

## My thoughts on teaching Spanish, main qualities to become totally fluent

After 7 years of teaching Spanish, mainly to British adults, I would like to take this moment to share with you some of my thoughts and experiences on the subject. It has become very apparent to me that learning a language is not simply about vocabulary, grammar and phonetics. With any language there is something much more subtle and complex. To become totally fluent you need a mixture of knowledge (vocabulary and grammar) and skills (talking, listening and pronunciation) with the main secret ingredient being a little self-confidence.

There is a fundamental difference between "knowledge" and "skill". It is possible for a person to learn history or geography by themselves but the same cannot be said when it comes to learning to swim or to drive a car. This is comparable to languages. With the help of a good grammar book and dictionary, grammar and vocabulary can be picked up relatively easily. The skills required to communicate with people in the street, however, cannot be learned so easily. For this people need more help and guidance. The modern audiovisual teaching methods that I use help people to pick up these skills quickly. They soon develop the correct pronunciation and from that, the confidence to speak with people from the very beginning.

The main difference between successfully learning knowledge and mastering a skill is a psychological one. In my experience, having the intellectual capacity to perfectly memorize verbs and vocabulary means very little if you do not possess the confidence to try to put that knowledge into practice. You will only master Spanish by trying to speak with the Spanish! I have seen people

coming to my classes who do not attempt to mix with the Spanish as much as they should because they are afraid of making mistakes. By not trying you limit your learning potential and may become disillusioned with the whole process. If you see your mistakes as things to learn from and not moments to be embarrassed about, your language skills will come on leaps and bounds, as will your lives in Spain. In order to master any language you have to mix theory with practice to get faster results.

I also hear a common complaint, particularly from my more mature students, that their memories aren't what they used to be. Ironically one of the most recommended methods for improving memory retention is the learning of a second language. This keeps the brain active and slows down the mental effects of the ageing process. Use it or lose it! We simply have to be more patient and disciplined than when we were teenagers. If a teenager needs to hear a word 10 times to remember it, for an adult it will take longer.-that's all. On the other hand, you are much wiser and have now much more time to study than ever before.

Once the basics of a language have been mastered the need for another quality becomes very apparent, especially with more mature people and, I'm sorry to say, generally with the British! That quality is patience! I have noticed in many students that six to eight months down the line they begin to become frustrated. When I ask why they almost always reply that they feel that they have stopped improving even though they still try. This is a good indication that they have reached an intermediate level. From this point onwards the changes in their abilities will be more about the mastering the subtleties of the Spanish language. It is easy to see signs of improvement when you know nothing, but when you are halfway there, the fine tunings aren't so apparent. At this point another important quality makes a difference -perseverance- only the

ones who persevere will become totally fluent.

If you consider that learning a language at an advanced level is the same as having a degree in a subject then you will see the advantages that you already have. If you were to have studied Spanish in London, for example, you would have had to study for three years at university and another practical year in Spain. As you already live here and are therefore doing the theory and practice at the same time you could, in theory, be totally fluent in half the time.

Finally, I'd like to point out the differences that I have noticed between men and women. Generally women like to study more than men and so possess better grammar and vocabulary. Men, on the other hand, have far more confidence to speak in Spanish but usually make more mistakes. Therefore to give women more confidence to speak I point out their high levels of knowledge. For the men I concentrate on improving grammar and correcting their mistakes, so they gradually make less.

I would like to thank you all for trusting in my guidance and teaching methods and would like to congratulate you all for embarking upon this ambitious and rewarding project. In doing so you are opening up a whole new Spanish world of possibilities and culture. I myself am learning all the time and hope, with experience, to improve my own teaching techniques.

**Group lessons or one-to-one take place in El Estrecho. If you are interested please contact me on: 968 546 859 or 678 936 110 as well you can email me at [linaresmj@terra.es](mailto:linaresmj@terra.es) I have already started conversation and cinema Spanish lessons for advanced learners.**

[www.spanishforadults.es](http://www.spanishforadults.es)

Maria Linares