



A BEGINNER'S COMPLETE, START-TO-FINISH GUIDE TO LEARNING SPANISH

How to develop a strategy that will get you started right away, using a method and resources you design and select that will let you reach your goals as quickly and efficiently as possible



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What this Guide Contains, Why, and Where

A Short Introduction

First, we'll start with a short introduction explaining where the instructions in this guide come from and why those instructions are what they are (they are essentially the end result of a couple of decades of trial and error that resulted in me learning three languages to fluency on my own). This begins on the next page.

The two major reasons beginners have so much trouble getting started in a language

I'll briefly tell you about the two major reasons I've observed that beginners suffer so much frustration and difficulty in learning a language for the first time, and especially in getting started in such a way that they feel confident that what they're doing is efficient, effective, and will deliver them to where they want to go (a certain type and level of fluency) in an acceptable amount of time. This starts on page 4 and ends on page 5.

How to Avoid the Biggest Mistakes and Frustrations Beginners Have: **Ask the Right Questions**

I am going to pose a series of questions to you that you need to answer as best you can. The purpose of these questions is to help you determine, very specifically, the best possible method, resources, and schedule for you to use in order to achieve *your* own personal language-learning goals as quickly and efficiently as possible ("efficiently" in terms of time, money, and effort). This is by far the most important part of this guide. **The lack of information provided by the answers to these questions (usually caused by a failure to ask them in the first place) is the cause of the overwhelming majority of the problems and frustrations that beginning language students have.** It starts on page 6 and ends on page 12.

Three Example Plans

I will now demonstrate how you can turn the answers that you gave to these questions into an actual plan by showing you three example plans I've constructed based on the most common circumstances and goals I've observed in hundreds of language students I've spoken with over the years. By "plan", I mean *how* to learn Spanish, with which resources, on what kind of schedule, and how much time, money, and effort you can (roughly) expect to expend in doing so. This starts on page 13 and ends on page 17.

The Most Helpful Resources I Have Found

In the last chapter I'll recommend the resources I believe to be the most helpful to the greatest number of people reading this guide (beginners who want to learn a language, specifically Spanish). I have many great resources and tips to give you from the over twelve years I've spent learning Spanish that include experience in multiple Spanish-speaking countries (Spain, Colombia, and Chile). This starts on page 18 and ends on page 26.

Introduction

Where this Advice Comes from: Trial and Error (Lots of Error)

Everything in this guide comes from my own personal experience learning languages since I was twelve years old (I am thirty-seven at the time of this writing). I started then with French via a book and a set of cassette tapes. This, not surprisingly, failed completely to teach me to actually speak French to French people. I then took French in high school and learned, when I went to France for a week on a school trip after **three years of these French classes**, just how bad foreign language instruction in most schools was. I was barely able to speak to people (I remember trying to ask a waiter what kind of cheese we were being served and he could not understand me). I had tried teaching myself a bit of German the previous year before we went to Germany for a week on a similar trip, that was almost a complete failure (I think I managed some greetings and could count to ten). I tried learning Spanish and French while I was at Tulane University: long story short, I failed again. A few years later I tried Japanese, then Swedish, each for only a few weeks at a time: more failures.

I now speak Spanish, French, and German fluently. My Spanish is far better than either of the other two, mainly because I've been studying it for much longer, but I can confidently say that I'm at least conversationally fluent in French and German at this point and that my Spanish is nearly native-level.

My point is this: my advice here comes from a couple of decades of trial and error that ultimately resulted in success. None of this is theoretical or taken from academic texts written by people who either have never learned a language themselves or have only done so in classrooms where *they* didn't need to know anything about how to learn a language because the teacher took care of that for them by providing all the instruction and resources, handling the scheduling, giving them homework, and evaluating their progress.

I learned three languages to advanced levels, from home over the internet, with absolutely no guidance or instruction from anyone else about how to do it. I have spent time in Spanish-speaking countries but this was well after I had attained fluency in Spanish. I use "tutors" but until very recently they've just been untrained native speakers whose only purpose was to correct my errors and explain how to say certain things I was unsure of, they were not professional language teachers. A couple of months ago I started preparing for some of the [CEFR](#) language exams and doing that *does* require professional language teachers who know how to prepare students for that specific exam, granted. So, if you need to prepare for an exam then yes, hiring a professional teacher who specializes in preparing students for that particular type of exam is probably advisable for you. The other ninety-plus percent of you will be best served by working with native speakers who are there simply to correct your errors and teach you how to say things you want to say but don't quite know how, and they don't need to have any sort of formal training in order to do that. One of the things I will do in this guide is tell you where to find them and how to work with them.

Chapter 1

The two major reasons beginners have so much trouble getting started in a language

If you're reading this guide, it's likely because you decided to start learning Spanish and spent some time trying to do so, without any real plan, using resources and techniques that grabbed your attention here and there, until you began to realize the progress you were making for the time, effort, and possibly money you had invested thus far was not very good, and therefore that you needed help constructing some sort of plan or strategy. If you did not waste time doing that and instead this guide is your first step towards learning Spanish, then you're either lucky or clever. If you're coming here as the result of frustration, wasted time, and wasted money, then I completely understand (it's mostly how I learned what I did!) and I'm genuinely sorry for your trouble but beating yourself up and feeling bad about it will not help you at all – this is how most people start off learning their first foreign language as adults (badly), me included. We humans just seem to insist on learning things the hard way.

Let's just let all of that negativity go right now because not only does it not help but also because we're going to eliminate its root cause by helping you construct an effective strategy that will allow you to confidently learn Spanish in an efficient manner so that you attain the goals you have in mind for it as quickly as possible. You *will* feel confident that you're going to succeed in learning Spanish within a reasonable period of time once you've finished this guide because you will have a plan with specific tasks you have to perform in a specific order and you will understand why it's been constructed this way because you will be the one who constructed it based on your own personal needs and circumstances, guided through this process by the advice of an experienced person (me) who has done this several times before.

Let's get started, and let's do it by understanding the root cause of your difficulties, which is that you don't know, specifically, what to do in order to learn Spanish. The reason you don't know what to do is because of two particular problems:

1. You have not clarified, to yourself, your own needs and goals which are what determine the method and resources you should employ.
2. Even once you have done this you still don't know what you should do because you've never learned a language on your own and consequently you don't know which methods and tools best fit certain needs and circumstances, so even once you've sorted out exactly what your needs and circumstances are you still don't know what to do.

The solution is simple: we clarify what it is that you want to accomplish and the circumstances you have under which to work, and then we determine precisely which combination of techniques and tools will work best for you and on what sort of schedule.

When I talk about what you want to accomplish, your goals and needs, I mean: **what precisely is it that you want to do with your Spanish?**

Someone who merely wants to learn Spanish because they're interested in Latin American culture and history, so they want to better understand it and maybe occasionally talk to native speakers, is going to have very different goals than someone who wants to learn Spanish so they can work or retire in a specific country, say Argentina or Mexico, and someone in their late teens or early twenties who wants to learn Spanish for more academic reasons (to pass a certain exam like the [AP](#) Spanish exam or one of [DELE exams](#)) or because they wish to attend university in Spain is going to have very different goals than the preceding two people. Different goals require different methods and tools to accomplish them: a method primarily focused on written Spanish (say 80% written, 20% spoken) that utilizes workbook exercises and flashcards might be a pretty good choice for the 17-year-old who wants to pass the AP Spanish exam, but those would be horrible choices for the 55-year-old who wants to be able to speak casually but fluently with natives in everyday contexts and is considering retiring to Mexico or Argentina.

The second half of the equation is circumstances. The method and tools I would recommend to you if you have 20 hours and \$200 per week to spend learning Spanish are going to be very different from what I would recommend to you if you have 5 hours and \$10 per week to work with (both are perfectly sufficient, by the way, it's just that one is faster than the other). It also matters how those hours are spaced out: evenly throughout the week or almost all of them on the weekend? A lot of these tools and techniques require a quiet environment to work in, but some don't, and therefore which ones you should use, when, and where will depend on how your time is distributed.

Here's how we're going to deal with this in the next chapter: I'm going to pose a series of questions for you to answer and then I'm going to tell you how to use those answers to determine what it is that will work best for you. It's a simple, straightforward, and effective solution. It just seemed difficult until now because you didn't have the experience necessary to know that this is what you needed to do and to know how precisely to do it (which combination of goals and circumstances best matches with what method and which tools, etc.) – I'm going to take care of this for you, you just need to answer the questions so we know exactly what your goals and circumstances are. Let's do this now.

Chapter 2

Questions to Ask Yourself in Order to Determine Your Exact Goals and Relevant Circumstances

Let's start with "why?". Why do you want to learn Spanish? What are *your* own motivations? Let's also not get this confused with the intended use of your Spanish (e.g., "I want to curse at my spouse in their own language"), that's something completely different that we'll get to a bit further down. What I mean is:

What are the personal benefits you wish to gain?

Some examples:

- Will this help you earn more money at work?
- Will learning Spanish help you feel more educated, worldly, and better rounded by allowing you to learn about certain peoples and countries, their histories and cultures?
- Do you hope that it will help you make Spanish-speaking friends who will then enrich your life?
- Do you want to learn Spanish so that you can better communicate with a particular person or particular people who you care about?

This is important to understand so that you have a good feeling of just how much trouble you're really willing to go to in order to learn Spanish, such as how much time and money you're willing to expend, which are important questions that we are about to get to. Knowing this, consciously and for certain, will also help you keep going when you inevitably (and it is inevitable at some point) become tired, discouraged, or frustrated while learning the language. Learning a language is a difficult, complicated, and time-consuming endeavor. It can be made (mostly) fun and interesting, but it *cannot* be made easy. We can learn a language in a way that's fun, interesting, and efficient, but you're still going to have to exert substantial effort. What I'm saying is that it doesn't have to be unpleasant, it doesn't have to *feel* like hard work.

The next question we want to address is the one mentioned above that people often confuse with the reason (motivation) that they want to learn a language, and that is the end result you hope to obtain with it.

What do you want to *do* with your Spanish?

This is the intended use you have for it that I mentioned above which you shouldn't confuse with its benefits (to you personally). Some examples:

- Do you want to use it for casual travel to Spanish-speaking countries?
- Do you want to use it to communicate with Spanish-speaking customers and/or colleagues in your profession?
- Do you need it to pass a Spanish proficiency exam of some sort (AP, DELE, etc.)?
- Do you need it so that you can live in retirement in a Spanish-speaking country?
- Do you need it so that you can work in a Spanish-speaking country?
- Do you want to be able to consume Spanish-language popular media?

- Do you need to be able to understand Spanish-language reports, documents, lectures, or papers in your professional field?

You can write down your answers to the questions in this guide (most people would find that helpful I think), or not, it's up to you. I will, however, ask that you really try to answer them to yourself as specifically as possible. Be very clear and detailed with yourself about what it is you want to gain from learning Spanish and precisely how you intend to use it. Also, definitely arrange your answers in order of priority, because when we get to resources and methods later on some work better than others for certain desired outcomes and you'll need to know which outcomes you desire the most so you can spend the most time, money, and energy on those resources and methods which best deliver them (e.g., if you don't care about being able to write in Spanish then there's not much point in buying workbooks).

How much time do you have?

Quantify this in hours-per-week. Most people will have somewhere around five to twenty hours per week they can spend learning a foreign language, presuming it's not their full time job or part of it (an example of such a person might be a diplomat who, as part of their training, has to spend four to six months at a government language school where they would spend eight hours a day learning a language).

When and where can you spend time learning Spanish?

This is where we break down the answer to the preceding question (how much time do you have?) into much more useful specifics:

- What can you do during your commute to work? How much time do you have and what will you be capable of doing?
If you're driving then you can only listen, you obviously cannot read, write, or watch videos. You could speak to a limited degree, e.g., repeating after the speaker of a podcast or audio lesson or perhaps even having a (hands-free) conversation on the phone with a native speaker who is your language exchange partner (I'll get to what this is later). If you're on public transportation (subway, bus) or an airplane then you can read, write, and maybe listen (depending on how noisy it is) but speaking is probably not possible or at least fairly limited.
- Where can you study Spanish?
Find all the blocks of time, no matter how small (hey, with 30 seconds I can review at least one or two flashcards on my phone), that you have throughout the week. Can you work on some Spanish during your commute? Is it in the car, subway, walking, or some combination? Do you fly regularly such that you can do something on the plane and in the airport? Do you have some time at home each evening? Do you have breaks or free time at work during which you can do this?

How large are the blocks of time you have to work with?

Do you have thirty minutes in the car during your commute and then ten minutes in the subway? Do you have an hour at home each night? How about fifteen minutes at work most days?

Some activities, such as online classes or tutoring sessions, require a certain minimum amount of time (usually an hour), that's why this is relevant.

What kind of activity can you do during each block of time?

By this I mean: speaking, listening, watching (videos), reading, or writing? For example, during your commute you might be in the car for thirty minutes during which you can listen to a Spanish podcast and then you'll be in the subway for fifteen minutes where it's too loud to listen to anything but you can review some flashcards on your phone then. You might have an hour or more of quiet, isolated time at home each evening – this is perfect for online group classes, one-on-one tutoring sessions, language exchanges on Skype, and Spanish-language movies and TV shows. Maybe you have fifteen minutes in the morning where you can watch some Spanish-language YouTube channels while you drink your coffee. Figure out where all your available blocks of time are and *what* (speaking, listening, watching, reading, writing) you can do during these times.

What kind of devices do you have that you can use and when can you use them?

For example: desktop/laptop, tablet, phone, Amazon Alexa (it can play podcasts and audiobooks as well as Spanish-language music), etc.

How much money can you spend?

Again, I like to think in terms of money-per-week or money-per-month (most subscriptions are per-month). You do not *have* to spend any money on this, you can actually do quite well with merely free resources, given how much is available online now. You can get what is basically free Spanish tutoring by doing something called a language exchange: this is where you help a native Spanish speaker with their English in exchange for them helping you with your Spanish, e.g., you'd do a thirty-minute Skype call with them and spend fifteen minutes working on their English and then fifteen minutes working on your Spanish.

You also don't need to spend a lot in order to get substantial results. You can get excellent group classes online (3-5 students per class) for as little as thirty-five dollars per month. There are a couple services that use popular media in Spanish to teach it and they're typically in the ten-to-twenty dollars per month range. There are several good flashcard apps that are free. I'll go into what I recommend and how much it costs at the end (Chapter 4: Resources), as well as some discount codes I have for you if you're interested in them.

Now let's narrow it down

We're going to take the information you generated by answering the above questions and use it to answer some much more specific questions that will help you precisely plan the most efficient way to learn Spanish *for you*.

Determine the priority of the four primary skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing

As you know, those are the four main things we do with language. Based on what you said you were going to use your Spanish for, I want you to order them by priority as best you can. For example:

Based on the fact that making videos in Spanish and talking to native speakers are the most important things I want to do with my Spanish, for me speaking ability and listening comprehension are the two most important skills, and equally so (probably I'd give a slight edge to listening comprehension), then comes reading, and finally writing in last place.

Based on this knowledge of my priorities in the four skills, I focus on improving my comprehension of spoken audio, mainly from videos online (Spanish-language movies and shows on Netflix, news reports from Spain, YouTube videos, etc.), as well as working on my speaking ability with personal tutors from Spain (for informal conversation practice, this can be done for \$5-15 per hour).

Notice that I spend the overwhelming majority of my time, effort, and money on those skills which I value the most: listening and speaking. **I do this because I know what I want to do with my Spanish.**

You need to figure this out for yourself as well. You can do this by examining your answers to the preceding questions you just asked yourself to see which skills will be of the most value to you.

Here is a summary of what I generally recommend in order to best develop each skill; we'll go into lots more detail right after this and then we'll look at examples in the next chapter:

- **Speaking:** If, like most people, you care about being able to speak conversationally with native speakers, then you'll want to prioritize group classes, tutoring sessions, and/or language exchanges. These all allow you to verbally interact with a native speaker whose job it is to correct your errors and help you express yourself fluently in Spanish.
- **Listening Comprehension:** This is probably going to be the single most important skill for most of you because most of you have prioritized being able to have informal conversations with native speakers above all else, and being able to understand what they say to you is slightly more important than being able to speak to them at the same level (as they are speaking to you). My reason for saying this is based on experience: people can understand their own native language when it's spoken very poorly, as you probably already know. I'm sure at some point you've had a non-native speaker speak to you in your own native language (probably English) and despite them doing a poor job and making many mistakes, you could still understand them, couldn't you? Native speakers can generally understand you even if you absolutely butcher it, however if you can't understand *them* when they reply to you in correct, full-speed, adult-level Spanish, then communication has failed, now hasn't it? Your ability to understand them when they speak is far more important with regards to ensuring your ability to communicate than is your ability to speak fluently with few or no mistakes – I understand the *desire* to be able to talk like a native, I'm just being practical and saying that it's not necessary and your ability to understand what's said to you is far more important (presuming your primary goal is communication and not just showing off your ability to speak a foreign language well).

Also, if you mostly care about being able to consume Spanish-language media such as movies and YouTube videos, then obviously listening comprehension is where almost all of your efforts will go and you'll want YouTube videos for beginning Spanish students, Netflix shows in Spanish with the Spanish subtitles turned on, Spanish-language podcasts for Spanish students, etc.

- **Reading Comprehension:** If reading comprehension is very important to you then you'll want to find sources of written Spanish-language material to learn from and tools to help you do it (I

have many, they're at the end in the "Resources" chapter). You should consider general sources such as newspapers and novels, and if you want to use Spanish in your profession then you'll want to find pertinent Spanish-language publications in your specific field in order to help you learn the terminology and syntax particular to that field.

- **Writing:** If you need to be able to write well in Spanish then there's not much else for it besides a tutor who can read and correct what you've written. This doesn't have to be expensive, though it does depend on the level of expertise you require from the tutor. You're looking at probably \$5-20 per hour or so depending on the cost of living where the tutor lives and their qualifications. Two tutoring sessions that are one hour long each, twice per week, would lead to rapid, impressive gains in your Spanish ability and won't break the bank (most people can afford \$10-\$30 per week or so for something like this). I should also note that you could also accomplish this via a language exchange so that it doesn't cost you any money: you just offer to help them however they like with their English in exchange for them reviewing and correcting something you've written.

Do you have a specific dialect you need to learn?

More people have this need than realize it. Some examples of intended uses of Spanish where I believe the student would benefit from focusing on a particular dialect are:

- You're learning Spanish to be able to talk with your in-laws.
- You want to be able to better communicate with your romantic partner.
- You're moving to a specific country for some reason (work, retirement, school, etc.)
- The culture and people of a particular country interest you.
- You need to do business with people from a specific country.
- You want to attend university in a specific country.

If any of these are the case then I believe you should focus on learning the particular dialect of the country, region, or even city where the people you care about being able to communicate with are from. There are several ways you can do this:

- Choose popular media in that particular dialect, such as YouTube videos by speakers from the country or region you're interested in, movies or shows featuring (or mostly featuring) speakers of that dialect, news articles and broadcasts from the particular country or region you're interested in, podcasts by people from that country or region, etc.
- Choose tutors and/or language exchange partners from the country or region of interest. This is generally very easy to do (again, see the "Resources" chapter).
- If you're going to use a workbook or self-teaching course, try to get one that focuses on the dialect you're interested in. This is a bit trickier but also not really something to worry about because such courses are typically focused on basic Spanish for beginners and that's something which changes very little from one dialect to another so it doesn't really matter. When they do emphasize that they teach a particular type of Spanish, it's usually just either "Latin American Spanish" or "Peninsular Spanish" (Spanish as it's spoken in Spain).
- Look up articles and videos explaining what some of the most prominent differences are between the dialect you want to learn and others, e.g., if you want to learn Colombian Spanish then search YouTube for things like, "Colombian Spanish", "Difference between

Colombian Spanish and other dialects”, “Colombian dialect”, “Colombian slang”, “Colombian syntax”, and then watch some of those videos.

Do you have friends or family members who are native speakers who can help you?

Most people won't have this but a lot will, especially for those of you who live in the U.S. where there are lots of Spanish speakers. Take full advantage of this, but remember that merely because someone is a native speaker of a language that does *not* make them a teacher of that language. Most of you are native English speakers: would you call yourself an English teacher? How well do you think you'd fair teaching English to an adult Spanish-speaker from scratch?

Native speakers who aren't trained language teachers are really just good for two things (these two things are very valuable, however):

1. Telling you when you've made a mistake and correcting it. They can tell you if something is just outright wrong or nonsensical, or if it's understandable but not the most natural way to say it.
2. Telling you how to say something in their native language that you're having trouble expressing, e.g., “How would I say, ‘two wrongs don't make a right’ in Spanish?” – native speakers are great for answering such questions.

What they're generally *not* good at is teaching the language from scratch to a complete beginner. This is something you'll mostly have to do on your own or with the help of a professional (this doesn't have to be expensive, I know of some great online group classes that can be had for as little as \$35 per month, see the “Resources” chapter please). Doing it on your own isn't too hard, honestly. You can use the aforementioned group classes or a tutor, or you can get one of the many good beginners' Spanish books out there (the *Practice Makes Perfect* series and *Assimil* courses, both of which you can find on Amazon fairly inexpensively, are good for this). Between these two approaches, obviously having a professional teacher help you is going to be better, but the self-study method is obviously less expensive, just slower.

How much time do you have to learn Spanish before you'll have to use it in an *uncontrolled* environment?

By “uncontrolled”, I mean outside of a learning environment where everyone is patient with you and willing to tolerate your mistakes and slow, interrupted speech. I mean when you travel to a Spanish-speaking country, for example.

If you're going on vacation to Mexico in a week I'd probably just tell you to get whatever the top-rated Spanish “traveler's phrasebook” is on Amazon, memorize as much as you can, and maybe try to get in a quick class or two with a good Mexican tutor, and that's it. You really don't have time for much else. If you're planning on moving to Argentina in five to seven years' time or visiting relatives in Mexico in six months, my recommendations are going to be completely different.

This dictates not only *what* you do but also *how much time* you have to devote per week to doing it (you can always devote more, yes, but it's good to know what the minimum is). If you need to be conversationally fluent in six months, I'm going to tell you that's definitely possible but you need to plan on putting in at least two hours a day or so, on average, between now and then if you want to pull this off, and *that* presumes you've got a decent plan in place already for what precisely you're going to do during those two hours.

Break down the portion of your Spanish study time that you will be spending in each location you will study Spanish, by day of week if necessary.

We need to plan out which resources to use where, how, and for how long, and certain resources have minimum time requirements and/or require a certain type of environment – that’s why we have to do this. What I want you to come up with is something like the following hypothetical example of a woman who works full-time and has two children and who wants to learn to speak Spanish so she can better communicate with her husband’s family when they visit them in Mexico:

“Monday, Wednesday, Friday: ~15 minutes in the morning during which I can watch material in video format or listen to something in audio format during coffee/breakfast, then 30 minutes during my commute during which I can only listen to something in audio format because I’m driving, then 10 minutes on the last leg of my commute on the subway when I can review flashcards. I will have 30 minutes in total during breaks at work during which I can either listen to something or do flashcard reviews. I probably won’t have any time in the evenings for anything because M/W/F is when the kids have soccer/karate practice plus I have to cook.

Tuesday/Thursday: Same as above except I have 1.5-2 hours in the evening during which I can do anything, so that would be a good time for group classes or a tutoring session, as those require an uninterrupted hour.

Saturday/Sunday: ~2-4 hours during the day during which I can do anything, so I’ll plan a group class or tutoring session for each of these days, plus I can watch some YouTube videos or a Netflix show in Spanish, look up what I don’t understand, and make flashcards out of those things (those words and phrases I have to look up).”

I recommend you write down something roughly like that. This will substantially increase your efficiency and consequently the speed at which you learn Spanish and therefore how soon you reach whatever your desired level of competency is. This can absolutely make the difference between reaching conversational fluency in six months with a highly effective and efficient study system, one which you have custom-designed for yourself based on the aforementioned criteria that you obtained by asking yourself the right questions, and reaching the same conversational fluency in a year and a half with a much less organized and less efficient system where you haven’t really planned anything and are just haphazardly doing this and that here and there (what most people do and what I’m trying to help you avoid).

The latter (haphazardly) is how I started learning languages and is a large part of why I failed so many times before I finally succeeded with Spanish a little over a decade ago. What I recommend here in this guide is based on what my approach to learning languages has evolved into being over the past 20+ years of trial and error.

Right, so let’s move on to some example plans based on what I know are the most common goals and circumstances that people have.

Chapter 3: Three Example Plans Based on Common Goals and Criteria

These are to serve two purposes:

1. To give you a better idea of what I'm suggesting you do. I've already described it but examples tend to clarify a lot of little questions and points of confusion people have that weren't adequately addressed in the initial explanation.
2. To save most of you a lot of work since these examples will be based on what I've found are the most common goals and circumstances people have, so most of you can just copy a lot of this.

I'll include some of the resources I recommend here but I'll go into more detail about them for you in the next chapter, just so you know. Let's get started.

Example 1: The Casual Enthusiast or Traveler

Casual conversational fluency is most important goal

Time & Budget: 10 hours and \$20 per week

This is more or less most of you: you care more about being able to have normal, casual, spoken conversations with native speakers than anything else (you'd probably like to be able to read a bit as well so you can understand restaurant menus, news reports, etc.), writing doesn't much matter, and you've got somewhere around 5-15 hours a week to devote to it along with maybe \$10-30 per week you're willing to spend on it.

What I would generally recommend in this case:

1. **Online group classes** from [GoSpanish](#) if you're a beginning Spanish student **or a personal tutor** on [iTalki](#) if you're at an intermediate or higher level. This is going to be the single most valuable use of your time and money. You want to be able to speak casually and fluently with native speakers? Then you need a native speaker to start teaching you how to speak casually and to then practice doing so with you, and this is precisely what group classes or a tutor do.

I recommend the group classes for beginners because that's who they're centered around – the teachers for [GoSpanish](#) (which I've tried out myself by taking several hours' worth of classes) are trained to teach Spanish from scratch to beginners and have the materials prepared ahead of time for it, plus class size is limited to 3-5 students. The reason I recommend iTalki tutors only if you're intermediate and above is because for the \$5-15/hour you can afford with this budget you're going to be getting what are called "community tutors", as opposed to "professional teachers" (on iTalki professional teachers must have teaching credentials and minimum one year experience). Community tutors are just native speakers who have signed up to practice their language with people who are learning it. They generally do not have any training in language instruction, so they're good at correcting errors and telling you how to say things that you ask them for help with and that's about it. They are not good at teaching complete beginners how to speak their language from scratch. The professional teachers who do specialize in doing this are more expensive, starting at around \$15-20/hour for Spanish,

typically.

You can get *unlimited* group classes (take several per day if you like) from [GoSpanish](#) that are 80% as good as a professional one-on-one tutor for a flat rate of \$35 per month, so that's why I recommend them for beginners unless you've got a good bit more money to spend. Note: if you use my link ([yes this one, click me](#)) and the coupon code, "spanishwithandrew", you'll get 10% off with [GoSpanish](#).

2. **A good podcast** to listen to when appropriate (this is usually when your body is busy performing a task but your mind is mostly free, such as when commuting to work or walking/jogging/cycling). I strongly recommend [SpanishPod101](#). I've sampled several of their Spanish podcasts plus I've extensively used their other, equivalent podcasts in German and French to help me learn those two languages as well.
3. **Some good YouTube channels** for beginning/intermediate Spanish students such as [Easy Spanish](#), [SpanishLand School](#), [SpanishPod101](#) (they have a YouTube channel, yes), or [Butterfly Spanish](#). These all do a great job of explaining the sort of fundamental Spanish that beginners have questions about and problems with.
4. **Some Spanish-language newspapers** (pick one from the area of the world you're interested in, e.g. Buenos Aires or Mexico City) and the necessary references to look up what you don't know (see the next point). Use [NewspaperMap.com](#) to find a paper in the location with the dialect you are most interested in learning.
5. **Good references.** These are useful for everybody no matter what. I recommend [Reverso Context](#) as your primary dictionary to look up words and phrases (it handles whole phrases/expressions better than standard dictionaries and includes real-world examples in each result), though both [SpanishDict](#) and [WordReference](#) are also good. I recommend using [Google Image search](#) to help you make electronic flashcards if that interests you (search for the word or phrase you're making the card for to see if any images adequately illustrate it and then copy that image to the front of your flashcard and put the word or expression on the back). Another excellent tool it seems few people know about is [Forvo](#). [Forvo](#) allows you to hear a native speaker pronounce whatever word or phrase you search for (I rarely run into one they don't have for a major language).

Example 2: The Professional

Formal conversational fluency in a professional context is most important, ability to read and write formally in a professional context is equally important or nearly so, ability to have some informal conversation is less important but desirable

Time & Budget: 5-20 hours and \$30+ per week

This is the person who is mainly or entirely learning the language for professional purposes. They need it to conduct business, communicate with colleagues in academia, or conduct government business as part of a diplomatic post. The most important thing is being able to speak formally, fluently, and correctly, followed closely by being able to read documents related to their profession, respond to emails, and/or write papers, presentations, and speeches.

What I would recommend:

1. **You need a professional, one-on-one tutor**, first and foremost. Nothing else is going to come close to working as well as this, and in fact I doubt anything else would really work at all (trying to do this on your own via workbooks and self-teaching courses would almost certainly be a massive waste of time). Get on [iTalki](#), register for an account, click on “Find a teacher” at the top, and then start playing with the various menus at the top of the search page that let you select what you want and narrow down the results. Specify that you want them to be from whatever country the people you work with are most often from, specify that you also need them to speak your native language if you’re a beginner (not necessary if you can already speak Spanish at an intermediate level or better), select your price range (plan on paying at least \$15-20/hour), select the hours you need under “Availability”, select “Professional Teachers” under “Teacher Types”, and you’ll probably want to select “Business” under “Category”. If you’re on a more limited budget, [GoSpanish](#) offers private tutors as well as part of different packages that include unlimited group classes, so you can get the group classes plus 2-4 private, 1-hour tutoring sessions per month as part of a package that costs \$59-79 per month (less than that, actually, if you use [one of my links to GoSpanish](#) plus the coupon code, “spanishwithandrew” – **those get you 10% off**).
2. Find some **Spanish-language publications within your field** in order to learn relevant terminology in Spanish. Flash cards weren’t necessary in the previous example but they are here, I think. You’re going to need to memorize a lot of terminology that’s specific to your field of expertise and possibly *only* used in your field, so it’s not like you’re going to see these terms regularly enough that you’ll just sort of learn them naturally, plus this way is more efficient. Good electronic flashcard programs include [Anki](#), [Memrise](#), and [Quizlet](#). Look for industry publications, whitepapers, academic papers and journals, etc.
3. Use **newspapers and news broadcasts** to supplement the above. Both of these tend to use formal and very correct, neutral language, precisely what you want to learn. I recommend newspapers and articles immediately, even for beginners, because you can go as slow as you need to since the material is written, and the news shows and broadcasts once you get to an intermediate level (with videos you have to listen at the speed that they speak and such broadcasts are intended for adult native speakers, so they speak quickly and use more complex language, making news shows better suited to intermediate and advanced students). Use [NewspaperMap.com](#) to find a paper in the location with the dialect you are most interested in learning.
4. To help with the written material you’ll be working with I recommend the same **references** as in the previous example. I recommend [Reverso Context](#) as your primary dictionary to look up words and phrases (it handles whole phrases/expressions better than standard dictionaries and includes real-world examples in each result), though both [SpanishDict](#) and [WordReference](#) are also good. I recommend using [Google Image search](#) to help you make electronic flashcards (search for the word or phrase you’re making the card for to see if any images adequately illustrate it and then copy that image to the front of your flashcard and put the word or expression on the back). Another excellent tool it seems few people know about is [Forvo](#). [Forvo](#) allows you to hear a native speaker pronounce whatever word or phrase you search for (I rarely run into one they don’t have for a major language).

Example 3: The Study-Abroad Student

Conversational fluency in informal Spanish and advanced reading and writing ability in formal Spanish are the most important skills and equally so, some ability to speak formally is less important but still required

Time & Budget: 5-20 hours and \$10-30 per week

This is the student who wants to study abroad at the high school or university level, whether they're doing just a one-year exchange or spending several years there getting a degree. You would need to be able to speak (mostly informally) with your classmates and friends and formally with your teachers and you would definitely need to be able to read textbooks and write assignments as well as use both those skills to take exams, so you would need an advanced, near-native reading and writing ability (the higher the education level the more will be expected of you in this regard: substantially less will be expected of a 16 year-old high school student than a 24 year-old graduate student).

If this is you, I would recommend:

1. **Definitely a tutor on iTalki or GoSpanish and maybe group classes on GoSpanish as well.** I understand you're probably on a limited budget but if you're going to spend money on one thing, this ought to be it. An error I think a lot of you might make will be to overemphasize the importance of learning formal speech – yes, you'll need it to talk to your teachers and some others occasionally but it's not as important as you might think since that won't happen too often and generally for short periods of time, plus they'll be forgiving of you since they'll know you're a non-native speaker. Also, formal speech is something you can quickly pick up while you're there. Inevitably you'll learn to speak formally to some degree prior to departing and any minor tweaks you need you can make as you go, no big deal.
You're going to *need* a one-on-one tutor because something just as important as your speaking ability will be your ability to read and write (formally), and to develop this you need a tutor who specializes in it to give you written assignments which they will correct and help you with during the next tutoring session. You can have them correct it *with* you in real time during the lesson on Skype or you can have them do it beforehand and then go over it with you. Most tutors prefer, as do I, to do the correction with the student during the lesson. I find you learn more this way and it gives you an opportunity to understand why a native speaker makes the decisions they do with the language, how they think in it, etc. If you do this, be sure to always ask why they make the decisions they do to phrase things in the particular ways that they do. Most of them use a combination of Skype and Google Docs (shared documents) to do this so that you're watching them make the corrections in real time in Google Docs while talking to them on Skype and I've found that this works superbly.
2. **Newspapers** for all of you and **academic journals and published studies** in your planned field of study if you're a graduate student (undergrad and high school students needn't bother with this), books, and **basically just anything well-written** you can get your hands on. With regards to your academic career, your ability to read and write will probably be more important than your ability to speak fluently. Read as much as you can, make a bunch of flashcards (some good

electronic flashcard programs are [Anki](#), [Memrise](#), and [Quizlet](#)), and review them often. Use [NewspaperMap.com](#) to find a paper in the location with the dialect you are most interested in learning.

3. To help with the written material you'll be working with I recommend the same **references** as in the previous example. I recommend [Reverso Context](#) as your primary dictionary to look up words and phrases (it handles whole phrases/expressions better than standard dictionaries and includes real-world examples in each result), though both [SpanishDict](#) and [WordReference](#) are also good. I recommend using [Google Image search](#) to help you make the electronic flashcards (search for the word or phrase you're making the card for to see if any images adequately illustrate it and then copy that image to the front of your flashcard and put the word or expression on the back). Another excellent tool it seems few people know about is [Forvo](#). Forvo allows you to hear a native speaker pronounce whatever word or phrase you search for (I rarely run into one they don't have for a major language).

You might be thinking you need workbooks and grammar books, I really don't think you do. Your tutor will handle the majority of this instruction (they'll find your weak points in these areas and fix them, that's their job), and online resources have gotten so good now that you're really better off just searching Google and YouTube for any questions you have about grammar or syntax. Lastly, my experience with workbooks is that they're ok at teaching complete beginners the basics of reading and writing, and teaching them the basics of the language's grammar and syntax, but these basics are the only thing they're good at teaching. If you're considering studying abroad you're probably already at an intermediate level in Spanish right now (or the Spanish classes you plan on taking at your school will get you there before you leave). Don't bother with workbooks outside of what you're assigned by your teacher/tutor, they'll probably end up being a waste of time and money.

Finally, let's move onto the chapter of recommended resources where I will go into a bit more detail about the resources I have just recommended to you in this chapter as well as some additional ones.

Chapter 4: Recommended Resources

Here I'll cover all the various resources I feel comfortable recommending that you at least have a look at. Some will be right for you, some won't – the whole point of this book up until now was to help you design your own, custom Spanish-learning program, to help you determine what to do, when, and where. We have now (I hope) done this, or at least given you a much better idea of how to go about achieving the goals that you have with regards to learning the Spanish language.

We now need to have a look at some of what's out there – use the information you gathered in the preceding chapters to help you choose some tools to try out and put together at least a rough plan of when, where, and how you want to use them.

Providers of Online Classes and Tutors

[GoSpanish](#)

From a review of them that I previously wrote:

“[GoSpanish](#) provides online group classes for a flat rate of \$35 per month [*you pay less in exchange for taking the time to read this e-book, thank you for that, the coupon code is below*] for unlimited classes at four different levels (beginner, upper beginner, intermediate, and advanced) with high-quality teachers, class sizes averaging 2-6 students, and which you can participate in from any device with internet (works on desktop, laptop, and smartphone – I tried all 3). Also, they offer a free trial period of 5 days.

The \$35 per month is their cheapest plan (Silver) but even the cheapest plan gets you unlimited group classes (the classes run all day long so take as many as you want whenever you want). I suspect they'll change this in the future but those who get in on the original deal will probably be able to keep their original plan at the original price (in other words: they're low-balling themselves, get in now). The two additional plans are at \$59 and \$79 per month and they get you some private, one-on-one classes (2 private classes per month and 4 private classes per month, respectively).

Note: These packages with private classes included would be a great way for someone who wants or genuinely needs (e.g., our hypothetical student above) a one-on-one tutor to get one at a very affordable rate as part of a package that includes unlimited group classes as well.

For those of you wondering how their rate for private classes compares with what you'd pay for a similar 1 hour class with a good tutor on [iTalki](#): fear not, I have done the math for you. A good Spanish tutor on [iTalki](#) will run you about \$10-15/hour, with [GoSpanish](#) going from the \$35 plan to the \$59 one gets you, in addition to unlimited group classes, 2 private, 1-hour classes (with good teachers in my opinion) for an additional \$24 ($59 - 35 = 24$), or \$12/class. Pretty reasonable. If you go for the Platinum plan at \$79/month, that nets you 4 private classes for an additional \$44 ($79 - 35 = 44$), or \$11/class, so a slightly better deal.

Honestly, that's pretty good: that's at the low end of what you'll find on [iTalki](#). If you want private tutoring, the upgrade is probably worth the premium, yes. If you don't, it's not. You're not going to do much better than \$11-\$12/hour anywhere else.”

Most of the above is from the first couple of paragraphs of a very thorough review I did of [GoSpanish](#) on my website, which you can read here if you like. I include much more information about how the classes work, screenshots of the interface, and a video of me actually using [GoSpanish](#).

I've worked with and recommended them for a couple of years now and always had good experiences, as have all of my readers (I've yet to get a complaint and people *do* email me if they have problems with something I've directed them to).

[Check out GoSpanish here](#). If you use one of my links, such as that right before this sentence, to [GoSpanish](#) contained in this e-book (it has my tracking code in it) and the coupon code, "**spanishwithandrew**" (don't include the quotes), then **you'll get 10% off**.

I would like to point out that there is one other company that provides a comparable service which I have *not* tried but which seems to have good reviews: [Lingoda](#) ([check out their site here](#)). You'll notice that they're substantially more expensive and I'd like to explain why, lest you think it's a quality issue. All of [GoSpanish's](#) tutors are based in Latin America which has a cost of living 3-5 **times** lower than that of Spain, which is where the tutors for [Lingoda](#) are based (so if you need to learn Iberian Spanish and want online group classes then [Lingoda](#) is your only option right now, as best I'm aware). [GoSpanish's](#) primary expense, paying their tutors, costs them far less than what it costs [Lingoda](#) simply because [Lingoda's](#) tutors live in Spain where the cost of living is much higher – it's simply that, nothing more.

[iTalki](#)

There are other platforms that connect you with language tutors in a similar manner, but none approach [iTalki](#) in size or popularity. I've used [iTalki](#) exclusively for a decade now with around 600 lessons taken in 3 different languages (Spanish, French, and German), and I highly recommend them if you want a personal, one-on-one tutor (especially if you need customized lessons, you need to learn Spanish from Spain, or you have a lot of money to spend on one-on-one tutors, otherwise a combination package of group classes and private lessons from [GoSpanish](#) is probably going to be better value for money).

Here's how [iTalki](#) works:

1. You sign up for an account (this is free).
2. Click on "Find a Teacher" in the top right menu bar.
3. Select the language you want to learn.
4. Select the other criteria that you want to specify (you do *not* have to specify any of these that you do not want to).
5. Peruse the profiles of the available teachers. Watch their introductory videos, read about the various classes and packages they offer, check the reviews quickly to make sure there's nothing awful there (that's about all those reviews are good for, it's rare you'll see a tutor with less than about 4.8/5 stars).
6. Schedule **one** class with them (be aware that if you just signed up you likely qualify for a limited number of short, I believe 30-minute, "trial classes" at a substantial discount). I don't care how perfect they appear to be for what you want to do or what kind of discount they're offering for packages of 5 or 10 classes, just schedule one class to begin with and take it from there. It usually takes me 2 or 3 classes to really be certain whether I want to stay with a particular tutor or not. When you *are* certain that you want to stick with a specific tutor, then it makes sense to purchase a package of 5 or 10 classes at a discount if they offer that (most do).

7. You'll have your class with them over (probably) Skype, though some tutors offer Google Hangouts, Zoom, or iTalki's own proprietary system (it was buggy for me when I tried it a few months ago, I stick with Skype).
8. Do the best you can to ensure the following *before* your class begins:
 - a. That you have a quiet environment with a good internet connection for the duration of the class (usually one hour).
 - b. That you have a good quality microphone and webcam (built-in mics that laptops/tablets tend to have are ok but if you can do better you should, audio quality is paramount). If you have to choose, audio quality is more important than video quality. The same goes for headphones: unless you have an awesome speaker system hooked up to your computer, use headphones.
 - c. That disturbances will be minimized; ask roommates/family not to disturb you, put your phone on "Do Not Disturb" or at least on vibrate/silent mode. I also have found that shutting down my email client (e.g., Outlook, Microsoft Mail, Thunderbird, etc.) eliminates a lot of annoyance because I get a "Ding!" and notification on my screen every time I receive an email.
 - d. It's not necessary but I find it useful to have some references already pulled up in my web browser. I specifically have open, in four tabs in one window: Google Image Search, a Spanish dictionary, Reverso Context, and Wikipedia in the language that I'm learning (so es.wikipedia.org for Spanish). Wikipedia in Spanish is useful as it allows you to look up lots of things that will come up in discussion – the tutor can help you with the Spanish when you can't understand something.
9. You shouldn't need to worry about notetaking during the lesson, the tutor should be writing all corrections for you. What I prefer is for them to write the whole sentence in question, that contains the word or phrase I'm having trouble with or want to learn (whether it's a sentence they said or one you're trying to say, doesn't matter, same for both), in Skype or Google Docs or wherever they're taking notes for you. After the lesson is over I'll enter that sentence into my flashcard program (I use Anki) and create a fill-in-the-blank card (known as a "Cloze deletion") out of each sentence where the word or phrase I want to learn will be blanked out on the front of the card and I have to remember what they are before turning over the card to see if I'm right (the back of the card will contain the full sentence with nothing blanked out).

[Check out their site here.](#)

Don't be afraid to go through several tutors before you find one you like, this is not abnormal and they won't be insulted (students stop scheduling classes for a whole variety of reasons, not just because they're displeased with the tutor).

Websites That Use Popular Media in Spanish (movies, shows, YouTube videos, music, etc.) to Teach You Spanish

This is such a great way to learn a language because you use popular media made by and for native speakers but it's presented in a way, within a framework (the video is embedded in a custom interface), that's specifically designed to teach the Spanish being spoken. I'm talking about using movies, shows, YouTube videos, music videos, etc. that are made by and for native Spanish speakers, to learn Spanish. The Spanish they use is entirely authentic, they speak just like they do every day in the same way that

characters in English-language shows you watch speak normal, everyday English. Not only that, but you're far more likely to remember what you initially learned if you learned it in an interesting, logical context – you have things to connect it to (the characters and what they were doing and talking about at the time). Now, especially if you're a beginner, you might think there's a problem with this...

There *is* a problem with this if you're just watching the movie or show with no assistance whatsoever: you can't understand what they're saying and they're speaking so fast you have trouble even figuring out what to search for in the dictionary. Most online streaming services and TV stations now offer subtitles in the language spoken – this is a massive improvement. What's even better about the services I'm about to recommend is that they go far beyond that and offer not only subtitles in the language spoken but subtitles in English as well (you can enable either, both, or neither), integrated dictionaries and flashcards (you click a word in the subtitles and it's definition is automatically displayed to the right of the video player *and* it's added to your flashcards for later review), quizzes and games based on that specific video and the Spanish used in it, and more.

This is an excellent supplement to a good tutor or language exchange partner (addressed in the next section below), it's very popular, and there are a couple of sites that specialize in this which I have recommended for years. The two services I recommend you have a look at are:

[Yabla](#)

[Yabla](#) is a company I used to improve my Spanish shortly after I had just started learning it. They're constantly upgrading their interface and adding new videos for their users. You've got everything from short, 30-second clips from YouTube or Latin American soap operas (called "telenovelas") to hour-long documentaries to choose from. The majority of it is media made by and for native speakers, not some contrived Spanish-course meant for students where the Spanish is intentionally dumbed-down and the speakers speak *extra* slowly and clearly (so, not naturally as they normally would) for the student. You get movies, shows, YouTube videos, and more that were intended for adult, native speakers of Spanish, this way you learn to speak just like they do.

You can [check out their site here](#), or you can read [my full-length review of them on my website here](#) (I include a lot of screenshots but beware those are a few years old and [Yabla](#) has upgraded a lot of things since then).

[FluentU](#)

They do more or less the same thing as Yabla, and in a similar way, but I have not personally tried their service so I don't want to say anymore than I know. I know they've been around for years and have very good reviews, so I wanted to include them here as an alternative so you can have a look at both and choose the one you prefer.

[Check out their site here.](#)

Podcasts

This is an excellent option for any foreign language student regardless of ability because of the enormous variety of podcasts available in so many different languages for students of all levels. You can utilize these any time and place that you can listen to something, and they're excellent for improving listening comprehension as well as speaking ability if you can repeat after the speaker in the environment you're in.

I've really just got one particular company I recommend above all others if you're a beginner or intermediate-level student:

[SpanishPod101](#)

I've used them for years now: to improve my Spanish, to learn German, and then to learn French. They're an especially good choice for beginners and intermediates because they design their podcasts especially for students at different levels. They have a whole series of podcasts for complete beginners who speak no Spanish whatsoever, from which you can then move on to their advanced beginner series, from which you can then move on to their low-intermediate series, and on and on up through the advanced series. This amounts to an enormous amount – thousands of hours' worth – of podcasts in Spanish.

They talk about topics of interest to language students: lots of cultural subjects addressing different aspects of the cultures and histories of various Spanish-speaking countries, how to perform common and useful tasks in Spanish-speaking countries like ordering food or purchasing groceries, local holidays and festivals, local food, customs and manners particular to certain Spanish-speaking countries, etc.

They also provide lots of useful tools for language students (remember, these are podcasts made expressly for language students), such as full transcripts of every podcast with an English translation of it, worksheets for each podcast based on the new grammar, syntax, and vocabulary that was introduced in that podcast, and more.

[Check out their site here.](#)

Language Exchange Apps and Websites

A language exchange is an interaction where you effectively pay for a language lesson *with* a language lesson, e.g., you pay for a Spanish lesson with an English lesson. What you do is get together with the native speaker of a language you want to learn and in exchange for them helping you with their native language, you help them with your native language. For example, you find a Spanish speaker and meet (online or in person) for one hour, during which you spend 30 minutes speaking Spanish and having them help you, and 30 minutes speaking English where you help them.

This is still done in person, and if you can do it that way, you should. However, the overwhelming majority of these take place online via Skype, Zoom, etc.

This is free in terms of money, the only thing it costs you is your time (like I said, you effectively pay for it with time instead of money by spending half the call helping them with their English).

Remember what I said about what native speakers were good for, my point being to emphasize the difference between them and professional teachers and thereby help you determine which one best suits your needs. Native speakers (with no formal language instruction training and little to no experience) are very good for:

1. **Telling you when you've made a mistake.** They're great at error correction. You, for example, can easily look at, or listen to, a sentence in English and tell if there are any errors and, if so, where. Odds are you can't explain, at least not very well, *why* it's wrong, especially if said explanation requires knowledge of technical grammar (e.g., "Always use the simple present tense for habitual actions and the present progressive tense for current, ongoing actions"). If

you primarily want to learn how to converse informally in a foreign language, this isn't a problem because you don't need technical explanations like that, you just need to be told when you're saying something wrong and then how to say it right – any native speaker can do this for you.

2. **Telling you how to say something you're having trouble expressing.** You have some particular information you want to convey in their native language (describing an action, feeling, concept, etc.) and you don't quite know how to do it the way that you want to do it – they can tell you how. You just need to get across to them what it is you want to say and then they can quickly and easily tell you how to say it correctly and naturally in their language.

If all you want to do is improve your ability to converse orally in their language then the above is precisely what you need and all you really need, presuming you don't need to use the language for some specialized purpose like an exam or professional communication (law, medicine, engineering) where they'd have to be able to teach you the relevant technical language.

Here are some websites and apps where you can find language exchange partners:

[iTalki](#)

This time, after you've registered for your free account and logged in, click "Community" in the top menu bar. There you'll find tons of people looking for language exchange partners, for doing both written and spoken language exchanges (written ones are where you correct something they've written in exchange for them later helping you with something you've written in their native language). It's very easy to find such a request from a native Spanish speaker, or post your own, and arrange to talk with them sometime via Skype.

[Check out their site here.](#)

[HelloTalk](#)

This has become an extremely popular app and is probably the single most popular way for people interested in language exchanges to find each other. The free version is fine but the limitation is that you're only allowed to select one target language, so if you're learning more than one language at once it may be worth it to upgrade if you try the app and decide you like it. You can send both text and voice messages to people through the app as well as make voice and video calls to them (this is ideally what you want to do: have a real-time video call with your partner where you can talk naturally and see each other's body language).

[Check out their site here.](#)

[Tandem](#)

This is essentially the same thing as HelloTalk: an app that lets you connect to language exchange partners so you can help each other out. It has most of the same features (messaging, video-calling, etc.), so if you're interested in either one I'd recommend trying both and just sticking with the one you prefer.

[Check out their site here.](#)

[Bilingua](#)

Yet another app just like the preceding two, this one stands out through its proprietary algorithm that purports to save you substantial time and effort by using the personal criteria you enter to match you up with appropriate language exchange partners.

You tell [Bilingua](#) which language you want to learn, what your native language is, what your interests are, what you're looking for in a partner, and what you want to talk about with them, and then it delivers what it believes are the best matches for you.

[Check out their site here.](#)

[My Language Exchange](#)

This is only a website, not an app, and it's been around forever so there are a *ton* of members. This is good as you have a practically endless number of people to contact and initiate language exchanges with. The downside of this site is that you have to pay in order to be able to do that (contact other members); it's not expensive, just \$6/month or \$24/year, but I thought I should point this out.

The site itself only serves as a means to find and contact other people who may potentially be interested in having a language exchange with you, it does not actually host the exchange itself, you have to arrange that with the other person. So you would contact someone via My Language Exchange, they would decide they want to talk to you, and then the two of you would proceed however you liked (simply doing a written exchange via emails, scheduling a Skype call, talking on WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, etc.).

[Check out their site here.](#)

[The Mixxer](#)

This is an entirely free site set up by a Japanese teacher at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. Its goal is to connect people who wish to have a language exchange on Skype. The teacher believes, and I agree, that actually talking in real-time with a native speaker as soon as possible, and as much as possible, is a top priority in learning a language. When you search for partners you will see, in each profile, a link to their Skype username that you can click which will immediately start Skype on your computer or device (presuming it's installed) so that you can request that they allow you to chat with them (Skype allows you to send a short message explaining what you want along with the request). You can also send people messages directly via the site if you prefer.

[Check out their site here.](#)

References I Use and Recommend

[Dictionaries](#)

What you choose here will somewhat be based on your current abilities, that is whether you pick a dictionary that's completely in Spanish or one that's Spanish-English/English-Spanish (this is what most of you will need).

[SpanishDict](#)

I think this is probably the best Spanish dictionary *in English*. I love that, with a lot of their definitions, they provide videos of native speakers using the word in a real-life context and pronouncing it for you. I've found their definitions to be thorough and correct.

[Check out their site here.](#)

WordReference

This is another one with the definitions in English, and it's probably the most popular foreign-language dictionary online (they provide dictionaries for a lot of different languages).

[Check out their site here.](#)

Diccionario de la Lengua Española

This is *the* official dictionary of the Spanish language. It's run by the [Royal Spanish Academy](#) (La Real Academia Española) and is entirely in Spanish. The sole contributor to the dictionary used to be the Royal Spanish Academy, an official government institute of Spain, but that has now changed and includes contributions from other academic institutes throughout Latin America, so it's now much more diverse with words and definitions from all over the Spanish-speaking world.

Be warned, however, that not only is it entirely in Spanish, it's in advanced, sometimes technical and/or esoteric Spanish, using words within its definitions that are rarely used and with which even some native speakers aren't familiar. As such, I recommend it only for advanced-intermediate and advanced students (so around B2 level and up).

[Check out their site here.](#)

Reverso Context

This is easily the single resource I use the most for *all* foreign languages. I love it because it not only provides simple, short definitions at the top of each results page, but also because those definitions are based on translations of real-world contexts in which the word or phrase was used, *and* because those contexts and their translations are then displayed below.

So you quickly get a short list of potential meanings and then a bunch of real-world examples of the word or phrase you searched for being used, *and* an English translation of each of those examples. Fantastic.

[Check out their site here.](#)

Other

Forvo

This is such a cool idea and it's so useful for language students, it amazes me that more don't know about it. It's community-driven, a.k.a. crowd-sourced, meaning that it's the members of the site who make all the contributions. What it is, is a word/phrase pronunciation reference, essentially. You can search for any word, phrase, expression, or proper name (person, city, country, river, building, brand name, etc.) and then get *recordings of native speakers saying it for you* so you now know how to correctly pronounce it.

If you have an account (they're free) you can download the recordings, which can then be easily added to flashcards in most flashcard apps.

The site is very popular and has lots of users so you're very unlikely to search for anything and not get any results. For example, right now just for Spanish, they have 70,139 registered members who are native Spanish speakers and 325,139 words/phrases pronounced.

[Check out their site here.](#)

[Urban Dictionary](#)

Yes, really. It and the following site are great for looking up slang and informal expressions in Spanish that you can't find in the preceding references (in other words, if all else fails, look here).

If you come across some slang or an expression, especially if it's very localized (unique to one place), and you can't find it elsewhere, check [Urban Dictionary \(click here for their site\)](#) and...

[Asi Hablamos](#)

This is a reference specifically for Latin American Spanish and focuses on local, informal words and expressions. It is meant for Spanish-speakers themselves so it's entirely in Spanish.

[Check out their site here.](#)

[Fundéu RAE](#) and the [Diccionario panhispánico de dudas](#)

These two are more or less the same thing. You have questions, they have answers. One is run officially by the Royal Spanish Academy and the other merely consults the Academy. I honestly don't understand why they're separate, but they are (I'm guessing they were founded at different times by different organizations).

They're essentially FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). People (typically native speakers) send in questions they have about Spanish and then the organizations answer these questions and publish them (and their answers) on their respective websites. Both sites are entirely in Spanish, though of course you can always just plug them into Google Translate if you like (simply copy the URL of the page you want translated and paste it into Google Translate and it'll translate the whole page for you).

Check out their sites [here \(Fundéu RAE\)](#) and [here \(Diccionario panhispánico de dudas\)](#).

[Wikipedia in Spanish](#)

I have found that the best Wikipedia articles about things which are particular to certain countries (places, buildings, people, celebrations, holidays, government agencies, etc.) are those articles in the native language *of that country*, e.g., the clearest, most accurate, and most detailed article about the French Revolution is the version of it that's in French. Not only are you getting the best information when you read the Spanish-language version of articles about things concerning Spanish-speaking countries and cultures, but it's also excellent practice.

Something you'll find very useful for your web browser is the Google Translate extension which allows you to click on any word in a foreign language and be immediately presented with the translation for it. It's currently available for [Chrome](#), [Firefox](#), [Opera](#), and [Edge](#). There is [something similar for Safari](#).

[Check out the Spanish Wikipedia page here.](#)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I really hope this has helped you. This guide was almost certainly not what you were expecting because there *is* no single best (or even good) way to learn a language for everyone and that's probably what you thought this was going to be: "just follow these six easy steps – do x, y, and z – and voila! In just a few months you'll be fluent in Spanish!". No, that's nonsense, and anybody who tells you they've got something that will do that is lying to you.

I could not possibly tell *you* how to learn Spanish *because I don't know you!* I have no idea what your needs, goals, and circumstances are. I don't know what you want to be able to accomplish in Spanish, how much time you have, or when, where, and under what circumstances you have time to study Spanish (if you have spare time at work, then is it quiet there and are you left alone, like in your own office, or are there lots of noise and people milling about? It matters!). I believe that a single language-learning system/method that will work effectively and efficiently for most students simply does not exist.

What you really need is some general guidance about how to learn a language, a list of quality resources that's fairly comprehensive such that the right combination of them will be effective for most students when employed properly, and then you need some more specific guidance that will help you choose the correct resources *for you* and help you construct a plan of which ones to use when, where, and how. That's what this guide aspires to do. I hope it has done that for you.

Don't forget to check out my website, [Spanish with Andrew](#), as well as [my YouTube channel](#) where you can find tons of articles, videos, resources, reviews, tips, tools, techniques, etc. that will help you learn Spanish and other languages (I've focused on helping English-speakers learn Spanish up until now but I give a lot of advice and recommend a lot of resources that will help you learn *any* language, and I'm currently learning German and French in addition to Spanish so don't hesitate to ask me about those if you're learning them). [I'm very active on Pinterest](#), usually pinning useful language-learning infographics, websites, and tools every day. I'm also on [Instagram as "andrewhasacamera"](#) and on [TikTok as "andrewmtracey"](#) – both of those have a lot of short videos that will help you with Spanish and language-learning in general; I plan on increasing my posting frequency soon (I *will* manage to reach several videos per day, I promise). I have [a Twitter account](#) where I occasionally post short tips and links to useful/funny things related to languages. Lastly, please feel free to contact me for any reason at andrew@traceylanguages.com. I'll be happy to help you and I welcome feedback about this guide.

Cheers,

Andrew Tracey