

Congratulations!

You are now embarking on the wonderful journey of learning Spanish!

Learning a language –any language– has many benefits. Here are only a few:

- It helps your brain stay **sharp**.
- It enhances your knowledge of your **own language**.
- It gives you **access** to a large number of books, movies, music, TV shows, etc. in their original language, their original flavor!
- It gives you a chance to consider everything from a **new perspective**.

And, in the case of Spanish, it also gives you the opportunity to speak with some **500 million** more people!

Sure, there are also some challenges. Another language is a **different way of thinking** about the world around us. You will find that some ideas are expressed very differently from what you would expect. You will find some things a bit harder, and others **much easier**. And you will find things that are used exactly as in English, your mother tongue, or some other language you already speak!

Do you think you know nothing about Spanish? Well, that's not true. You probably know words like *fiesta, burrito, nada, siesta, adiós, macho, salsa, pronto, loco, amigo, tornado, patio*, and even places such as *Colorado, Nevada, Buena Vista, Los Ángeles*.

Also, there are **many words** that are **very similar** in English and Spanish. You can probably recognize words like *idea, problema, diferente, familia*.

But be careful! Some could be **false friends** –they look familiar, but their meaning is totally different! A famous one is *embarazada*, which doesn't mean *embarrassed*, but *pregnant*. Also, *librería* is a *bookstore* and *lectura* means *reading*.

Nowadays, there are many **resources** you can use to help you improve your language skills, and to immerse yourself in Spanish. Music, movies, podcasts, videos, etc. can help you with your listening skills, and to start getting used to the sounds of the language. You can try reading a blog or other website in Spanish and see how many words you understand. These things are useful to get to know the culture as well. Spanish is spoken in many countries with many different cultures. So you have a lot to explore!



Do I have to study grammar?

Studying grammar sounds like a **tedious** task. I don't think it is that useful to do hundreds of exercises on a very specific topic of the language you don't fully understand. I think it is more important to **expose** yourself to Spanish (listening and reading) and find out these nuances on your own.

However, I do think it is important to understand the **basic structure** of the language, and that means learning some general aspects of Spanish grammar.

Which variant of Spanish should I learn?



Spanish is the official language in 21 countries, and it is spoken in other 27 countries¹. Each of these regions has a **different cultural background**, which has had an impact on the language.

Although I do not believe there is a "neutral Spanish," I do think it is possible to learn a rather general, standard form of Spanish. Also, bear in mind that Spanish speakers can understand each other, and the use of different words and expressions causes some very funny moments! Some everyday objects may be called differently, and some expressions may have different connotations in one country or another. You can try to learn the most common words and expressions of the Spanish variant you are (or intend to be) more in contact with.

For example, *you* has many different forms in Spanish (*tú, vos, usted, vosotros, ustedes*). However, **you don't need to learn them all**. The most common throughout the Spanish world are *tú* (singular) and *ustedes* (plural). If you learn those two, you'll be just fine. You only need to know that the other forms exist, and in time also understand them when you hear someone using them, but that's all.

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To expand our minds and to become more fully civilized members of the human race, we should learn as many different languages as we can. The diversity of tongues is a treasure and a resource for thinking new thoughts. David Bellos

¹ According to statistics by *Instituto Cervantes*, 2021.