

*Make sure you get my best language tips
free by email...*

*Please go and click the activation link in
the email I sent you!!*

LEARN SPANISH: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

So you're looking for the best way to learn Spanish on your own?

In this post, you'll learn - in detail - the exact steps you need to become fluent, including...

- Best Spanish resources
- Most effective study techniques
- How much time to spend

I'll break the process down into four stages (the same stages I used to become fluent in Spanish) - feel free to skip ahead if you're not a complete beginner:

- [First Few Weeks: Getting Started](#)
- [Months 1-3: Build a Foundation](#)
- [Months 4-6: Speak and Read](#)
- [Months 7-12: Lifestyle Changes](#)

Sound good?

You'll learn the process that experienced language learners use to study languages on their own - without following an expensive programme of study in a language school.

You also discover the best way to learn Spanish on your own without [moving to Spain](#), talking to [strangers](#) on the street, or spending your life buried in books.

Ready? Great!

Let's look at an overview of the entire process. Then, I'll explain each part in detail.

Olly Richards



How To Learn Spanish On Your Own (In 12 Months)

Key Success Factors:

1. Motivation
2. Focus
3. Time



First Few Weeks

Spend the first few weeks with an introductory Spanish audio course
Ideal for your commute: 30-60 mins a day

You'll acclimatise to the language, learn some useful basics, and start speaking with some simple "listen & repeat" exercises

Months 1-3

What's the fastest, most effective way of building a strong foundation in Spanish?

1. Work systematically through a good textbook
2. Revise thoroughly
3. Practise talking about the contents of the textbook with a speaking partner/tutor

Activity	Time (mins)
Revision	15
Speaking	30
Textbook study	45

Months 4-6

Take the foundation you've built and put it into practice, so you learn to speak with confidence.

1. Regular speaking with different native Spanish speakers
2. Systematic reading and listening to interesting material in Spanish
3. Grow your vocabulary strategically with the help of digital flashcards

Activity	Time (mins)
Reading & Listening	50
Flashcards	20
Real Conversations	120

Months 7-12

Make Spanish part of your lifestyle and improve the accuracy of your Spanish by studying grammar in more depth.

1. Switch your daily activities from English to Spanish
2. Read real Spanish
3. Study grammar in more detail

Activity	Time (mins)
Grammar Study	20
Read Real Spanish	50
Daily Activities	120

<http://iwillteachyoulanguage.com>



BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

For the purposes of this post, I'm going to assume you're a [beginner](#), or false beginner (i.e. you studied a bit at school, but don't remember much). The time frame I'm working with is one year.

The aim in this time is to become [conversationally fluent](#) - to speak confidently and enjoy using Spanish in any daily situation, not to speak perfectly.

You can learn Spanish in more or less time, and will vary depending on the amount of work you put in. I've divided the year into four stages, which represent phases I reliably go through when learning a new language.

My guidelines assume you have one hour per day to dedicate to study. But as you'll see, there's scope for doing much more by utilising "[dead time](#)".

This is all about the best way to learn Spanish on your own, which means you won't be following a programme of study laid out by a teacher or school. What this *doesn't* mean is **learning in isolation**. In order to learn to speak Spanish, you need to [practise speaking with others](#), and this makes up an important part of the process I describe here.

[I've learnt 8 foreign languages](#) myself, and I work regularly with some of the world's most accomplished polyglots.

That is to say, I know my stuff!

However, every learner is different. What you'll find here is best described as a "picture of the stages of learning a language".

You should take it more as an informative guide than a set of prescriptive instructions.

THE BEST WAY TO LEARN SPANISH ON YOUR OWN

Let's have a quick reality check!

If you want to learn Spanish independently, you're going to need a few things...

- Motivation (to keep going)
- Focus (to be effective)
- Time (for everything to sink in)

Without these three things, it's impossible to learn a language.

From all my work with language learners, there seems to be one killer way to set yourself up for success: **Keep it simple!**

With tonnes of Spanish websites, apps and courses out there, it can be tempting to jump from one to the next.

But there's one golden rule to remember...

It's usually more effective to calmly work your way through one book, or stick with one study method, than to try different things out of curiosity.

The focus you'll get from this keeps self-doubt away, and helps you learn more deeply.

GETTING STARTED: THE FIRST FEW WEEKS



First Few Weeks
Spend the first few weeks with an introductory Spanish audio course
Ideal for your commute: 30-60 mins a day
You'll acclimatise to the language, learn some useful basics, and start speaking with some simple "listen & repeat" exercises

What: Spend the first few weeks with an introductory Spanish audio course.

When: Ideal for your commute. 30-40 minutes a day. Two separate 15-20 minute sessions are ideal, as this helps memorisation.

Recommended Resources (choose one):

- [Pimsleur Spanish](#)
- [Michel Thomas Spanish](#)

Or, if you're about to travel to a Spanish speaking country:

- [Survive In Spanish](#)

How: This bit's easy - just follow the course as recommended

Why: These courses all give you a good introduction to Spanish and [get you speaking](#) right away.

You'll acclimatise to the language, learn some useful basics, and start speaking using some simple "listen & repeat" exercises.

If you get bogged down in textbooks too quickly, you might never take the time to sit back and **listen to the sounds of Spanish**. Take a couple of weeks to savour the language, and learn some useful spoken phrases you can start using immediately.

Danger: The big problem with audio courses is that they don't cover much ground. Although they're great to get started, don't spend more than 2-3 weeks on this stage, as there are much faster ways to learn.

MONTHS 1-3: BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION



What:

- 1. Work systematically through a good textbook
- 2. Practise talking about the contents of the textbook with a speaking partner/tutor

When:

Every day:

- 30-45 minutes: Textbook study

- 15 minutes: Revision
2-3 times per week:
- 30 minutes: Speaking practice

Recommended Resources (choose one):

Textbooks:

- [Colloquial Spanish](#)
- [Assimil Spanish](#)

Online:

- [SpanishPod101](#)

Why: After easing yourself in with a short audio course, you now have a challenge... "What's the fastest, most effective way of building a strong foundation in Spanish?"

The answer is in the humble textbook.

Publishers often do a great job of selecting the information that goes into beginner courses, and so the best way to learn Spanish on your own (at the beginning) is actually far simpler than you might think: **Simply work through a textbook from cover to cover.**

However, if everything you learn just lives in your head, it remains passive knowledge. If you want to speak Spanish, [you need to activate that knowledge.](#) For this reason, you'll start to practise what you learn with a speaking partner from the start.

If you don't have anyone to practise Spanish with, [click here to find out how to find one](#).

Textbook Study

I don't recommend you just blindly follow the contents of the textbook.

There will be hundreds of grammar exercises to follow, but it's not these activities that help you build a strong foundation in Spanish. A strong foundation comes from spending your time with the language in context, and learning what you need to make sense of it.

Specifically, this means: **Spend your time studying the dialogues from the textbook.**

- Read and listen to each dialogue many times
- Aim for 100% comprehension
- Use the grammar notes from the textbook to help you understand what's going on, but don't worry about memorising all the rules

You can use this approach to systematically work your way through the dialogues in the textbook.

Note: We're trying to keep things simple.

If you try and complete every exercise in the book, you'll slow down so much that you'll probably never finish it.

So we're stripping away all the unnecessary stuff and focusing on the most valuable part of the textbook- the dialogues.

You can always go back and [study the grammar](#) later, but it's by covering all the dialogues across various topics that you'll get the most complete picture of how Spanish works. (This is known as a top-down approach.)

For techniques for studying a dialogue effectively, [see this post](#).

Revision

For a long time, I believed that the way to learn a language fast was to **learn more**. Eventually, I learnt that the way to learn a language fast is to **revise more**. (This is one of the key principles I teach in my [Language Learning Foundations](#) course.)

Beyond your daily habit of studying your textbook, the single biggest thing you can do to improve your learning is to [add a revision session](#) at the end of the day.

In this session, you simply look back over what you did earlier, and do more of the same...

- Read the dialogue again
- Can you remember the new vocabulary?
- Can you understand the audio without reading?

Without the revision, there is a 24 hour gap between study sessions. With the revision, you have an opportunity for your brain to absorb what you're learning.

Speaking

Now, I know you're looking for the best way to learn Spanish on your own. However, you *do* want to learn to actually *speak* Spanish, right?

This means you'll need help, and you can't do it all by yourself. (You'll need a [speaking partner](#).)

However, you may wonder how you can start speaking Spanish when you're a beginner. This approach gives you a convenient way to get started:

- Study a chapter of the textbook until you feel you've absorbed it
- Practise the material from the textbook with a speaking partner

Make sure your speaking partner has a copy of the textbook, and ask them to help you practise what you've learnt.

You can:

- Role play the dialogue
- Practise using and manipulating new grammar (Yo *voy* a la playa, nosotros *vamos* a la playa, etc)
- Make up sentences using new vocabulary (Vamos a la playa, vamos al restaurante, vamos al río)

30 minutes is usually enough for speaking sessions, and you might want to spend a number of sessions practising one textbook chapter, and that's fine.

Just remember to keep moving through the book, and **not to aim for perfection**. When learning Spanish as a beginner, it's far better to gain a limited understanding of many areas than a deep understanding of a few. This is because lots can be learnt intuitively, without the need for dedicated study, so it's better to cover a lot and increase the chances of that happening.

Danger: These days, textbooks can be overlooked, in favour of smartphone apps and the internet. Although there are some great resources online, [the internet has been disastrous](#) in one important aspect: focus.

The major advantage of a textbook, in my opinion, is that it makes the job of focusing so much easier.

[Shut down the internet](#), turn off your phone, and just concentrate on the pages in the book. Everything you need is there.

The biggest danger in terms of textbook study is that you get bogged down in grammar exercises. Although they can be useful, you don't need to understand grammar perfectly yet. You'll learn the most by [covering the dialogues](#), as you'll get to see how the language works and actually learn a lot of grammar intuitively, thereby saving yourself time.

MONTHS 4-6: SPEAK AND READ



What:

- 1. Regular speaking with different native speakers
- 2. Systematic reading and listening to interesting material in Spanish
- 3. Grow your vocabulary strategically with the help of [digital flashcards](#)

When:

Every day:

- **45 minutes:** Reading with text and audio
- **15 minutes:** Study new vocabulary with flashcards
2-3 times per week:
- **1-2 hours:** Attend Spanish Meetup/language exchange, or speak with friends/tutors

Recommended Resources:

You will need a variety of material depending on interest. Try to find reading material that comes with audio:

- [Fluent Spanish Academy](#) - this is a Spanish community that contains a world-class library of study material especially for intermediate learners
- [Spanish Short Stories for Beginners](#) (with audio)
- [Spanish Short Stories for Beginners Volume 2](#)
- [Flashcards Deluxe](#) for the best flashcard app

Why:

After 3 months of study, you should have a good foundation in Spanish to a pre-intermediate level (A2). In months 4-6 you aim to take that foundation and put it into practice, so you learn to speak with some confidence.

At this stage, you may find yourself [hitting a plateau](#), where you seem to stop improving.

This happens because you've already learnt all the low hanging fruit in Spanish, such as [cognates](#), common words/phrases etc.

In reality, progress seems slower because you begin to realise just how much you don't know, and you have a desire to speak with more accuracy.

The route to developing confidence in Spanish is this: Spend as much time using Spanish to do things that interest you, and do this using all four skills - speaking, listening, reading, writing.

People who fail to break through this plateau usually do so because they spend too much time studying the language, and not using it for real purposes (e.g. reading, speaking).

The activities in this phase are designed to make sure you spend as much time as possible engaging with the language.

You may feel you lack structure without a textbook or course, but have faith in the process of surrounding yourself with real Spanish - it will ultimately pay off, as things slowly start to make sense and you learn to control the language.

Speaking

In the previous phase, you worked with native speaker tutors to help you practise language from your textbook. Now, it's time to get more authentic speaking practice.

The trouble is, speaking with native speakers can be scary. So, you're not going to throw yourself in at the deep end. Rather, you're going to continue working with tutors or conversation partners who you're familiar with, and [attending Meetups where everyone is there to practise Spanish](#) (i.e. they're in the same boat as you!)

For me, speaking Spanish "fluently" [isn't about being native-like](#). It's about being able to enjoy interesting conversations with native speakers. (There's a big difference!)

In your daily life, you tend to discuss similar topics every day with your colleagues and friends. Spanish should be no different:

- Decide on a topic that interests you (for me, that might include: language learning, London, politics, travel, self-development)
- Tell your tutor the topic you've chosen
- Use your speaking time to discuss that topic, asking for help when you struggle to express yourself
- When the discussions have run their course, move onto the next topic

In these conversations, your aim should **not** be to get everything correct. You are practising **expressing yourself**.

I find it helpful to think about the point I'd like to make in English, and then try to say that in Spanish. This helps to ensure [I'm being a good conversation partner](#), and not just trotting out formulaic Spanish I've learnt.

Reading and Listening

Spend your study time reading interesting material in Spanish.

The ideal material is:

- Interesting to you personally
- Graded to your level

Simplified material isn't always easy to find, but the [Fluent Spanish Academy](#) gathers everything together in one place, as a one-stop shop for intermediate Spanish learners.

The most important thing is to read on topics that interest you. This way, you learn **relevant Spanish** rather than trying to learn every noun, verb and adjective under the sun.

By reading and listening at the same time (to identical material), you can form links in your mind between the words and the sounds. You can also use the text to understand the audio which might otherwise be too fast.

Reading teaches you so much. (That's why I wrote my books of [Spanish short stories for beginners](#).)

Many perceived difficulties with Spanish grammar can be solved simply by reading a lot. When you see the grammar being used in a real context, it intuitively starts to make sense. I believe this is much better way to learn grammar than trying to study it in an isolated way in a textbook.

Treat reading as your main Spanish study each day. You can do it in one long session (45 mins), or do it on your commute (2x20 mins).

For an effective reading strategy, [click here](#).

Strategic Vocabulary Study

As your Spanish improves, you realise that there are tonnes of words you don't know.

To make matters worse, that vocabulary becomes harder to memorise because you see it less often.

If you're reading Spanish and having regular conversations, you'll be learning a lot of new vocabulary naturally. But rather than leave it to chance, you can use [electronic flashcards](#) to help commit the most useful vocabulary to memory.

The trick here is to be selective about which vocabulary you try to learn. You can't learn everything, so try to notice the words and phrases you come across in your other activities that seem to be highly useful.

Use your flashcard app as a place to store this vocabulary, and use the "Spaced Repetition System" to help you commit it to memory.

Some people [find it hard to get excited](#) about using flashcards, but it's very powerful and you can commit a lot of vocabulary to memory within a short time.

The most effective way to learn Spanish vocabulary with flashcards is to do multiple, short sessions a day. The recommended 15-20 minutes per day is best broken down into 3 or 4 short 5-minute sessions study. You can easily fit these into coffee breaks or waiting for the train.

Danger: The hardest part of learning Spanish on your own, especially at the 4-6 month stage, is the lack of structure.

You might be unsure you're studying in the right way, without the structure provided by a regular class.

3 months of regular reading, listening and speaking will teach you a lot of Spanish naturally. But it needs to be focused. It's vital to choose reading material that's at a suitable level for you, or else you'll struggle.

The biggest "hack" in this process is the strategic learning of vocabulary with flashcards. Most people shoot themselves in the foot here by trying to learn too much.

Flashcards can quickly become overwhelming if you cram them with vocabulary you don't really need. Be always thinking: "What's the most useful stuff here? What will really help me speak better?" This means the 15 minutes you spend on this each day are highly targeted, and make a direct contribution to your fluency.

You will still find speaking hard at this stage, and that's OK. Your attitude is important here. If you focus on everything you *can't* say, you'll become negative and want to retreat to your books. Instead, focus on the process of simply speaking week after week, and the benefits that come from that.

MONTHS 7-12: LIFESTYLE CHANGES



What:

- Switch your daily activities from English to Spanish, and create a social life based on Spanish
- Read real Spanish
- Study grammar in more detail

When:

Every day:

- **45 minutes:** Read real Spanish on topics of interest
- **15 minutes:** Work through a Spanish grammar book
- **All day:** Replace your daily activities with Spanish - news, movies, weather, recipes
2-3 times per week:
 - Attend Spanish cultural events, Meetups, etc. and surround yourself with the language

Recommended Resources

Replacing your daily activities with Spanish will take a bit of preparation, but it's easy to find everything you need online:

- News: <http://www.elmundo.es/>
- Weather: <http://www.eltiempo.es/londres.html>
- TV: <http://wwitv.com/television/191.htm>
- Movies: <http://screenrant.com/best-spanish-language-movies-tv-series-stream-netflix/> (Have you seen the Spanish versions of Breaking Bad or Downton Abbey?)
- Cooking: <http://www.quericavida.com/recetas>

In addition:

- Do your Google searches in Spanish: <http://google.es>
- Set your phone to Spanish: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT204031>
- Set your PC to Spanish: <http://www.idganswers.com/question/11894/how-to-change-language-to-spanish-in-windows-7>

Grammar:

- [Fluent Spanish Academy](#) - The Academy contains a collection of Short Stories that are written using specific grammar points, and is the best resource for improving your grammar in a natural way.
- [Practice Makes Perfect Complete Spanish Grammar](#)
- [Barron's Spanish Grammar](#)
- [Routledge Frequency Dictionary of Spanish](#)

Why:

After 6 months of studying and - critically - *using* Spanish, you will be in a good place.

Now it's time to do two things:

- Make Spanish part of your lifestyle by [replacing your daily activities](#) in English

- Improve the accuracy of your Spanish by [studying grammar](#) in more depth
In the previous 3 months you were looking for reading material that is simplified for beginners, and speaking opportunities that are designed for learners.

However, now you need to dive into *real* Spanish. Real Spanish is where you'll learn how the language is really used, and have the chance to speak with real people - not sugar-coated to make it easy for you.

The way to make this meaningful, and not get overwhelmed, is to continue basing your studying around your own interests:

- Read the news you want to read
- Watch the [movies](#) you want to watch
- Attend the events you want to attend

By keeping everything centred around your interests, you achieve two things:

- It's easier to stay motivated
- You don't have to learn every Spanish word under the sun. You focus instead on vocabulary that you're more like to want in your daily life.

Naturally, this is not easy - especially at first. But by rising to the challenge, and keeping it up for 6 months, you'll reach the end of the 12 months with a significant amount of ability in Spanish.

(The star of the Netflix blockbuster Narcos used these principles to learn Spanish in only a few months. [Read how in this post!](#))

Study Grammar in More Depth

Spanish is what you might call a "front-loaded" language. In other words, much of the difficulty comes at the beginning. Once you can speak Spanish to a decent level, you won't find any big surprises (unlike many Asian languages, for example).

Until this point, I've suggested you don't study grammar in much depth.

The reason is that most people believe the best way to learn Spanish on your own is to master grammar from the beginning.

This is a mistake, because it's easy to get bogged down with tricky grammar points that **you don't actually need in order to speak**.

However, now that you *can* speak, it's time to look at refining your grammar.

Luckily, you'll find that you've already learnt a lot of that so-called "tricky" grammar simply by being exposed to it over the last 6 months - so it will prove to be much easier to master.

For the same reason, it makes sense to study grammar systematically at this stage, and you can do this by working through a good grammar exercise book. Simply focus on the areas of grammar you find tricky.

Switch Your Daily Activities To Spanish

At the same time as you work on your grammar, you need to start making Spanish the default language for your daily activities.

There's no need to look for "soft" options any more!

You should literally try to do everything you need to do in Spanish, whether that's reading the newspaper or going out for the evening.

This [isn't particularly complex to do](#), but it does take [commitment](#).

The best way to approach this is to **start small**. Introduce one new Spanish activity every week.

Start with your daily news fix.

Then, the following week, switch Google to Spanish. And so on.

Ideally, your speaking practice will come from a Spanish-based social life.

However, if this isn't practical (perhaps due to where you live), you should arrange regular speaking sessions on Skype.

Just remember, these should not be "lessons" where you are taught, simply sessions where you have an opportunity to speak about topics of interest.

Read Real Spanish

It's still important to maintain your daily study time, as this gives you structure.

Continuing the theme from months 4-6, you're now going to read as widely as possible.

Set a regular time every day to read, and stick to it.

In terms of reading material, ideally it should be something you'd read for fun in your mother tongue. Given the choice, non-fiction tends to be simpler to read than fiction. Similarly, magazines and blog posts can make for good reading material.

Personally, I like to read physical books or magazines, because reading "offline" helps me to focus.

Danger: By now, you're using Spanish for **real purposes**, almost like performing a "language transplant" on your life! And that's what will ultimately bring you the confidence and fluency you want.

However, to make it a success, you do need to create your own structure, and this means...

- [Schedule your study](#) and speaking times
- Choose material and topics that are genuinely interesting for you

These things seem almost too simplistic, but failing to study regularly, or reading boring things, will quickly [kill your progress](#).

CONCLUSION - THE BEST WAY TO LEARN SPANISH ON YOUR OWN

I hope you've been able to take some inspiration from this study plan!

I've really tried to boil the process down to the elements that will really result in your *learning* Spanish - not just *studying* it.

As I said at the beginning, the **best** way to learn Spanish on your own will always be the **simplest**.

Because ultimately, you're the only one holding yourself accountable.

Take this plan as a blueprint, commit to sticking at it, and get stuck in! And if you'd like a help hand, check out the [Fluent Spanish Academy](#).

¡Buena suerte!

Do you know someone who wants to learn Spanish? Please share this post with them, or [click here to send a Tweet!](#)