

# 34 Learning Ideas for Beginners Spanish I

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As a foreign language learner it is in your hands to make learning happen. You have many resources available to help you achieve this, including your tutor, as you probably have been able to realize by now. The sooner you get into the habit of actively seeking to practice your Spanish the sooner you will develop the confidence and knowledge which will be consolidated as you progress, and which will make further learning easier. The tutor will support you all the way through and these learning ideas are just part of that support.

What follows is a collection of tips, suggestions and general good advice, some of which have been mentioned in class. Now they are put together here for easy access and reference. I hope some of those suggestions have already helped you to be more efficient in making progress, and if you have not tried any yet maybe soon you will realize how much of a difference they may make. This is not a one-fits-all though, but I very much hope that you find at least some of them useful. The content is organized by key words and presented alphabetically. Read through and highlight those which you may find most necessary to be reminded of, or cut out those you want to place somewhere visible. The ultimate aim of this module is to help you develop as an autonomous learner of Spanish as well as to give you a good grounding on the language, at Beginner's level, and both go hand in hand.

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## 1. Appointments

Make an appointment with yourself, and show up!! Is it to learn 10 more words of vocabulary by writing 5 sentences? Or is it to understand a particular use of a tense? Give yourself the time: open your diary and find at least 30 minutes for it and take them. Nothing else can go in there, it is just for you to meet with yourself and get something very specific done. Fix your objectives simply and clearly.

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## 2. Autonomy

Developing as an independent autonomous language learner should be one of your goals throughout this module and beyond. This means giving yourself the opportunity to experiment with different ways in which to keep in touch with the Spanish language from very early on. Learn to organize your time realistically to cover all the ground you need to cover weekly. Make use of the resources you are asked or advised to use, find the ones you like the best or find most helpful. Be selective: target areas you particularly want to improve. Be persistent: get into the habit and the spiral of learning will just unfold.

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## 3. Chronological age versus “Spanish age”

Inevitably, as part of learning a new language, you will experience at times certain frustration because you will wish to say much more than what you can in Spanish. One has to simply accept this and learn to put up with the frustration (yes, that is another skill you will be developing!). Eventually, your “Spanish age” will catch up with your chronological age. That will certainly be one major milestone, though unfortunately it may not be something you experience in the first 10 weeks of your getting started with the language.

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#### **4. Connections**

Your native language, or any other language you know may have sentence patterns that resemble Spanish one's. Noticing similarities and differences makes your learning more structured. Make connections!

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#### **5. Deadlines (and goals)**

Have deadlines, have goals. We all know of the main ones, the ones imposed by the tutor, by the module structure, by the university, by your school. What about the ones set by yourself? Make them SMARTER:

**S**pecific, **S**ignificant, **S**imple.

**M**easurable, **M**eaningful, **M**otivational, **M**anageable.

**A**ttainable, **A**ppropriate, **A**chievable.

**R**elevant, **R**ealistic.

**T**ime-bound, **T**rackable, **T**angible.

**E**njoyable, **E**ngaging.

**R**ecordable, **R**ewarding.

You need to own your work, this is one way to do it.

You can phrase it in different ways:

"Every week I aim to... (learn a minimum of X new words)"

or "Next week I intend to... (meet my language buddy on Monday for 45 minutes to revise the present tense by asking each other questions)".

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#### **6. DIY**

Make your own resources to learn your vocabulary, phrases or grammar points. Word cards, mind maps, three-column vocabulary lists? The important thing is that in creating those resources you have to think about the content and how to organize it, which helps you to become more familiar with it. After that, you just have to use those resources you created, on a regular basis!

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#### **7. Feedback**

There are a number of ways in which you receive feedback throughout this module, including verbally in the classroom, individually or as part of the group. Try to become aware of the multiple ways in which feedback comes your way. From questions and answers to solutions to exercises which are part of your self-study time. If you wish more feedback or specific feedback for a particular piece of work, you can request it. The tutor will be only happy to assist you.

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#### **8. Find out**

What kind of learner are you? It will make a difference in the way you feel about your learning to find out. If you are a visual learner, you may prefer learning your vocabulary using pictures, you may find it easier too! When you create your learning resources you can draw the pictures, or use the internet to create a picture dictionary in your computer.

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## **9. Four language skills**

Among the various skills you will develop as a result of learning Spanish, four of them are certainly crucial and language specific. These are listening, speaking, reading and writing. A good knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is essential to get your four language skills going. Listening, speaking, reading and writing will also help you to improve your vocabulary and grammar!

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## **10. Game**

In the following sentence, each word falls into a grammatical category: "Sevilla is particularly hot at this time of the day". Try to match each word with each of the following grammatical categories: adjective, noun, preposition, adverb, noun, article, demonstrative, verb, noun, preposition. Are you certain of the connections you have made? Check with your learning buddy and/or tutor.

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## **11. Grammar**

When learning grammar remember that facts have to be learnt and that spotting language patterns help you to make new sentences. Also become aware of how grammar and meaning-making are related. It is useful to be aware of the kind of grammar mistakes you make, they may easily fall into a particular type, once you establish this it will be easier for you to correct yourself.

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## **12. Guess**

It is part of developing your learning. Take the cues, take the plunge and see what happens. You will have to do it in real life too, so why not giving it a go in the comfortable and sympathetic atmosphere of a classroom until you get the knack of it and becomes automatic? You will be surprised of how many times you guess right, and if you don't it is also ok! Learning from one's mistakes is one way to make long-lasting learning happen.

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## **13. Homework/ Preparation/ Independent work**

It is important that you use your time out of the classroom well in terms of organizing your different language-related tasks (and this includes the work you decide to schedule for your self-study time, not only the one set for you by the tutor). It is important not only because it gets you to practice relevant language items with regularity, but because it makes it easier for you to identify those aspects of the language that need further clarification or work. Doing homework helps you to make specific questions about the things you do not understand or you do not know well, which in turn enables the tutor to help you out with those. It also makes you to get to know yourself as a language learner. Homework done in time also acts as evidence of your progress and certainly of your efforts to make progress. Soon you will be able to see how far you have come.

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## **14. Interruptions**

They are not as bad as they sound. Your language revision needs spacing, and returning to the same items at different times and in different ways. Bite-size moments are better and more realistic than long hours on the same section of your module program, and the more of them you have the better for developing your long term memory. So you can allow for some interruptions, especially if you schedule them as part of your study time.

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### **15. Language buddy**

You will have one, if you chose to, which means that you could arrange to meet every week to do some of your study and practice together. You could help each other understand language items that are not totally clear for either of you, you could list together a set of questions for your tutor to help you with specific difficulties, you could test each other...

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### **16. Meet (in the future)**

What do you want to say to your future learner-of-Spanish self? Try this:

<http://futureme.org/>

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### **17. Memory**

You lose 80% of the detail you have learned within 24 hours of having learned it. Help your long-term memory by going back to the content as often as possible.

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### **18. Milestones**

The contents listed in the module program act as markers: they break down your progress into a succession of identifiable stages in your task of learning Spanish. In addition to this, you can set yourself other markers, other milestones. Celebrate them when you reach them!

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### **19. Motivation**

If you have a good reason for starting learning Spanish, it will keep you going through thin and thick. However, keep reminding yourself regularly, it is important to have your motivation in sight when it comes to do your minimum of nine hours of self-study a week! With time your motivation may change and get stronger, and you may find that the more you learn, the more it opens up the horizon for travelling and meeting with the native speakers and potential future friends, which in turn makes your learning yet more meaningful, useful and rewarding.

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### **20. Notes**

Do not underestimate the power of a good system to keep your notes and materials you will get from your tutor together and in the right order. Be prepared to change it or adapt it, but do not do without it!

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### **21. Personal (goals)**

Share your goals with other people, let them know about your reasons to learn Spanish, decide to be accountable to someone: it could be your mum, or it could be your best friend, your language buddy, someone you trust, someone that supports you and wants you to do well, surround yourself with the people that believe that what you are doing is good, because it is good indeed!

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### **22. Progress**

Measure and record progress against the goals you have set, not against other students' progress. Your learning process is individual to you because of your specific previous ex-

periences in learning a language, your learning style, your motivations, the amount of work you put in, you name it.

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### **23. Practice**

Often and regularly.

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### **24. Real sources**

You do not have to wait until you are advanced in the study of Spanish to access Spanish language news websites, for example. It is a great and easy way to keep in touch with the language, and you do not need to spend a lot of time to get something out of it. You can click on short video clips and get more familiar with aspects of the spoken language such as intonation, pronunciation and speed. Also, reading an item of news with which you are already familiar in your own language can help you learn some new useful words in context.

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### **25. Reflect**

You can create a blog, or keep a learning journal where you jot down the ups and downs of learning Spanish. Thinking about what you are learning, but also about how you are learning it, helps you to become a better learner. At the end it will also be a tangible and rewarding testimony of the long path of learning you set yourself to walk.

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### **26. Revision, revision, revision**

Content grows quickly! It is simply no good to leave studying it for the very last few weeks of the semester. This, which may be true for other subjects you are studying is particularly true when you are learning a language. Week by week you need to set time aside to practice and to develop your language skills. You will soon realize which ones need paying more attention to, which in turn will be a good indicator of the kind of activities you have to do more often outside the classroom. If you consolidate your learning frequently you will also become a more confident student of Spanish. Learning new stuff will simply stay better on solid ground, and will appear less confusing or challenging than if you are behind with your basics.

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### **27. Plan, do, review**

Plan what you need to do, your learning time, your resources (notes, dictionary, grammar book, CDs, access to a computer, meeting your tutor, etc.), your vocabulary or grammar strategy, your review time. Do your plan, or your language learning or practice activity. Review what you did, why you did it, how well you did it, what you need to do next. Then, plan, do and review again.

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### **28. Questions**

Your tutor is one of your best resources. Do not miss any opportunity to ask all those questions, no matter how small! The answer could be the stepping stone you needed to move forward.

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### **29. Risks**

Take them. Do not worry all the time about making mistakes. Learning a language happens by doing something with it, and even if what you do is not totally right, you will understand any corrections better because you tried first.

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### **30. Self-study**

If every time that you learn some new item of Spanish you do not practice it for sometime it simply and easily gets forgotten. This in turn will make it difficult to take in new information and eventually the whole process of learning, understanding and recalling what you have learnt will be more and more arduous. Self-study helps you maintain the content that you have covered. Lessons, however good, are not enough. Learning Spanish requires that you organize your self-study time from the very start.

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### **31. Skills and employability**

You are learning a foreign language, which means you are learning a number of transferable skills, here are some: creativity, flexibility, group work, communication, organizational and logical skills (just to name a few). They are enhancing your profile for employability in the future.

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### **32. Teach (what you learn)**

If you pass what you have learnt to someone else within 48 hours of learning it, you learn it better.

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### **33. Three-column vocabulary lists**

First column: the word in Spanish, second column: the translation into your own language and third column: a sentence that uses the new word.

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### **34. Transparent languages**

The speakers of some languages like Spanish, Italian and Portuguese can easily work out what words of the other two languages mean simply because they are very similar to their own. These languages are called transparent by some researchers (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996). Transparency in the case of Spanish and Portuguese is very high (90%), whereas between English and Spanish falls somewhere between 25% and 50%. So looking on the positive side, you will find that you can work out the meaning of some words in Spanish easily, which argues for keeping up with your guessing work. On top of it, the more Spanish you learn, the closer you will be to understand other closely related languages like Portuguese and Italian!

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**IF YOU HAVE ANY OTHER SUGGESTION WHICH YOU THINK COULD HELP OTHERS, IF ONLY BECAUSE IT IS HELPING YOU, PLEASE DO LET ME KNOW!!**

