Learning a foreign language is of constant interest—students, travelers, lifelong learners, and job seekers. The landscape of such study today, once offered only through a small selection of curricular guides and complicated audio courses, has radically changed. Now students can access the basics for free online, learn in conversations with native speakers in social media communities, and have access to a rich world of print and electronic resources that are exhaustive in their coverage. Andrew Walsh, a Graduate Assistant at the Literatures and Languages Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a master’s student in Library and Information Science there, has written a guide to help librarians, be they in large academic institutions, public libraries, or high-school libraries, develop a modern collection of resources to aid the language learner. Walsh holds a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and has enjoyed studying the language since his elementary school days and thus has great experience with the tools that really help one learn. While his guide is dedicated to resources for the Spanish language, it also serves as a model for those seeking to build collections in other languages—highlighting the types of tools available and suggesting the kinds of resources that create the most useful collections. —Editor

**Foreign language education**

is in the midst of a radical transformation, fueled by a boom of new technologies and applications for learning. Today, educational institutions are including more digital and interactive media alongside textbooks and traditional resources as they recognize the value of information technology. But what is the right balance? Videos, podcasts, interactive online games and quizzes are very effective for some purposes while printed books remain far superior for others. Existing guides in this area are typically either bibliographies of print material or informal lists of online websites. Rarely does either style of guide compare the different types of tools, which makes identifying the best resources a difficult proposition. Additionally, the highly commercial nature of the web makes finding quality resources through Internet searches extremely difficult. As websites are trying to make a profit from advertisements, sales of their own products or affiliate commissions, websites that are not useful are prone to show up on search results.

This column recommends print textbooks, grammar books and reference books while also comparing them to newly emerging formats in an attempt to paint a more complete picture of the ways Spanish is learned today. The resources were selected based on their usefulness, scope, methods, organization and clarity. Sources that address cultural realities and regional variations are highlighted, since Spanish has such diverse dialects and varieties across Iberia and Latin America. The sources included are bilingual. Advanced learners will want to consult monolingual resources as well. Of course, many other valuable resources exist beyond those listed in this work. But my purpose is to give collection development librarians a good starting point to build a collection based upon a group of core resources for each category. A title’s exclusion from this list does not signify that it is not valuable.

The target learning group for this collection of resources is college-level learners of Spanish, which means that advanced high school students and adult learners can benefit as well. A short introductory section first lists a quick selection of resources designed to provide a fast and easy start to learning Spanish. Then the bulk of the guide is organized in categories based on the type of resource. Note: All online resources were accessed on 4/29/11.

### QUICK RESOURCES FOR BEGINNING SPANISH

Between online lessons, podcasts and affordable basic language textbooks, there are plenty of ways for a beginner to get a quick introduction to the Spanish language at little to no cost. A variety of organizations provide free language instruction online, with various types of lessons typically geared toward beginners. This learning format has several advantages: there are often convenient features such as e-mail newsletters for delivery of new lessons, blogs with updated posts, and a “word of the day” or similar content. There are often exercises and quizzes, and answers are graded immediately so that the learner can determine areas that need additional focus. Here are a few of the most effective ways to get started with Spanish. (A more comprehensive list of free online resources is found later in the Online Resources section.)

#### Websites

**BBC Languages**: Spanish ([www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish)).

The BBC language page offers a variety of free activities for beginners. There are informative guides to introduce the language, as well as many lessons that combine grammatical exercises with interactive video content. Learners can sign up for a complete twelve-week “Spanish Steps” beginner’s course in which weekly lessons will be delivered via e-mail. For those learners looking to move up to intermediate level, there is a quiz designed to gauge your current Spanish level.

**Más Arriba**: Spanish Language Exercises ([www.trentu.ca/academic/modernlanguages/spanish/masarriba](http://www.trentu.ca/academic/modernlanguages/spanish/masarriba)).

Gary Aitken, a retired professor of Spanish at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, has put together this great collection of Spanish language exercises. The content includes audio clips from native speakers and pictures which accompany written activities.

**Coffee Break Spanish Podcast** ([http://radioingua.com/shows/spanish/coffee-break-spanish](http://radioingua.com/shows/spanish/coffee-break-spanish)).

An award-winning free Spanish course delivered through podcasts. The weekly 15–20 minute lessons focus on real-world situations, culture and learning effective communication skills. For those listening to the lessons from the Radio Lingua website, be sure to navigate to the free audio lessons as there is also a paid premium course with additional materials. Users of Apple’s iTunes will find it much easier to subscribe to the podcast by searching the iTunes store.

**Books**


For learners who want a slightly more formal lesson-by-lesson approach but prefer the audio format, this affordable course can be a great resource. It features a variety of dialogues and lessons over three CDs. Several different native speakers provide the narration, with complete transcripts available online. The format is also ideal for busy learners who wish to learn Spanish on the go.


A simple way to get started with Spanish on your own, this beginner’s book features fun lessons that take only about five minutes to complete, hence the title. Activities teach basic grammatical points and introduce cultural themes. The book integrates text with images and audio, and the course also includes a free CD with native speaker audio and Internet-based resources.

---

**10 Reasons To Start Learning Spanish**

Spanish is one of the most popular languages for people to try and learn, with somewhere in the region of 20 million students currently studying it in some capacity. The language sounds beautiful, is widely used and has a number of other benefits, which combine to make it one of the stand-out options available. However, for those who need a little more convincing, here are ten reasons to start learning Spanish today.

**Learning Spanish can be fun and interesting.** It can make you more comfortable in situations where you would be lost without knowing the language. Yet, not everyone has the desire to learn Spanish. These people have several reasons for their reluctance. Some people feel that they are too old to learn Spanish. They realize that children learn language faster than anyone else. This makes them hesitant to even try. It is a very good idea to learn Spanish in today’s [...]

**Categories.**

Learn Spanish.
Lenguajero offers several features and tools designed for language learners, including:

- **Flashcard Learning**: Users can create and use flashcards to practice vocabulary and grammar.
- **Writing Exercises**: There are opportunities for learners to practice writing in Spanish and English.
- **Translation Services**: The platform includes a translation tool for converting text between Spanish and English.
- **Language Resources**: Lenguajero has access to a variety of online resources and dictionaries, such as the SpanishDict Dictionary, for learners to use.
- **Community Support**: Learners can connect with native speakers and get feedback on their language skills.
- **Podcasting**: The website offers podcasting features to help users practice their listening skills.
- **咐ment Writing**: Users can submit their assignments and receive feedback from native speakers.
- **Social Networking**: The platform includes social networking features to connect learners with each other.

In conclusion, the Lenguajero website offers a comprehensive suite of tools and features for language learning, making it a valuable resource for Spanish and English learners. Whether you are a beginner or an advanced learner, there is something for you on the Lenguajero website.
PRINT RESOURCES

Dictionaries/Reference Sources

While online reference sources earn praise for their convenience, the benefits of print reference come from their exhaustive coverage. The free online tools are quite limited in scope, as the top unabridged print dictionaries typically contain at least three times the number of entries of their online counterparts. Other useful resources that cannot be found on the web include dictionaries for particular regions and varieties of Spanish, specialized dictionaries for particular types of words or parts of speech and illustrated dictionaries.


Widely considered the most complete Spanish-English dictionary on the market, the fourth edition contains over 300,000 words and 500,000 translations. It has been updated to include the latest colloquialisms, buzzwords and specialized vocabulary. Covers 24 different regional varieties of Spanish and includes numerous cultural notes.


Although it dates back to 1995, this is still a valuable resource for those interested in learning the particularities of the Chicano Spanish variety spoken in the United States. It contains over 9,000 words and phrases.


False cognates, words that appear to be similar in Spanish and English but really hold different meanings, are a source of frustration for many learners. This bilingual dictionary has separate sections for Spanish and English, and with over 2,000 false cognates and 10,000 definitions, it is a very comprehensive work.


An excellent strategy for increasing vocabulary is to study the common endings of Spanish words. This unique work covers hundreds of suffixes and includes a complete index for quick reference. It also points out general equivalences in Spanish and English suffixes to help broaden the learner's understanding.


For more visual learners, as well as those interested in learning particularly specific or technical vocabulary, this dictionary is a great resource. For certain concepts that are complicated to explain, it is much more effective to see definitions in pictorial format. There are over 28,000 objects accompanied by illustrations, spanning many diverse subjects, and each picture has English and Spanish words on the same page.


A helpful dictionary divided into sections for 19 different Latin American countries, covering over 6,000 words specific to those nations’ varieties of Spanish. There is room for improvement, however, as some words lack important contextual information, but the book thoroughly represents all Latin American countries and at the moment is still the most valuable resource of its kind.

Textbooks

Traditionally, the most common way to learn Spanish is the textbook, and this is still the case even with all of the new methods that have emerged. In general, textbooks are the best format for learning grammar, vocabulary and culture all at one time, and they contain supplemental activities crafted to help students commit to memory. There are numerous reasons for libraries to add textbooks to their collections. They help disadvantaged students gain access to needed materials, and are very convenient for helping a large number of people, especially if put on reference only or short-term loan. Also, the simple fact that textbooks are the preferred format for student learning makes them a valuable resource to collect and make available for all learners. In this section I introduce the different categories of textbooks and discuss some of the popular titles.

A very affordable beginner's textbook, updated in 2005 with the release of the seventh edition, which now includes an accompanying workbook and four CDs. It is geared toward learners with some previous Spanish familiarity, and its dialogues and exercises are lively, covering grammatical structure, instilling fundamentals of reading comprehension and depicting the cultures of both Spain and Latin America. It does not have as many companion features as the more expensive textbooks, but you get a lot for the price, and it is appropriate for individual learners.


The enhanced ninth edition of ¿Como se Dice? is heavily integrated with an online companion course. The series has been popular among high school and college instructors for years, and now includes many interactive activities online in addition to the lessons in the print book.


Another textbook frequently used by educators which has undergone a major redesign for this most recent eighth edition. Recognizing that language education is in a state of flux, the authors consulted over 250 teachers and students to identify appropriate changes to remain effective. As a result, several interesting digital components accompany the book.


A textbook designed for intermediate-level learners, this tenth edition structures its lessons thematically and integrates a wide variety of cultural activities to help advance students' language skills and give them valuable practical knowledge. This is accomplished through cultural essays and articles as well as videos.


Vistas is a new textbook series, and in less than a decade it has solidified a place among the most frequently used texts in introductory Spanish courses. This third edition takes a student-centric approach—in addition to the lessons in the textbook, a complete accompanying website provides a variety of additional exercises and activities.

Grammar and Usage Guides

Textbooks provide a step-by-step approach to the Spanish language, but the fact that they must cover everything they cannot go very far in depth on any particular aspect. It is also common for textbooks to make generalizations or simplify particular aspects of the language. For this reason, a strong collection of grammar and usage guides is critical to fill in the gaps.


The subjunctive verb mood is extremely important in Spanish, and it is frequently cited as one of the most frustrating and confusing aspects of the language for English-speaking learners. This book tackles it in a unique way: it uses popular “Condorito” Chilean comic strips to introduce these tricky verb forms and all of their subtleties. The strips also do a great job of introducing important colloquial Spanish to learners of Spanish and English and learners will never be approached by someone who speaks a language other than Spanish as is frequently the case with Livemocha.
A comprehensive reference work covering contemporary Spanish grammar, this book is extremely valuable for a wide variety of learners interested in the structure of the language. It is well organized and covers all major aspects of grammar in detail while remaining very clear and readable. The examples chosen to accompany the grammar points are effective, and the book also points out differences between the major regional varieties of Spanish.


This is a much more concise look at Spanish grammar than A Reference Grammar of Spanish, but it covers the same grammar topics including word order, verbs, syntax and gender, all supported by clear examples. The book is aimed at the college-level intermediate student who does not have explicit grammar background; it would be the perfect supplement for a motivated learner enrolled in an undergraduate course, or a valuable reference resource for an independent learner.


A thorough approach to learning vocabulary, this volume is organized into 20 different thematic units. Immediately following the lists of words in each section are exercises that reinforce the material and sharpen other relevant skills. Also includes specialized vocabulary in common areas. The book is explicit to note when particular words are particular to Iberian or Latin American Spanish, and it can be either read at length, consulted for reference or simply browsed for interest.


This work introduces a significant amount of Spanish slang in a lively format with dialogues, word games and other activities. Covers the slang of several Spanish-speaking countries.


Using a much different approach to learning Spanish, this book presents a more casual writing style than that found in most textbooks and has a pleasing personal voice. The material, however, is carefully selected and the most common problems that affect Spanish language learners are dissected. Serves as a refreshing change of pace from more formal academic books and provides indispensable knowledge for intermediate learners looking to take the leap to the next level.


This helpful guide lists roughly 2,500 Spanish idioms that are organized alphabetically by their keywords for easy reference. For each entry, there is both an English translation and a full sentence in Spanish to help fully illuminate meaning.


A unique resource for learning Spanish verbs. Simple print guides that solely provide lists of conjugations are quickly becoming replaced by free online tools, but this work does much more. There are thorough explanations for why certain verbs are used in certain situations as well as sections for each of the main tenses. Exercises are used to gauge comprehension, and this emphasis on practice is very helpful for learners who struggle with verbs. Practice Makes Perfect is a series that also offers volumes on grammar, pronouns and prepositions and more; all works are recommended.


A detailed linguistic look into the diverse varieties of Spanish spoken in the United States, including Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican and several Central American varieties of Spanish. Provides significant historical context, a background of the general development, and an overview of scholarship that has been produced on Spanish in the United States. It can be difficult for students with no previous experience in linguistics, although this can be remedied with some brief background research.


For learners interested in the different varieties of Spanish in Latin America, this book is a great supplement to textbooks and other types of language courses. Similar to Varieties of Spanish in the United States, this work is linguistic in its analysis, and readers should have at least a basic knowledge of some of this terminology. It is not the case, however, that this scope hurts the book’s practical value; on the contrary, it helps paint a much more complete picture of Spanish as it is actually spoken than is possible in any textbook.

---

**Article Categories:**
- Library Reference and User Services
- Columns

**10 Reasons To Start Learning Spanish.** Spanish is one of the most popular languages for people to try and learn, with somewhere in the region of 20 million students currently studying it in some capacity. The language sounds beautiful, is widely used and has a number of other benefits, which combine to make it one of the stand out options available. However, for those who need a little more convincing, here are ten reasons to start learning Spanish today. Learning Spanish can be fun and interesting. It can make you comfortable in situations where you would be lost without knowing the language. Yet, not everyone has the desire to learn Spanish. These people have several reasons for their reluctance. Some people feel that they are too old to learn Spanish. They realize that children learn language faster than anyone else. This makes them hesitant to even try. It’s a very good idea to learn Spanish in today’s [...] Categories. Learn Spanish.

**Refbacks**
- There are currently no refbacks.

---