curates boards about his home country and his professional interests. He posts a lot of really cool infographics, data analyses, and articles revolving around online marketing, blogging, and social media dynamics.

Gabriel Serrano

Gabriel is a Venezuelan engineer who curates four very thematically-faithful boards: inspirational quotes, reasons for being Venezuelan, photography and wonders of engineering.

Isabel Mancias

Based in Portland, Oregon, Isabel is all about reaching for the stars. She gears her boards towards motivation, inspiration and recognizing personal success. One of her boards, ManciasTV, leads to a collection of over 70 videos she has filmed of herself talking on these subjects – in Spanish. Listening to these could be a great way to practice your listening skills if you're looking for a daily pep talk!

Riolan Virtual Business Solutions

This polished Mexican pinner is all about class and professionalism. She curates a large number of boards focused on how to create a personal brand, market it and spread your influence online. Just like their curator, her boards are absolutely dedicated to success.

Spanish language learning boards

Adrienne @ Speak Español

Adrienne is a contributor to the language learning site www.comespeakespanol.com. Her Pinterest boards are all aligned with her company's mission to help professionals advance in their careers by achieving language goals. The boards touch the roots of Pinterest, covering DIY projects, home organization, holiday crafts, exercise

routines and home décor – but it’s all posted with Spanish titles and descriptions.

Cheryl Thomas / Learning Spanish

This lady has set up a fantastic assortment of grammar charts, videos, phrase guides, Spanish articles and practice exercises. Based on the number of videos I’ve seen here (things along the lines of native-level conversations and Disney’s Frozen songs in Spanish) she’s mostly focused on listening skills.

Frances Joy Santiago / La profe – humor

Frances is a Spanish teacher based in the nation’s capital. While 99% of her boards are DIY project-oriented, she has also created a really cute collection of cartoons, jokes and helpful instruction materials for her Spanish class. Just scrolling through this board is sugary-sweet pleasant – it’s total eye candy! The content she pins will often lead you to cool resources like “Mi Vida Loca,” a BBC interactive online mini-series where you solve mysteries in Spanish.

Spanish fun

BellezaPura / Recetas

By searching for *recetas* pins and boards, as mentioned earlier, you are bound to run into tons of recipe-lovin’ pinners. My personal favorite is the clean, fresh and stylish collection managed by BellezaPura. It’s a good jumping off point for all the other classic “girly” Pinterest topics as well – everything ranging from celebrity gossip to wedding planning and fashion.

Glam en Español

If you find yourself gravitating towards using Pinterest semi-addictively and browsing the classic topics (fashion, hairstyles, cute food, and so on) take a look at Glam en Español. This Spanish-language collection of boards is chock full of how-to’s for hair and makeup, pictures of cute coffee cups, delicate food and posh fashion accessories.

Reyna Lou / Es más bonito en español

Miss Reyna Lou has dedicated this Pinterest board to noting how some things just sound better in Spanish. So, what sounds better and why? For this girl, it seems that phrases about life and love roll off the tongue more easily in Spanish – which is really quite a romantic, poetic language. Check out her page and see if you agree that the sing-song rhythm and trilling rr's of Spanish really do make for a more beautiful language!

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The Do's and Don'ts of Spanish Language Immersion Abroad

By: Maureen Stimola



By spending time in a Spanish-speaking country, you can accelerate your Spanish language learning full-throttle.

Even so, many travelers come home wondering: “why didn’t my Spanish improve *at all* while abroad?”

It’s a surprisingly common problem.

Don’t want to waste your golden opportunity to learn Spanish abroad?

By employing a few key strategies and avoiding major pitfalls, you are guaranteed to improve your Spanish while traveling.

What is Spanish Language Immersion?

You've saved money, bought tickets, and have been working hard to learn all the fundamentals of the Spanish language. By now you've probably mastered some common phrases and basic vocabulary. Everyone is telling you how lucky you are to go abroad – full immersion is the only way to achieve true fluency.

We're so used to hearing the word “immersion,” that we sometimes glaze over it without realizing its true meaning. You have already learned to immerse yourself in Spanish from home. This will be similar, but different. The goal is the same: flood your brain with Spanish at every possible opportunity. At home, you listen to Spanish podcasts and the news, watch Spanish movies, but ultimately the immersion process becomes interrupted by your daily activities. When you go to the store, the cashier addresses you in English. At school or work, everything is in English. At the bank, English. You get it.

While abroad, Spanish will permeate every second of your day, if you let it. Too many travelers get caught up with English language materials and English-speaking travel buddies, never allowing themselves to become fully immersed in their new environment and language.

Through the following do's and don'ts, we'll explore the ways you can boost your Spanish language learning and really extract the most value from your time abroad. We'll also examine major mistakes made by those travelers who return home without learning a lick of Spanish.

The Do's and Don'ts of Spanish Language Immersion Abroad

Below are all the key steps to achieve full Spanish language immersion while abroad. First, let's start with all the do's. These do's highlight the best ways to move forward with Spanish language learning while on your trip:

Do be prepared.

The nerdy book-laden traveler is virtually a thing of the past. You no longer have to load up suitcases with books – just download them to an e-reader or tablet. Don't carry hard-cover dictionaries and textbooks, download helpful Spanish learning apps and podcasts instead. While you should try to live in the moment and absorb Spanish naturally from your surroundings, you will learn significantly faster by bringing learning materials with you. Start and end your days with self-taught Spanish lessons, and reinforce these lessons as you walk the streets and see the sights.

Spanish speakers in the real world don't come with English subtitles to help us understand (although that would be super convenient). Fortunately, we Spanish language learners can always turn to FluentU's real-world Spanish videos to help us practice our listening skills. The FluentU video collection includes commercials, informative educational videos, movie trailers, news clips, street interviews, sing-along children's songs, goofy Youtube sketches, and much more. This variety of colorful videos is transformed into a learning experience, as FluentU provides thorough, interactive subtitles and allows you to keep track of learned vocabulary – it will even match your current language lessons to relevant videos so you can see how your new words, phrases and grammatical patterns are used in real life situations. Before you hit the streets of a new country, get a preview by checking out all that FluentU has to offer.

Do learn the basics first.

You will have an infinitely easier time learning Spanish abroad if you've conquered the initial linguistic hurdles. Fortunately, Spanish is a relatively simple language for native English-speakers – there is no new alphabet to learn, no intense differences in grammar or sentence structure. First, learn about the best ways to teach yourself Spanish from home. Spend a few weeks familiarizing yourself with Spanish pronunciation, and introductory vocabulary. Learn greetings and key travel phrases that will

help you get by. Drill yourself until you no longer make common mistakes with your basic Spanish. You'll want to be able to understand, to some degree, what people are saying. You don't want to spend precious travel time locked away in a hotel room with basic materials. While abroad, it's time to get out there and learn through experience!

Do read the local newspaper.

You might luck out and find fresh copies of the newspaper at your hotel or hostel. If not, pick one up every morning on the way to breakfast. To improve your Spanish reading skills, circle vocabulary words that you haven't seen before, even if you understand them through context. Keep a notebook and make lists of new vocabulary. Newspapers aren't just to improve Spanish comprehension, they will also keep you informed about the politics, culture and current events of the city. The newspaper is a great way to learn about upcoming festivals, concerts, parades, plays and more that will be going on in the area. Here's a list of great Spanish news publications that you won't want to miss.

Do pay close attention to regional accents.

Spanish is notoriously diverse. You may be prepared to relearn Spanish in every country you visit – but did you know that there are enormous variations in Spanish between regions, and even between towns and cities? Spanish mixes and blends with indigenous languages in many parts of the world. The more isolated a community, the more unique its way of speaking. In every new location you visit, stay alert and pick out strange words you haven't heard before. Categorize new words and pronunciations by region in a notebook.

Do hang out around kids.

Sure, some of us fear children for their brutal honesty – always innocently saying things like, “you're so sweaty” or “how'd you get so chubby?” But children will also be the first to say “hi,” the first to ask you about

yourself and the first to befriend you. They may not understand *why* you don't speak their language, but they will always give you a chance. If you find yourself wandering a rural community and have nobody to talk to, start by making conversation with a kid. Ask them about school, friends, homework, pets, family or games. One sad but true note of warning: be cautious, some children in urban areas of Latin America are manipulated by adults to scam foreigners.

Do get involved.

Look into volunteer activities that you could get involved with while abroad. You could try hooking up with NGOs and other community organizations through Workaway, where part-time work can be exchanged for room and board almost anywhere in the world. Getting involved helps you to find commonality with locals and fellow travelers, allowing you to make friends and contacts more easily.

While wandering a new city, look at flyers and see what events are happening. Attend concerts, cultural events, parades, museum openings and anything else that may contribute to your understanding of local culture and language. The more you get yourself out there, engaged, the more likely you are to interact with people and improve your Spanish conversational skills.

Now that you know what you should *do*, let's take a look at the major *don'ts* for traveling language learners:

Don't get overwhelmed.

Understand that, as much as you have prepared yourself, you will need to get adjusted once you arrive at your destination. I'm not talking about unpacking your suitcases – I'm talking about getting used to Spanish in its natural habitat. You can study, cram vocabulary and listen to audio recordings day in and day out, but if this is your first trip to a Spanish-speaking country, chances are you will be quite surprised by just how little you know.

Even advanced students are struck by this phenomenon. “I’m in advanced Spanish but it feels like I don’t know *any* Spanish!” This first time you are truly surrounded by Spanish, you might feel overwhelmed. Spanish is fast. The words blur together. Some syllables are totally disregarded. Slang words run rampant. If you’re in a coastal area or in the Caribbean – good luck, kid.

The key is to stay relaxed and *not* beat yourself up over some perceived inability. Stay confident. Never stop talking. Keep practicing at every possible opportunity, and within the first few days you will start to see noticeable improvements. After weeks or months, you could have the local dialect down pat!

Don’t spend all your time in touristy areas.

Urban havens for foreigners, often dubbed “*Gringolandia*” (Gringoland) or something similar, are not places where you want to be. It can be fun to meet up with fellow travelers, hear about their experiences and find travel buddies. It can also be a huge relief when shopkeepers can help you make purchases and navigate the streets in English. However, far too many travelers never leave *Gringolandia* and, as a result, their Spanish never improves much. Not to mention, they waste tons of money on unnecessarily expensive food and commodities. Get outside the tourist destinations filled with souvenir-oriented window displays and overpriced sunscreen. Go to the places where people live. Go out at night where local people go out to mingle and dance. Find the restaurants that are packed with locals at lunchtime.

Don’t rely on English for entertainment.

At night, after a long day of learning and exploring, you may just want to kick back in front of the television at your hostel, hop on the internet to chat with friends, listen to some tunes or read a book. All that is well and good but, for the love of god, don’t do any of those things in English. If you are committed to taking advantage of your time abroad

and really mastering Spanish, then doing anything in English will set you back enormously. When you read an English book, what language are you thinking in? English, obviously.

Watching TV in English, reading English books and scrolling through English language social media pages reinforces the idea that English is your go-to “normal” language. It keeps you thinking in English. This ultimately strengthens the feeling that English is *inside* your comfort zone, and Spanish is far *outside* your comfort zone. The goal should be to coax your brain into feeling totally comfortable with Spanish. Go ahead and do all your favorite leisure activities, but make sure you do them all in Spanish. Leave that iPod full of English entertainment at home – or, at the very least, load it up with Spanish language goodies! Check out this discussion of how to enhance learning with great Spanish music.

Don't be afraid.

It's intimidating to have to operate in a new language. While your online conversation partners, classmates and Spanish-speaking friends back home were all really nice and understanding, there's a far greater chance that you'll encounter some not-so-nice people out there. A grumpy shopkeeper, mean tour guide or snobby waitress could laugh at you or comment on your Spanish – or maybe they simply won't have the patience to understand you if you speak rough Spanish. In this context, “it has happened to the best of us” is not just a saying. It's 100% true. All the best Spanish language learners have had negative reactions to their Spanish at some point, and they have soldiered on. Laugh at yourself, smile at those who wish to bring you down, keep talking and march forward with your language learning.

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