

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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