Zero to Fluent in Spanish in 9 Months

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- by Ben Curtis
“I had to do something...”

When I came to Spain in 1998, I knew a handful of basic phrases in Spanish, enough to get a room for the night, a drink, and a ham and cheese sandwich. Things had to change!

9 months later I was pretty much fluent, and although I still had a LOT of grammar and vocabulary left to learn, I could chat away with Spanish people on anything from food to music and, if I was really unlucky, politics!

The fact that I was living in Spain and super motivated really helped a lot, but I’m convinced that the steps outlined below, the exact same steps I took to get fluent fast, will be useful to you too, no matter where you are learning Spanish, or what your current level is.

I’ve split the list into two sections, Collecting Spanish, and Speaking Spanish:

Collecting Spanish

1. I became a human sponge, absorbing everything in Spanish that I possibly could. I soaked it in from TV shows, newspapers, billboards, and films. (On my first day in Spain, I accidentally saw Saving Private Ryan dubbed into Spanish at the cinema. I didn’t understand a word but I know it helped!)

2. I kept my ears wide open, eavesdropping on conversations I heard in bars, on the Metro, out in the street... (if you don't live in a Spanish speaking country, that's where our Spanish podcasts and worksheets come in). I was always listening out for interesting phrases and words I’d never heard before. Then...
3. I never stopped asking questions. Friends who knew more Spanish than me, teachers, *intercambios*... I bombarded them with **non-stop questions** about all the things I’d heard out in the wild. What did it all mean!?

4. BUT, I skipped learning words I felt were too advanced for whatever stage I was at. I knew I’d come across them again later anyway, so I could drop one or two along the way for now. It’s really important to **filter out the complex stuff** in this way, because you just can’t learn everything all at once!

5. I wrote down just about all the vocabulary and phrases I wanted to keep hold of in **a special book**, and tested myself regularly to make sure I learned it all.

At the same time as you are **collecting**, you need to be...

### Speaking Spanish

6. I put **fluency above accuracy**. Of course I wanted to be accurate and speak as well as possible, but during that first year, more than anything I just wanted to speak! So...

7. I **never worried about making mistakes**. Neither should you! You learn lots more from making mistakes and having people point them out!

8. I got myself **intercambios**, and lots of them. This meant meeting a Spanish person for a couple of hours in a bar, speaking for half the time in English (for them to practice) and half the time in Spanish (for me!) Also...
9. I never held back in class. Don’t be shy, you **have to speak out in class** or you just don’t get to make the most of your teacher. Just because no one else wants to risk looking silly by answering a question, doesn’t mean you can’t!

10. I tried to show off what I knew whenever I could. You’re making a big effort to learn all this stuff, so make sure you use it whenever and with whoever you can! Be proud and, above all, **enjoy using your new skills!**

I really hope this list helps. Just remember, you don’t have to be living in a Spanish Speaking country to put these tips to use immediately. Keep yourself as motivated as possible, and **you’ll be fluent in Spanish in no time!**

*Saludos desde Madrid,*

Ben, Notes in Spanish

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