

**Urban's**  
**Spanish Language Course**  
**for Beginners and Travellers**

Urban Napflin

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Mexico: Cathedral in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas

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Peru: Machu Picchu waits for you at the end of the Inca Trail

## Introduction

Spanish is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and with this ebook you'll soon be capable to access that beautiful world of speaking, writing, singing & thinking!

Well, you still have to do the hard yards getting that grammar and vocabulary in check, of course...

But as this course is written for tablets and other mobile devices, I was trying to avoid excessive detail and a complicated vocabulary that isn't really necessary when travelling.

My goal was to get you to **a level that's decent enough to travel**, maybe even blend in, having fun communicating while keeping a great resource for a deeper foundation in your e-readers, always there if you feel like learning a little more.

I'm not a native speaker, not even a teacher, but I love languages and want to pass on my experience from 25 years of learning Spanish and travelling around, hopefully it will provide you with lots of fun while learning and many rewarding achievements on the way.

I tried to steer clear of grammatical terminology, but in spite of all good intentions I couldn't avoid those parts (they would have been enough to scare me off in the old times). Believe me, in the end you will find out that **grammar** is your friend and not your enemy - give it a chance, looking back you won't regret it!

Don't forget to make use of a **dictionary** as well (a little pocket dictionary will do) - you can find them wherever you travel, also ones written for Spanish speakers will do.

**For a successful start** you'll need to learn about pronunciation, listen to some Spanish, then learn a little grammar, a minimum vocabulary and a few simple sentences. After your first successful interactions go for more grammar, more words and when you get ready to read a book, go for the rest!



Spain: La Trapa on the idyllic west coast of Mallorca

## Why learn Spanish

Nearly **400 million people worldwide speak Spanish** as a first language and 60 million more as a second. It is the language most widely understood in the Western world and after English the second most important language for international communication.

Spanish is the primary language in a range of countries all over the globe:

Argentina  
Bolivia  
Chile  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Cuba  
Dominican Republic  
Ecuador  
El Salvador  
Equatorial Guinea  
Guatemala  
Honduras  
Mexico  
Nicaragua  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Puerto Rico  
Spain  
Uruguay  
Venezuela  
Western Sahara

**Spain** with its 47 million inhabitants has lost its leading position in the Spanish world, now most Spanish speakers live in Mexico (118 million people) and most other countries above are in Latin America as well.

Although Spanish is one single language, all of these countries have their own **dialects and vocabulary variations**, especially when spoken - but whatever you learn from this ebook will be understood by everyone.

Spanish will also help you get along well in other places, for example in the US over 44 million people are from Spanish speaking origins!

If you're not sure about making the effort to learn another language, consider this:

- You'll gather extremely positive experiences from **meeting people** whom otherwise you could not have talked to.
- Spain and Latin America were once the cultural epicentres of their continents and there are lots of very significant **places to discover**. You will find it easier to visit a lot of exciting countries, feeling less vulnerable, opening up a new world of travel with a new style of discovery.
- You'll get better access to **another world of culture**: music, film, literature, art, architecture, etc.!
- You'll be able to correctly **pronounce** the food you're eating!
- Regardless of age, learning a foreign language is a very satisfying **personal achievement**. You'll get back as much as you are ready to put in, even a little effort will get you some way and will not be in vain.

It's a very beautiful language and relatively easy to learn if you already understand English. Ideally, with the help of this short language course you will not only be able to understand the example sentences (over 700 of them), but by exchanging words, tenses, etc. you'll also be able to create your own sentences.

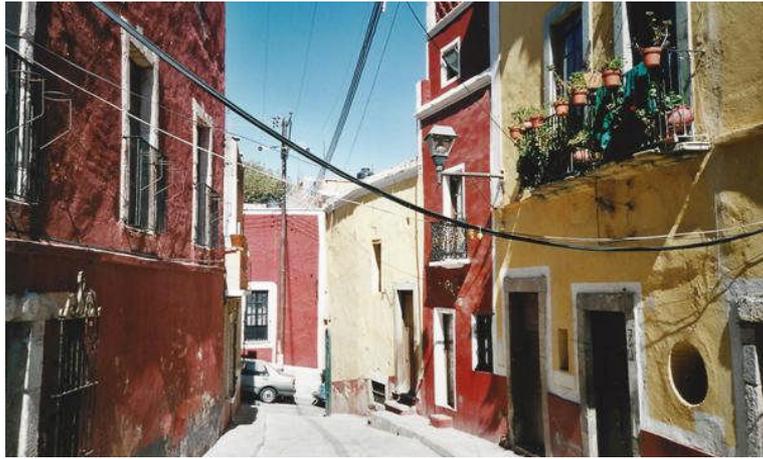
The course follows a certain order through the grammar and other sections, but feel free to **skip the seemingly boring sections** (whatever makes your eyes glaze over) and return later when you're ready - make sure you'll enjoy your path to becoming a fluent Spanish speaker, learning should ideally be interesting and fun.

The word lists contain a vocabulary of about **2,500 words** necessary for travelling and reading (native speakers would know about 10,000, so there's still some way to go...), focusing on a quick and easy learning process. At least 400 of those words are so similar to English that you practically already know them!

**After going through this ebook** there's a lot more you can do:

- Go to a Spanish **conversation class** or take lessons.
- Get your hands on **magazines and newspapers** while travelling.
- Sing along to good **music**, organise the lyrics to your favourite salsa, mariachi or rock band.
- Watch Spanish speaking **TV or films** (possibly with English subtitles), listen to internet radio or download an interesting podcast.
- Start with a **book** that's translated from English into Spanish, the vocabulary is often easier than in original versions (how about a bestseller you already know, like *Ángeles y Demonios*).

Check out the section 'More resources' with loads of suggestions at the end of this ebook!



Mexico: Typical alley in Guanajuato, a beautiful old mining town

## History and related languages

Spanish (*español*) is often also called **castellano** (Castilian), because the language evolved in the region of *Castilla* in northern Spain. Spain is located on the Iberian Peninsula (*Iberia* was the original Greek name), which the Phoenicians and later the Romans called *Hispania*.

The '**Vulgar Latin**' spoken in the Roman Empire is the basis of all the 'Romance languages': Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and others (English on the other hand has a Germanic origin).

In medieval times Spanish was only spoken in *Castilla*, it was then one of few places in Spain not impacted very much by the Muslim invasion. When the Castilians were able to reconquer Toledo in 1085, the **Christian reconquest** of the peninsula was gaining momentum. Their Castilian language was spreading successfully until independence was finally complete in 1492, when Queen Isabella I (from Castilla) and King Ferdinand II (from Aragon) together ruled the beginnings of modern Spain.

The same year that the last Muslim stronghold in Granada fell, the royal couple authorised the expedition of **Christopher Columbus** (*Cristóbal Colón*), leading to the colonisation of Latin America (the word 'colonisation' is actually much older and derived from Roman Latin). Spanish was evidently widely used since and there are also many creolic versions from mixing with native languages.

To prevent a drifting apart of all the Spanish accents and following the example of the French Académie Française, in 1713 the **Royal Spanish Academy** (*Real Academia Española*) was established, standardising the vocabulary and orthography of the language for longterm future use.

The Spanish of today incorporates many words of Arabic, English, French and Italian origin. Portuguese is the closest language (although a real mutual understanding is probably only possible when reading), followed by Catalán, Italian and French.



Spain: The Roman Aqueduct in Segovia

## What makes learning Spanish easy

There are some characteristics of Spanish which make learning easier, at least at a first glance:

English with its Germanic origin is not directly related but **many words are very similar**. Spanish is the closest language to Latin - the basis of much of our vocabulary since Roman dominance. For example, words that end in *-ción* can usually be transformed into English by replacing the ending with '-tion'. See the separate wordlists later in the ebook.

- **Pronunciation** is very regular. Unlike in English, spelling clearly determines pronunciation.
- The **plural** is simply formed by adding an *-s* to a vowel or an *-es* to a consonant:

Casa (house) - **casas**

Español (Spaniard) - **españoles**

- Spanish **sentences** are structured similarly to English:

**Yo necesito algo**  
*subject-verb-object*  
I need something

- **Questions** can easily be formed and intonation alone can turn a normal sentence into a question:

**Necesitas algo**  
You need something

**¿Necesitas algo?**  
Do you need something?

- **Personal pronouns** can usually be ignored as they are obvious from the verb conjugation or context:

**Necesito algo**  
I need something

- **Adverbs** are easily formed and simply end with *-mente*:

**Rápido** (adjective, meaning 'fast')  
**Rápidamente** (adverb)

- **Past tense** can easily (although not always correctly) be formed by using present perfect.

**Hablar**  
To talk

**He hablado**  
I have talked

- Also, **future tense** can simply (and also not always correctly) be formed by using a form for the near future, the equivalent of 'going to' in English:

**Comer**  
To eat

**Voy a comer**  
I'm going to eat

- **Numbers** follow a regular pattern from 16 onwards.

- Other **languages** partly become understandable as well (Portuguese, Italian, French, Catalán).

- **Spanish is accessible**: there are thousands of websites, books, newspapers, magazines, TV and radio channels, comics, etc. waiting for you! For example, listen to the news broadcasts ('*noticias*') of Spanish speaking TV and radio stations or search Youtube for 'Spanish pronunciation'.



Guatemala: Mayan temples in Tikal, a giant ancient city in the Petén jungle

## What makes learning Spanish difficult

- Spanish nouns have **two genders** and are either masculine or feminine.

**El** libro (the book)

**La** casa (the house)

- There are **formal and informal ways** of addressing someone.

- There are many **irregular grammar forms** (conjugation, tenses etc.) that need to be memorised. Irregularities often occur when verbs are used very often, in a way that will make it easier to remember because they keep popping up.

- **Some aspects of grammar** are completely unfamiliar, as for example the *subjuntivo* (subjunctive mood).

- **Some words** seem to translate easily but are in fact very different, see under 'Words you think you knew'.

- You'll notice that **regional slang** is used a lot and you won't find it in the textbooks. You'll find a short section about slang words under 'Vocabulary'.

- Spanish speakers in some regions have a **pronunciation or speed** that can make understanding nearly impossible for the untrained listener.

- **Accent marks** may look confusing in the beginning but are clearly used for pronunciation reasons only and will actually help you pronounce correctly.



Spain: Dalí museum in Figueras

## The general success criteria for learning languages

These four criteria are based on the book 'How language works' by David Crystal. As you can see, being talented is just one of the success factors:

### Talent

Not only intelligence and memory are important but also an ability for empathy, flexibility and independence. You should also be able to recognise phonetic differences.

### Motivation und attitude

Are you indeed going to use the language and how important is that goal to you? Do you have respect for the language and its culture?

### Technique

How systematically do you approach your learning, do you have a strategy or are you simply curious?

### Application

How often and intensely do you learn and do you apply the language in realistic situations?

### My tips for learning:

**Set yourself a goal!** As ambitious as possible but still being realistic, like 'I want to understand the news', 'I want to be able to practice a bit of small talk while travelling', or 'I want to be able to completely blend in when in a restaurant' etc.

**Take notes** whenever you understand something new or have an 'aha' moment, the repetition alone will help you retain that memory. Take notes on your device if it allows it.

**Summarise** the grammar in your own words and your brain will process it better.

**Exercise** the conjugation of verbs and develop a feeling for the forms.

**Mark important words** in a small dictionary (or, if possible, highlight them in this ebook), it will help to actively remember them.

**Talk Spanish** - even to yourself if no one else is around! The most rewarding way to use your Spanish is to talk to people, followed far behind by reading and watching films - you just got to do it to make the most of it!

**Sing** along to music, associate your learning with positive emotions!

**Read** interesting and fun Spanish newspapers and books with the help of your dictionary, try to access cool things you wouldn't have been able to before.

**Repetition** is key: reading this ebook from front to back won't make you speak Spanish, but going back to it again and again, taking notes, experimenting with new knowledge in discussions etc. will.

**Don't be afraid** of making mistakes. Some people may be near perfect in writing and are still unable to speak. It's probably better to make mistakes but communicate as much as possible - enabling you to acquire experiences and build on those. But don't get stuck on a poor level of

grammar just because people do seem to understand you anyway. Once you commit to an inspiring goal (like blending in perfectly) you will find enough motivation.

**Relax:** don't feel under pressure because the grammar, vocabulary or anything else appear overwhelming, a relaxed playful brain will learn much faster than one forced to do so.

**Persevere:** a longterm problem is forgetting words that you previously knew - it's very frustrating to open your mouth in confidence and not find that word again! Don't ever let your Spanish rest for more than 6 months or it will slowly fade away!



Bolivia: Walking at 3,812 metres (12,507 ft) altitude on Isla del Sol, an island in Lake Titicaca