

9 Hacks to Learning Spanish Faster & Easier

**Discover Tips to Unlock More Vocabulary &
Get More Out of Studying Spanish.**



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1. Learning Opposites

This one tip can help you to dramatically grow your vocabulary and improve your recall of words. Think about it this way: when using a word, at some point, you may need to express the opposite idea (*yo me despierto* vs *yo me duermo*). So, whenever you learn a word, identify if it has an opposite and then make sure to learn it at the same time. To be clear on what I'm talking about, here's an example list of words and their opposites or antonyms.

Word	Antonym/Opposite
Good	Bad
High	Low
Hot	Cold
Left	Right
Up	Down
Light	Dark
Beautiful	Ugly
Soft	Hard
Smart	Dumb
Less	More

By learning opposites, you'll balance out your knowledge of the language as you increase your vocabulary. I've had lots of students that knew how to say one thing in Spanish, but they couldn't convey the opposite idea. So, if the new word you just learned has an opposite or antonym, don't hesitate and make a point of learning it immediately. That said, not all words have opposites or direct antonyms.

2. Learn Synonyms and Close Alternatives

In Spanish, there are numerous ways to express an idea. For instance, there are many ways to call something or [someone beautiful](#) as well as ways to tell someone that you [love them](#). However, each word or expression conveys a slightly different meaning, which can help clarify your thoughts or feelings.

For instance, when it comes to telling someone that you love them, there are certain expressions and terms that make it clear that you're saying it to a friend or family member, while others are only used in a romantic sense. Learning synonyms and close alternatives will enable you to start expressing your ideas with a much deeper and richer set of vocabulary.

Word	Synonyms & Alternatives
Good	Great, Fine, Fair
Hot	Scorching, Warm, Attractive
Dark	Dim
Beautiful	Pretty, Handsome, Gorgeous
Smart	Intelligent, Clever, Astute

Let's take another example from the table above. Depending on the synonym we use for 'smart', I'll convey a different message. If I say that one of my brothers is intelligent while the other is clever, you can probably imagine one is more book-smart while the other is more street-smart.

By learning synonyms not only will you be able to express your thoughts more accurately, but you'll also challenge yourself to broaden and deepen your vocabulary, which will take you from a beginner to an advanced, fluent Spanish speaker. As is the case with learning opposites and antonyms, many words won't have synonyms or alternatives.

3. Prepare Yourself for Future Topics Ahead of Time

When learning Spanish, you'll find that some topics are easier than others.

This is completely natural!

Vocabulary usually isn't what most people struggle with. If they know enough of the language to be naturally encouraged to speak it then they'll absorb the additional vocab they need in time. The trickier topics are often what hold people back from advancing or unlocking enough from the language to speak it confidently without it feeling like it's a chore or taking much effort.

Depending on your level of Spanish, you'll face different challenges. Among several other key topics, beginners often experience difficulty with the [preterite](#) and [imperfect](#) past tenses. Intermediate learners struggle with subjunctive tenses and object pronouns. Advanced learners struggle with prepositions, among other topics.

What ends up holding a lot of learners back is the expectation that each topic will take as long or as little time as the last one. There have been topics I would teach that would only take 1-2 days. Other topics would take 2 weeks to complete. Whether people are learning it on their own or in the classroom, these larger and more challenging topics give the sense that the students are stuck and are not moving forward with the same momentum they once felt.

If instead, Spanish students knew:

"Hey, A, B, and C are easy but D, E, and F are really tricky topics and you should expect they'll take weeks to get through each and even longer to master."

...then this would shift people's learning expectations.

Depending on where you are in your learning journey, you can use the roadmap to look ahead and forecast which of the upcoming topics you have to learn will be easier and which will be more challenging. Based on that, you can mentally prepare yourself for those more demanding lessons.

By knowing which things will naturally take more time than others, you can give yourself permission to be more patient during certain parts of your Spanish learning journey. That way, you don't falsely believe that it's taking longer than it should for you to advance. Instead, you know that you're just going through one of the trickier parts of the journey.

4. Associate with a Quirky/Memorable Trick or Rule

Exposure and repetition with vocabulary, verbs and a lot of the grammar will work for many folks. Often, it's a game of wash, rinse, and repeat. But there are certain topics in Spanish (many of them grammar-heavy or conjugation-specific) where it's just down right harder to learn! Often it comes down to deciding if you're supposed to use one word over another ("Por vs para... there's a 50% chance I'll use the right one."), a certain conjugation ("Is this verb in my statement supposed to be subjunctive or indicative?" or "Am I speaking about the past in a preterite or imperfect sense?"), or a pronoun ("Is this verb reflexive or reciprocal?").

Each of these topics have been covered in-depth many times by many Spanish teachers... including yours truly! And many of us distill these difficult topics down to simple guidelines, rules, and key points. Many students will get the gist of it from these rules and guidelines. But others still struggle.

It's not a big deal.

Everyone's path in Spanish is different, everyone learns differently, and therefore, the information clicks differently in our minds. So, for those who still struggle with these tricky topics (many do, so you're not alone), I recommend learning a quirky, memorable trick to help you resolve these issues.

Let's look at an example. When deciding whether a statement should be preterite or imperfect, some of my students use:

"If you cannot perfectly point out a (specific) moment in time in the past, then it must be imperfect. If you can perfectly point out or reference a point in time when something happened, then it's not imperfect (and therefore it must be preterite)."

In other words, we are relating:

- The **Imperfect tense** as non-singular (meaning that the action was more like a habit) and ambiguous.
- The **Preterite tense** as singular and precise.

Here's another example. When trying to decide if she needed to use reflexive or non-reflexive verbs, a former student would take a moment to ask herself:

"Okay, am I washing my hands or am I helping my baby sister to wash her hands? If I'm washing her hands, I'm performing the action, but it's her who benefits from it. If that's the case, it cannot be a reflexive verb."

So, if you can apply this type of memorable statement or analogy which helps you distill many rules down to one and solidify the concept, you might just nail it!

P.S. - If you struggle with preterite and imperfect tense, you can check out my article comparing the two and sharing the rules, guidelines and scenario chart [here](#).

5. Make a Study/Practice Schedule for Consistency

One of the most effective ways to learn Spanish is by chipping away at it consistently. The more time you put into practice, the faster you'll pick up the language. One of the best ways to learn is by immersion, being in an environment where you're forced to use the language. However, everyone's situation is different and this means that:

1. Many people won't have the same opportunities.
2. Your immersion time will vary.

Yes, immersion is important, but consistency is key.

Let's take an example of two students, John and Alice, who want to learn Spanish. John is traveling to Mexico and will be there for 1 week. Alice is going to study and practice Spanish at home using her computer, phone, textbooks, audio recordings, videos lectures, apps, you name it.

If we give both students the same amount of time to study, but different study schedules, how will their results change?

Let's say that for the 7 days that John is in Mexico, he interacts with people for 12 hours per day. That means that he will have:

$$7 \text{ days} \times 12 \text{ hours/day} = \underline{84 \text{ hours}} \text{ of Spanish study in total}$$

Now, we'll give Alice the same amount of total hours to study Spanish. But since she's studying at home, she only has a certain amount of time every day that she can commit to studying Spanish. So, let's say that she commits 30 minutes (0.5 hours) per day. This means that she will be able to study:

$$84 \text{ hours} / 0.5 \text{ hours/day} = \underline{168 \text{ days}}$$

While John will get his full 84 hours of Spanish practice in 1 week, Alice will be practicing over the span of 168 days or roughly 5 and a half months! By the end of it, who's likely to learn more Spanish? Alice, of course! By being consistent, she'll learn more and retain more than John likely will. Yes, immersion is important, but you'll get much further with consistency.

The reasoning is simple: your mind and body need time to rest and recover. When you learn a new skill, your brain, body or both need time to rest and efficiently store the new information. When you add time, consistent practice and sufficient rest, you'll go much further.

Don't believe me? Apply these two approaches to any other skill in life. It could be fitness, bodybuilding, swimming, martial arts, math, science, you name it!

*Let's take fitness for instance:

1. John goes to the gym for 12 hours per day, 7 days straight. By day 3, John probably can't even lift anymore weights since his body is so sore and tired. In fact, in this context, 12 hours per day for 1 week is probably doing more harm than good. The body isn't getting enough rest.

2. Alice goes to the gym for 30 minutes per day, 7 days a week, until she reaches 84 hours in total. Because Alice sticks to exercising routinely for 30 minutes a day, she's much more likely to reach her fitness goals.

**Disclaimer: I'm not a fitness expert and am not recommending either of these workout schedules or routines. So, while Alice's approach is overall the better one, you should not take this as advice for a healthy, safe, or balanced exercise routine. They are simply contrasting examples.*

Learning a subject like computer programming:

1. John goes to a coding bootcamp for 12 hours per day, 7 days straight. By the end of the week, John's probably been exposed to a lot of programming concepts and a coding language or two. However, his brain is likely exhausted and overwhelmed with the influx of information. Long term, he might struggle to retain most of what he learned unless he continues to practice it consistently.

2. Alice codes 30 minutes per day for 168 days straight. Over the 5 and a half months, Alice will learn how to program at a more gradual pace, but she'll have a better understanding and overall working knowledge of programming by learning it in smaller, more manageable chunks. She will likely have retained more of what she's learned and practiced.

Notes:

1) I've learned to code a bit before. And I was a lot like John and less like Alice. When I tried to learn it by studying many hours a day, I hated it! It was confusing because I didn't have time to process anything. On my second attempt I took my time and it was not nearly as hard.

2) Funny enough, computer programming consists of learning programming languages, so while it was difficult for me, I thought this would draw a clear example of an intellectually intensive skill similar to Spanish.

Making it a Habit

There's something else very powerful at work here: the formation of a habit. Since Alice has taken the approach of steady, consistent practice, she's more likely to stick with the study and practice in the long term, which is a key ingredient of success in learning a new language or any other skill.

Consistency and Immersion are Best

I want to end these examples with an important note. With the same amount of practice time, consistency will take you further. So if you had to choose one approach over the other, practice Spanish in manageable, digestible chunks on a consistent basis.

That said, there are many bootcamps and immersion programs. And getting this immersive exposure to a new skill can be extremely useful in leveling up in a skill set. The key is that lots of consistent practice should precede and follow those intensive, immersive experiences. The person who studies Spanish for

3 months before going to Mexico or Spain for a week or two of immersive practice followed by consistent practice after they return will get a lot further (and a lot more out of the immersion program).

Make a Schedule and Follow it Consistently for Success

Now that I've made my points, you should make a schedule for studying and practicing your Spanish. I recommend a minimum of 30 minutes per day of practice. You can study longer if you want. Here are the steps:

1. Choose 1-2 time blocks per day to accommodate for a minimum of 30 minutes total study/practice time.
2. Pick a time of day that works best for you which you can block off in your schedule for uninterrupted learning.
3. Do it every day.

There are different approaches and methodologies you can follow, and of course it will depend on your daily routine and obligations. Some people want to do it first thing in the morning, others at the end of the day.

Note: if you need to find a conversation partner, there are many apps (such as Tandem and HelloTalk) where you can find people to chat in Spanish.

6. Learn Spanish's Language Patterns

Many languages, including Spanish, have patterns within words and sentence structures. Let's take a look at a couple of these:

- Infinitive verbs always end in -ar, -er, and -ir.
- Conjugated verbs often follow specific patterns, too.
- Suffixes are telling of the meaning or classification of the word, as shown in Spanish Language Patterns resource.

An excellent way to expand your vocabulary faster is by learning these patterns. Once you understand these patterns, you'll be able to infer the meaning of new words based on their patterns. This will help you unlock vocabulary at an accelerated pace as you practice Spanish, participate in more conversations, and are exposed to the language.

For more patterns, see the 20 "Secret" Language Patterns in Spanish PDF I've included.

7. Put it into Practice: Understanding What Makes the Biggest Difference in Language Learning

When it comes to learning Spanish or any other language for that matter, there are 4 primary skills that need to be considered in order to master the language.

These 4 skills are: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

If you truly want to master the language, then you need to be strong in all 4 skills. However, in real-world practice, you don't necessarily need to focus on all four skill sets. In fact, it entirely depends on how you'll use the language. For instance, if you plan on using Spanish to communicate with others face-to-face, then you're primarily looking to become conversationally fluent. So, while you need to work on all 4 skills, you must focus on developing your listening and speaking skills. On the other hand, if you're going to be texting friends, writing to penpals, working in a job that requires you to process information in Spanish, then you'll likely need to focus on your reading and writing skills.

Notice a couple of things about these 4 skills;

1. They are often paired together: reading and writing are the visual and kinetic formats of the language, while the second pair, speaking and listening are an auditory format.
2. Each pair consists of an input and output skill: reading and listening are when you are taking information in, whereas speaking and writing are when you are putting information out. So, if you focus on speaking and listening, you will be using and practicing both an input and output skill; one where you take information in (listening) and another where you are broadcasting information to others (speaking).

Ultimately, if you incorporate all 4 channels, you will have the best working knowledge of Spanish and be able to use and enjoy the language to its full potential. And you should. So, what you should do is:

1. Determine how you'll primarily communicate in Spanish (spoken or written).
2. Come up with a plan to focus on those skills and channels of communication.

3. Practice all 4 skills, with a focus on your two primary skills. For instance, you might want to focus 75% of your time on listening and speaking. The remaining 25% of your time would go to reading and writing.
4. Adjust your study/practice plan based on your learning strengths and weaknesses. I've had students where they primarily wanted to speak and listen in Spanish, but they were much stronger at learning, engaging and absorbing new information visually or through writing than they were by simply listening. That could very well be your case! If you find yourself naturally struggling with remembering words or how to pronounce them, then you might need to balance out the skills a little more. So, instead of a 75%-25% split, you can adjust this to 70%-30% or a 60%-40% split to accelerate your learning curve.

8. Relate to Old Information

The first days of learning Spanish can be overwhelming. This is because many students feel that they know nothing about the language, which makes them think that they have a long and difficult path ahead of them. In reality, you're likely to have some existing knowledge that you can use in your favor.

For example, if you speak English, there are certain words that are exactly the same in English as in Spanish (*animal, casual, normal, etc*). As you'll learn on the 20 "Secret" Spanish patterns resource, some English endings have their Spanish counterpart (*legally = legalmente*). So, in this case, you can take advantage of all the vocabulary you already know how to use. You can also do this with verb tenses and other grammatical elements (i.e. understanding what an indirect object is in your language can save you some headaches in Spanish).

Now, I'm not encouraging you to rely on translation, but rather on patterns and structures you already know. As a beginner, translating in your head from Spanish to your language or vice versa may seem a good solution. However, as your learning progresses, you'll encounter more complex structures whose translation might not make any sense. So, you don't want to depend on translation, because eventually it may do more harm than good.

So, take your time to reflect about your language. You'll find that there are some things that you already know that will make your Spanish learning journey easier.

9. Focus on the Type of Spanish You Need

Many of my former students were Americans. And every time I'd tell someone that 'vosotros' was not used in Latin America, they would get upset or disappointed. It's understandable. For them, it was a waste of time and brain power learning conjugations and pronouns they'd never use. The same happens with vocabulary. A lot of students go crazy learning every single word they can just to find out that this vocabulary is not enough to communicate in their daily environments.

A personal example: when I was learning English I took 20 minutes a day to learn random vocabulary. 'Toddler' was one of the first words I learned. To this day, this is probably the third time that I've used this word. It's just a term that I don't use in my daily environment. If back then I knew better, I would have focused on phrases and words that would have made a difference for me.

My point is that you want to be selective. You want to focus your energy on learning the things that will help you reach your goals. If you're aiming to start having conversations as soon as possible, you should learn greetings and other basic phrases that you can find in the 150+ Conversational Spanish Questions & Responses resource. Trust me, taking some time to figure out the dialect and vocabulary you should learn will help you allocate your energy to the things that matter.