

## Why learn Spanish?

You already have good reasons for learning Spanish. Perhaps you want to be able to communicate with relatives, travel abroad during summer, or prepare yourself for study in a Spanish-speaking country. Maybe a Spanish-speaking exchange student spiked your interest or you have a friend who recommended it. Maybe you just like the way the language sounds.

### **Talk to 470 million Spanish speakers worldwide.**

Over 470 million people around the world speak Spanish. It's second only to Mandarin Chinese in the number of people who call it their native tongue! Spanish is the official language of twenty-one countries on four continents and is dominant in many other places. Spanish opens doors for you to communicate with one-third of the people on Earth.

### **Talk to Spanish-speaking people at home.**

If you live in the United States, you may enjoy daily contact with native Spanish speakers in many cities and rural areas... certainly in states bordering Mexico and others like Florida or New York where many immigrants reside. Even if your home state is not located in one of these areas, it's likely there are Spanish-speakers close to where you live. Since 1995, the number of people of Hispanic descent living in the US has grown. Fifty-three percent of college and university students in foreign language courses have chosen Spanish.

### **Learn Spanish to enhance your travel.**

If you've ever dreamed of visiting far-off, exotic, tropical places... you don't have to look far! Many Spanish-speaking countries fit this description. Whether you go to the Caribbean, Central America, Africa or Spain, the mother country, knowing the language and culture will be very useful! It gives you insights that a non-Spanish speaker lacks. Knowing even a little Spanish ahead of time helps travelers communicate more successfully, especially considering that a lot of Spanish speakers do not know English. Whether providing an address to a cabby, making hotel reservations, ordering food at a restaurant, or meeting the locals, your travel experience will be much smoother and more enjoyable when you can communicate. If you take a little time to learn some Spanish before going to distant lands, your understanding of and appreciation for the places you visit will be much greater.

### **Use Spanish to Improve employment potential.**

Know a second language? You're hired! If you have proven yourself to be a capable employee with the right job skills and Spanish, you are more likely to get the job of your dreams.

# español

In fact, many jobs today require basic proficiency in another language. With the world becoming ever smaller, contact with people from other countries is hard to avoid for long. Just having a basic knowledge may be the thing that separates you 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.

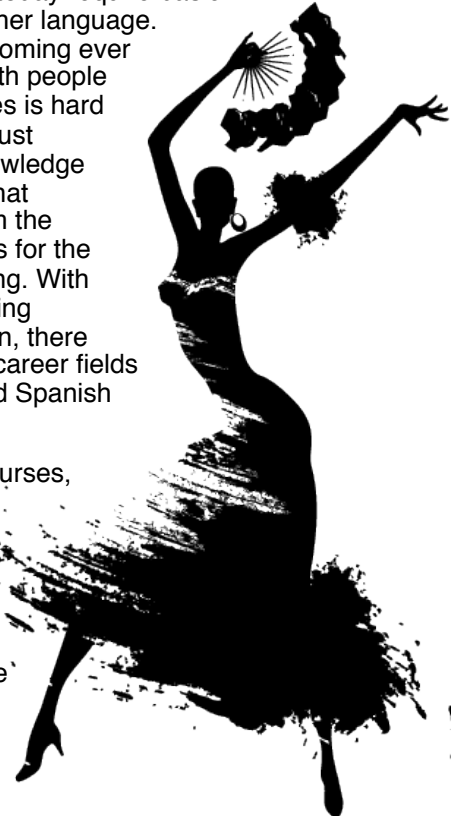
Among them are nurses, social workers, teachers, salespeople, translators, and many more.

People who speak Spanish often have opportunities to pursue careers in international trade or business.

Other options include interpretation, diplomacy and security, all of which require knowledge of and proficiency in another language and culture. 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!

### **Learn Spanish to improve in your own language.**

Spanish is a Romance language, meaning that it has deep roots in Latin, the language spoken throughout the Roman Empire for two thousand years. English, too has many words of Latin origin. So, learning Spanish helps English speakers improve their understanding and broaden their vocabulary in their own language. Latin roots are at the base of a lot of specialized, career-oriented language, like legal and medical terminology. Recognizing and understanding these sophisticated words is critical to one's performance on the job. The many centuries of Roman rule left their mark linguistically in these and other modern scientific and professional fields.



### **Learn Spanish to prepare for study abroad.**

Many high schools, colleges, and universities offer opportunities to study outside the US. Different types of programs are available that vary in length of time spent in the host country—from as little as a week to as much as a year. As little as one semester or year of prior language study is often all that is needed to qualify for 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. 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 Spanish, it allows you to improve your language abilities on a daily basis. Constant exposure to 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 fluency.

Exchange students also earn credits for classes taken while abroad. Most schools even allow students to fulfill multiple academic requirements while studying in a foreign country.

### **Better appreciate Spanish-speaking cultures.**

Apart from access to "high" culture such as art, literature and history, a knowledge of Spanish can help learners understand and appreciate day-to-day life in the Spanish-speaking world. The ability to read and understand Spanish—whether in a newspaper, magazine, web page, tv broadcast, letter from friends or pen pals, or a street conversation—truly gives you the "insider's view" into the subtleties of language and culture. These go hand-in-hand. While it's not impossible to learn Spanish outside the culture, direct exposure to it gives language learners insights they would not otherwise have.

### **Access Spanish art, music, literature and film.**

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to enjoy a film in its original language instead of watching subtitles or hearing a dubbed version? Have you wondered if the translation is accurate or if you are missing out on interesting and important details? You very likely do! Becoming proficient in Spanish enhances your enjoyment of such Oscar-winning films as *Belle Epoque* (1993), *All About My Mother* (1999), and *The Sea Inside* (2004). In addition to deriving more enjoyment from film, knowledge of Spanish provides access to the minds and times of the people responsible for some of the greatest literature in the world. Cervantes' *Don Quixote*—recognized by many scholars as the first modern novel—was not only groundbreaking in the 16th century when first published, but continues to fascinate and inspire current audiences.

### **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 making new and interesting friends.

Getting to know someone by communicating with them in their own language is a great way to really become much more intimately acquainted rather than relying upon interpretation and body language. Study, practice and exposure to the language are vital to effective and successful communication.

Although becoming proficient in any language takes great effort, dedication and time on the part of the learner, the rewards are great. Imagine all of the friends you might make while working, vacationing, or studying abroad? Having lifelong international friends not only opens future travel opportunities but makes you a cultural ambassador of your home country.

### **Acquire a third language more easily.**

People who have learned Spanish—through hard work, perseverance and lots of practice, of course—often say that the next language is a lot easier to master. Foreign language study develops a set of mental, social and cultural skills that carry over to acquiring other languages and mastering other subjects. Once you attain proficiency, when the grammar, vocabulary and other facets of the language are fairly automatic—learning comes with much less effort. New languages, particularly European ones, tend to have a lot of commonalities. You can assimilate them by tapping into previous language-learning experience. Once you know Spanish, other Romance Languages like Italian, French, Portuguese, Romanian, or even their ancient forefather Latin, are all within your reach! □

---

**FUN FACT:** Neuroscientists believe that learning a new language delays or even prevents dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and other mental disorders!



# Questions

1. About how many people speak Spanish worldwide and about what percentage of the world's population does this comprise?
2. For how many countries is Spanish the official language?
3. How many foreign-language students at the college and university level have chosen Spanish?
4. In which tropical places does the Spanish language dominate?
5. How might knowing Spanish help you communicate during travel?
6. How can learning another language improve your job prospects and what fringe benefits does this include?
7. What nine professions mentioned in the article often require a person to know Spanish?
8. What is a Romance Language and how can learning one benefit you?
9. How might a foreign-exchange program benefit you?
10. How can learning another language help you understand the culture?
11. To what "finer things" will learning Spanish grant you access and why is this important?
12. What is widely recognized by scholars as the first novel?
13. How can learning the language enhance personal communication?
14. How can you become a cultural ambassador for the United States?
15. According to the article, "foreign language study develops a set of mental, social, and cultural skills" that allow you to... do what?