

TOP TEN REASON FOR LEARNING SPANISH

1. Communicate with 350 million native Spanish speakers worldwide.

Spanish is spoken by at least an estimated 350 million people around the world and is currently the 4th most commonly spoken language worldwide. Geographically, a large number of countries have Spanish as a dominant language: Spain, the United States, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Equatorial Guinea, the Philippines, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, Colombia, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Knowing Spanish opens the door for you to communicate with 1/3 of a billion speakers worldwide!

2. Communicate with Spanish-speaking people at home.

If you live in the US, it is possible to maintain almost daily contact with native Spanish speakers in many cities or even in rural areas. This is certainly the case in the many states bordering Mexico, or such states as Florida and New York where many immigrants of Cuban ancestry reside. Even if your home state is not located in one of these areas, there is still a great likelihood of finding Spanish-speakers close to where you live. As of 1995, 10% of all people living in the US were of Hispanic descent. In the past 10 years, this number has continued to increase.

Perhaps this is why 53% of students learning languages in US colleges and universities are learning Spanish over languages. You have the opportunity to use your language skills right at home.

3. Learn Spanish to enhance your travel experiences.

If you've ever dreamed of visiting far-off, exotic, tropical places, you don't have far to look when you consider the great number of Spanish-speaking countries that fit this description. Wherever you decide to go, be it to Central America, or to Spain, the mother-country of the Spanish language, knowing the language will get you far.

Knowing the language and culture of the land you visit will give you insights into the people and culture that a non-Spanish speaker would never have access to. Knowing even a little Spanish ahead of time helps travelers communicate more successfully, especially considering that a great number of Spanish speakers do not know English. Whether giving an address in a taxi, making reservations in a hotel, ordering food or drinks in a restaurant, or meeting the locals at the main hang-out, your travel experience will be much smoother and more enjoyable when you

can communicate.

If you take a little time to learn some of the Spanish language before heading off to distant lands, your understanding and appreciation for the places you visit will be improved tremendously.

4. Use Spanish to improve your employment potential.

Know a second language? Great, you're hired! If you have proven yourself to be a capable employee with just the right job skills AND you speak a foreign language such as Spanish, you are much more likely to land that job of your dreams than if you are monolingual. In fact, many jobs today require a minimum of basic proficiency in another language.

With the world becoming ever more global, contact with people of other countries has increased tremendously in recent decades. Just having a basic knowledge may be all it takes to separate yourself from the crowd of applicants for the job you are pursuing. With the rapidly increasing Hispanic population, there are a multitude of career fields in the US that need Spanish speakers. Among them are nurses, social workers, teachers, salespeople, translators, and many more.

Internationally, people who speak Spanish often have opportunities to work in trade or business fields. Other options include diplomacy, interpretation, and security applications, which all require a sensitivity and proficiency of another language. And did you know that bilingual employees often receive a larger salary than their non-Spanish speaking counterparts?

If the chance to show off your skills and be more competitive on the job market doesn't interest you in studying Spanish, perhaps the extra cash will!

5. Learn Spanish to improve your knowledge of your own language.

Spanish is from the Romance language family of languages, its roots coming primarily from Latin, the language spoken by the Romans. As you might know, English, too has many words of Latin origin. Because of this, knowing Spanish helps speakers of English (as well as some other European languages) broaden their vocabulary in their native language. Often times, these same Latin roots are at the base of many sophisticated words in English, so Spanish learners can also become more proficient in English.

In addition, a recognition and understanding of these words of Latin origin is especially helpful in certain professions in science, medicine, law, and many others with specialized vocabulary, as the many centuries

of Roman rule left their mark linguistically in these and other modern scientific and professional fields.

6. Learn Spanish to prepare for study abroad opportunities.

Many high schools, colleges, and universities offer study abroad opportunities. Many different types of programs are available to choose from and they vary in time from as little as a week of study to one semester, or even a whole year. Often, as little as one semester or one year of prior language study is all that is needed to qualify to participate in an exchange program.

Without taking that first step of signing up for a language class, you may just miss out on one of life's most exciting adventures possible. What could be better than living, breathing, and using your newly acquired language skills than actually putting them to use in one of the many Spanish-speaking countries from around the world? Not only does an exchange program give you the opportunity to use the Spanish you know, but also the opportunity to improve your language abilities on a daily basis. Constant exposure the language and culture of the city in which you study is believed to be the key to true language mastery and helps pave the way to literacy and native speaker like fluency.

Exchange students benefit not only from the opportunity to practice language daily, but also from the credits they receive for the classes taken while abroad. Most schools even allow students to fulfill multiple academic requirements while studying in a foreign country. Who doesn't love the idea of receiving credits toward graduation at the same time as having the experience of a lifetime?

7. Better appreciate Spanish-speaking cultures.

Apart from opening up access to areas of "high" culture such as art, literature, and history, a knowledge of Spanish can help learners understand and appreciate day-to-day culture in the Spanish-speaking world. The ability to read and understand authentic Spanish -- whether that be in the newspaper, on television, in magazines, in letters from friends or pen pals, or on the street -- truly gives an "insider" view into the language and all of its different shades of meaning.

Learning the Spanish language and culture go hand-in-hand. While not impossible to learn Spanish never having experienced the culture first hand, direct exposure to the culture will give language learners insights into the language that would otherwise not be possible.

8. Learn Spanish to make lifelong friends.

As most people would probably recognize, the primary purpose of a language is to facilitate communication between people. However, what many people don't realize is that learning a foreign language, although intimidating at times, opens many doors to meeting new and exciting people that wouldn't otherwise be possible. Getting to know somebody by communicating with them in their own language is a great way to really get to know that person on a much deeper level than only through communicating with gestures or body language. Language study, practice, and exposure to the language are vital to effective and successful communication.

Even though becoming proficient in Spanish might take a lot of effort, dedication, and time on the part of the learner, the rewards can be great. Imagine all of the friends it is possible to make while on vacation, during study abroad, through having a common interest in music, or even while at work? Having lifelong international friends not only opens future travel opportunities but makes you a cultural ambassador both at home and abroad.

9. Learning Spanish makes acquiring the next foreign language easier.

It is often said by people who have become bilingual in Spanish or another language: Through hard work, perseverance, and lots of practice, the next language one learns is much easier to master by comparison. Learning a foreign language develops a whole set of mental, social, and cultural skills and this newfound awareness carries over to other languages when learned. Once Spanish has been learned to a proficient level, when the grammar concepts, vocabulary, and other facets of the language have become fairly automatic, picking up a new language comes much more effortlessly. The new languages studied, especially of European origin, tend to have a lot of recognizable, common elements that are more easily assimilated and expanded upon by tapping into previous language-learning experience. In fact, once you know Spanish, other languages in the Romance language family such as Italian, French, Portuguese, or even ancient Latin, will almost seem like "cousins" to the Spanish you've already learned!

10. Gain access to Spanish art, music, literature and film.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to view a film in its original language instead of watching it in a dubbed version? Are you tired of being distracted from enjoying a film by the need to read the film's subtitles? Have you wondered if the translation of the film is accurate or if you are missing out on the details in the film? Becoming proficient in Spanish would greatly enhance your enjoyment of such Oscar-winning films as *Belle époque* (1993), *All About My Mother* (1999), and *The Sea Inside* (2004).

In addition to deriving more enjoyment from films, a knowledge of Spanish would help gain access into the minds and times of the people responsible for some of the greatest literature in the Spanish-speaking world. Who hasn't heard of Miguel de Cervantes, whose novel, *Don Quixote* was not only groundbreaking in the 16th century when first published, but continues to fascinate and inspire current audiences?

What about Spanish music and art? Most people would recognize Cuban singing-sensation, Gloria Estefan, and Spanish cubist painter Pablo Picasso is known worldwide for his modern-style of art that has influenced the artistic community around the globe. In recent years, film stars from Spain and Latin America such as Penelope Cruz, Antonio Banderas, and Salma Hayak have become recognized not just at home, but in Hollywood as well.

So what are you waiting for? Get out there and start learning Spanish today and take advantage of all of the new opportunities it opens!