

How to learn a language in under 24 hours

1. Pronunciation

Learning the pronunciation and writing system of the target language is always the necessary first step before starting to speak. If the target language has an unfamiliar writing system, try to find resources that use a transliterated writing system, like 'pinyin' for Mandarin Chinese. Listening to audio can be helpful to learn accurate pronunciation.

2. Pronouns

Pronouns are used in almost every sentence. Learn the most important declensions, which are usually the nominative (subject pronouns), accusative (direct object pronouns), and dative (indirect object pronouns). To save time, focus on the most important pronouns, which are usually 'I', 'you', and 'it'.

3. Top Verbs

Mastering the most important verbs (auxiliary/modal/handle) will allow you to converse in any context.

TOP 10 VERBS IN ANY LANGUAGE:

to be, to have (to)*, to want*, to need*, to be able to*, to go*, to know*, to do, to understand, to think/believe

4. Important Irregulars

Learning all the exceptions to all the rules is not reasonable. Therefore, only learn the irregular conjugations for the most important verbs in the most important tenses. This principle also applies to other rules/exceptions. Do not learn them unless they will be used frequently.

5. Tenses / Moods

Only learn the most important tenses. Present tense is by far the most important. Other tenses may be learned quickly given the language. For example, some languages use the infinitive as the imperative, or use a single word to signify the future tense. Only focusing on the conjugations for 'I', 'you', and 'it' can save time. Other tenses/moods are not needed for basic speech.

6. Word Order

Learn the word order for the 3 most important simple sentences: declaratives, negations, and interrogatives. If it is different, learn the syntax for handle verbs, and using conjunctions like 'but' and 'because' to join two simple sentences.

7. Interrogatives

Learn the basics: who, what, where, when, why, how, how much. Some language may have other interrogatives - only choose the most relevant ones.

8. Articles and Nouns

Learn how to use nouns. This may require learning articles. Articles are more complicated in some languages than in others, but they are important omitting or misusing articles in a language that has articles can result in foreign-sounding speech. Ex. "I go to restaurant to eat sandwich."

9. Possessives

Possessive adjectives are very useful. Focusing only on "my" and "yours" can save time.

10. Demonstratives

Both demonstrative adjectives and pronouns are important. Learning these will enable useful sentences like "I want that" or "I want to go to this place".

11. Other Useful Words

These include the basic 'yes'/'no'; conjunctions like 'but' and 'because'; indispensable prepositions like 'to', 'in', 'for', and 'from'; adjectives like 'also', 'a lot', and 'very'; and the numbers.

12. Top Nouns

Learning nouns is the lowest priority because they are easy to learn. With a simple dictionary app, you can look up any noun you want. It is hard to generalize what the most important nouns are because this will depend greatly on the context and situation of the learner. For example, a student would want to learn words like 'university' and 'student', whereas a businessman would want to learn words like 'meeting' and 'business'.

This guide describes what I believe are the 12 most important areas of focus (ordered by importance) when attempting to learn a language in a short amount of time. Although most of the relevant information can be summarized on 1-2 pages, it is useful to learn about these 12 areas in a bit more detail from some language learning resource. Also, since such 1-2 page language guides that cover all 12 of these areas practically don't exist, you will almost definitely need to use different sources to learn about these topics.

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Pronunciation notes: If last letter is a vowel, n or s, accent is on the penultimate syllable. Otherwise, accent is on final syllable, but written accents take precedence over all unwritten accents. All 'h's are silent. Z is pronounced like s. Double L is pronounced like 'y'. G and c are soft before e and i but hard otherwise. 'ia' and 'io' are two common diphthongs that are pronounced together as 1 syllable. The "qu" sound is

Pronouns:

	English Subject	Subject	Direct Object	Indirect Object
singular	i	yo	me	me
	you (informal)	tú	te	te
	he she	el ella	lo la	le
	you (formal)	usted		
plural	we	nosotros	nos	nos
	we (feminine)	nosotras		
	they they(feminine)	ellos ellas	los las	les
	you (plural)	ustedes		

Top verbs:

to be	ser* estar*	to say	decir*	to live	vivir
to have	tener*	to understand	entender*	to give	dar*
to want	querer*	to speak	hablar	to see	ver*
to need	necesitar	to think	pensar* creer	to come	venir
to be able to	poder*	to do	hacer*	should	deber
to know	saber*	to like	gustar*	to learn	aprender
to go	ir*	to eat	comer	*See table below for irregulars	
to have to	tener que	to buy	comprar		

**"dar" is conjugated as -er in preterite. For "ver", "estar", and "dar", the "yo" form is "voy", "estoy", and "doy". For "estar", all present tense conjugations have an accent on the last syllable (except estamos). "gustar" means "to please". Instead of saying "I like it", you have to say "It pleases me".

Top Verb Conjugations:

English	to speak	to eat	to live	to be	to have	to want	to be able to	to know	to say	to understand	to think	to go	to do to make	to come	
Infinitive	hablar	comer	vivir	ser	tener	querer	poder	saber	decir	entender	pensar	ir	hacer	venir	
Past Tense Form	preterite	preterite	imperfect	imperfect	imperfect	imperfect	imperfect	imperfect	preterite		imperfect	preterite	preterite	preterite	
singular	yo	hablo hablé	como comí	vivo vivía	soy era	tengo tenía	quiero quería	puedo podía	sé sabía	digo dije	entiendo entiendes	pienso pensaba	voy fui	hago hice	vengo vine
	tú	hablas hablaste	comes comiste	vives vivías	eres eras	tienes tenías	quieres querías	puedes podías	sabes sabías	dices dijiste	entiendes	piensas pensabas	vas fuiste	haces hiciste	vienes viniste
	él/ella usted	habla habló	come comió	vive vivía	es era	tiene tenía	quiere quería	puede podía	sabe sabía	dice dijo	entiende	piensa pensaba	va fue	hace hizo	viene vino
plural	nosotros	hablamos hablamos	comemos comimos	vivimos vivíamos	somos éramos	tenemos teníamos	queremos queríamos	podemos podíamos	sabemos sabíamos	decimos dijimos	entendemos	pensamos pensábamos	vamos fuimos	hacemos hicimos	venimos vinimos
	ellos ustedes	hablan hablaron	comen comieron	viven vivían	son eran	tienen tenían	quieren querían	pueden podían	saben sabían	dicen dijeron	entienden	piensan pensaban	van fueron	hacen hicieron	vienen vinieron
	Imp. tú usted ustedes	habla hable hablen	come coma coman	vive viva vivan	sé sea sean	ten tenga tengan				di diga digan			vé vaya vayan	haz haga hagan	ven venga vengan

All Spanish verbs end in -ar, -er, or -ir. "Hablar", "comer", and "vivir", are examples of regular verbs; all regular verbs follow their conjugated patterns. The other verbs given are irregular. This table also provides the most common past tense form for all verbs, except for entender (regular -er verb in both preterite and imperfect).

Tenses:

- Present progressive:** estar + gerund. Gerund is formed by removing the -ar/er/ir from the infinitive and adding -ando for -ar and -iendo for -er/ir verbs. Ex: "I am speaking" = "Estoy hablando"
- Future:** ir + a + infinitive. Ex: "I am going to do it" = "Voy a hacerlo"
- Imperative:** for informal command, take the "él" form; for formal command start with "él" form, then change final "a" to "e" or final "e" to "a"; for plural command, add n to formal singular command

ser vs. estar:

Spanish uses these two verbs to mean "to be". As a loose rule of thumb, "ser" is used for permanent things like name, place of origin, job, and personal traits; "estar" is used for temporary things like location, emotions, and states of being.

Interrogatives:

who	quién	which	cuál
what	qué	why	por qué
when	cuándo	how	cómo
where	dónde	how much how many	cuánto

When not used as interrogatives, add a "lo" in front of qué and cuál and remove the accent. Ex: ¿Qué quieres? → No sé lo que quieres (What do you want? → I don't know what you want).

Word order:

- Declarative:** Subject + Verb + Object.
- Negations:** "no" goes before the verb
- Interrogatives:** Same as declarative, but with change in inflection (usually rising tone).

NOTE: Subject pronouns are usually omitted, especially "it". Ex. "Yo no lo quiero" → "No lo quiero"

Possessive Adjectives:

Add 's' at the end for plural form.

my	mi	our	nuestro
your	tu	their	su
his/her	su		

Demonstratives:

Given as [masculine/feminine].

this	este/esta	that	ese/esa
these	estos/estas	those	esos/esas

Articles:

Given as [masculine/feminine].

Definite		Indefinite	
the	el/la	a	un/una
the (pl)	los/las	some	unos/unas

Some important words:

a lot	mucho	but	pero	like	como	still	todavía
after	después	bye	adios	money	dinero	thank you	gracias
all	todo	English	ingles (m.)	more/less	más/menos	that (relative pronoun)	que
already/yet	ya	everyone	todo el mundo	near	cerca	there is/are	hay
also	también	far	lejos	no	no	thing	cosa
although	aunque	father	padre (m)	now	ahora	time	tiempo* (m)
and	y	mother	madre (f)	only	sólo	to	vez (f)
as	como	food	comida	or	o	today	a
bad/badly	malo/mal	for	para/por*	person/people	persona/gente (f)	tomorrow	hoy
bathroom	baño (m.)	friend	amigo	since (time)	desde	yesterday	mañana
because	porque	from	de	so (therefore)	entonces	too (much)	ayer
before	antes	good/well	bueno/bien	so (much)	tan/tanto*	US	demasiado
best	mejor	hello	hola	sorry	lo siento, perdón	very	Estados Unidos
big/small	grande/pequeño	here/there	aquí/ahí	Spanish	español	water	muy
		however	sin embargo			yes	agua
							sí

Numbers: uno (1), dos (2), tres (3), cuatro (4), cinco (5), seis (6), siete (7), ocho (8), nueve (9), diez (10), once (11), doce (12), trece (13), catorce (14), quince (15), dieciséis (16), diecisiete (17), dieciocho (18), diecinueve (19), veinte (20), veintiuno (21), treinta (30), treinta y dos (32), cuarenta (40), cuarenta y cinco (45), cincuenta (50), sesenta (60), setenta (70), ochenta (80), noventa (90), cien (100), ciento sesenta y siete (167). Articles and adjectives must agree with the number and gender of the noun that they are used with. In general, masculine nouns end in “o” and feminine nouns end in “a”. In general, adjectives go after nouns, except for numbers, possessive adjectives, and words like “many”. “tan” is used before adjectives, like “tan grande” (so big). “tanto” is “so much, like “me gusta tanto” is “I like it so much”. When in doubt about “por” and “para”, default to “para”. “para” also means “in order to”. “mucho tiempo” is “a lot of time”, “una vez” is “one time”. To make a noun plural, add “s” if it ends in a vowel and “es” if it ends in a consonant.

Notes

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Sentences using information only from previous sheet:

I am Mike	Soy Mike.	I am not from the US.	No soy de los Estados Unidos.
I want water.	Quiero agua.	I don't speak Spanish.	No hablo español
I want it.	Lo quiero.	I don't need it.	No lo necesito
He already told me.	Ya me dijo.	She didn't tell me.	No me dijo.
He told it to me.	Ya me lo dijo.	He didn't give it to me.	No me lo dio.
I can do it.	Puedo hacerlo.	You shouldn't do that.	No debes hacer eso.
I want to tell you.	Quiero decirte.	I don't need to tell you (it).	No necesito decírtelo.
I have to give it to you.	Tengo que dártelo.	I don't want to give it to you.	No quiero dártelo.
Come.	Ven.	Don't come.	No vengas
Do it.	Hazlo.	Don't do it.	No lo hagas
Tell me.	Dime.	Don't tell him.	No le digas.
Give it to him.	Dáselo.	Don't tell it to him.	No se lo digas.
Who is that?	¿Quién es ese?	I don't know who that is.	No sé quién es.
What is this?	¿Qué es esto?	I don't know what you want.	No sé lo que quieres.
Where are you?	¿Dónde estás?	I don't know where he is.	No sé dónde está.
When do you want to go?	¿Cuándo quieres ir?	I don't know when he is going to come.	No sé cuándo va a venir.
Why do you want to do it?	¿Por qué quieres hacerlo?	I don't understand why you want to buy that.	No entiendo por qué quieres comprar eso.
How are you?	¿Cómo estás?	I don't understand how to do it.	No entiendo cómo hacerlo.
How much is it?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	I don't know how many people there are here.	No sé cuantas personas hay aquí.
Is that your mom?	¿Esa es tu madre?	I'm going to do it after I eat (after eating).	Voy a hacerlo después de comer.
Do you speak spanish?	¿Hablas español?	Can you do it before you come (before coming)?	¿Puedes hacerlo antes de venir?
Do you want this?	¿Quieres esto?	It's not too small.	No es demasiado pequeño.
Did they tell you yet?	¿Ya te dijeron?	This one is as big as that one.	Este es tan grande como ese.
Where are you from?	¿De donde eres?	She has more money than you.	Ella tiene más dinero que tú.
It's very big.	Es muy grande.	I only need two.	Sólo necesito dos.
Where is your friend going?	¿A dónde va tu amigo?	Everyone is doing it.	Todo el mundo está haciéndolo.

I want to learn Spanish because I am going to Mexico tomorrow.

Quiero aprender español porque voy a México mañana.

Even though I don't speak Spanish, I want to go to Puerto Rico
The person that I like lives too far from here.
The thing that I need isn't here.

Aunque no hablo español, quiero ir a Puerto Rico
La persona que me gusta vive demasiado lejos de aquí.
La cosa que necesito no está aquí.

He doesn't have a lot of money, but she has a lot of money because she can speak Spanish.

Él no tiene mucho dinero, pero ella tiene mucho dinero porque puede hablar español.

NOTES: When "donde" is associated with motion to a place, "a donde" is used. Generally, subject pronouns are omitted unless they are used for emphasis. "Le lo" becomes "se lo" for ease of pronunciation.

How to use this guide

This guide provides the vocab and grammar fundamentals needed to start speaking. Now you need to train your muscle memory and creative ability to form sentences: Take any one of the sample sentence structures from above (or make your own), and repeat out loud until it sounds fluent. Then gradually substitute in different nouns, verbs, and pronouns to develop your creative ability and functional understanding of syntax, all while repeating each sentence until it sounds fluent. Using just the information on this sheet, you can create hundreds of sentences by substituting words and combining sentence structures. Look up other nouns, adjectives, and verbs on your own and substitute into the sentence structures from above to make even more sentences. In the example below, the bolded text develops muscle memory through repetition while the underlined parts develop your syntax understanding and ability to form sentences on your own. Don't read from the paper (except the 1st time), and aim for fluid speech without pauses or hesitations. **If what you say doesn't sound fluent, say it again and again until it does.**

I want to go to the store.

I need to go to the store.

I don't want to go.

I want to go to the bank.

I have to go to the store.

She doesn't want to go.

I want to go to the restaurant.

I should go to the store.

We don't want to go.