

Speak Spanish Pronto

Beginner Lessons

Lesson 19: The Most Frequently Used Words

Warning: Lots of reading below.

If you want to learn Spanish quicker than the average, there's a method outlined here that a lot of language learners don't know.

Even if this lesson took 10 hours it would *still* save you time in the long run. For the anxious, the list can be found [here](#)*. And the explanation for *why* this list is a good idea is what follows below.

If you didn't pick up on it from the title, there's a good reason why you should make an effort to learn the most frequently used words—they occur most often, *obviously*.

This means they'll be far and away the most important and useful ones to pick up from the beginning.

Why Study This List?

A frustrating part of learning Spanish in a traditional classroom is that the course usually treats all vocabulary equally. This is definitely *not* the case in real world usage.

In a typical course, you'll learn vocabulary usually by theme. That means learning hundreds of words about the kitchen, food, colors, professions, transportation, restaurants and so on.

However, a **much** smaller list of verbs, nouns and adjectives, pronouns and the like get used *every* single day.

Words like: *am, it, hungry, were, could, bus, have, I'm going, he's eating, getting dressed, on the phone, coming home, "Are you ready?"* and so on, are words that are used with **much more** frequency.

So why treat all vocabulary as equally important and try to learn such infrequently used words?

My advice for faster learning—**don't** do it this way.

All vocabulary is **not** equal. Instead use what's called a *frequency dictionary* and learn the top words that occur in normal conversations every day.

But wait! If you're not convinced yet, there's a chart!

The Secret Sauce

The chart is based on a study done in 2002 by Doug Biber of Northern Arizona University and Mark Davies of Brigham Young University.

It analyzed fiction, non-fiction print and oral speech in order to determine the most frequently used Spanish words.

The chart below shows coverage of these categories during a typical conversation based on knowing 1-3000 of the most common words.

# words	non-fiction	fiction	oral
<i>1st 1000</i>	76	79.6	87.8
<i>2nd 1000</i>	8	6.5	4.9
<i>3rd 1000</i>	4.2	3.5	2.3
<i>First 3000</i>	88.2%	89.6%	94.0%

Since this is a speaking-focused course, the important category is the **oral** category at the right.

Breaking it Down



It shows that knowing the *first* 1,000 commonly used words will allow you access to nearly **88%** of spoken Spanish.



It goes on to say that memorizing *another* 1,000 words (2,000 total) will only yield you **5%** more. And the *next* 1,000 (3,000 total) gets you a measly **2%** more.

In the economics world they call this *diminishing returns*. Basically, that increasing one factor (**vocabulary**, in this case) results in smaller and smaller returns (**amount of Spanish understood**).

Based on this, it would make sense to initially focus your time on learning, recognizing, and being able to pick up on those first 1,000 words.

Not a Silver Bullet—Just More Efficient

These 1,000 words will only get you so far. Unfortunately, you'll still have to be able to recognize a lot of arbitrary words—like *purple* and *rhinoceros*.

Still, there are much more important words, like *water*, *house*, *work* and *people* that you should prioritize. That is the strategy here—prioritizing.

Using a frequency dictionary is one way to jumpstart your understanding; it allows you to easily construct sentences and gets you on your way towards conversational fluency.

What You Can Do

You won't have trouble constructing:

- I went to the ____ last Friday.
- Yesterday, we saw ____ and it was ____.
- Yes, my family and I have ____ but we rarely ____ them.

You'll need to increase your vocabulary just a bit in order to fill in those blanks above.

That's where a technique like learning all the [*perfect cognates*](#) and other patterns for *near perfect cognates* will get you part of the way to learning the critical verbs, nouns and adjectives that are outside of the top 1,000 words.

Together, implementing this lesson with the previous one, allows you to focus on what matters in a time efficient way.

This leaves more time to focus on other critical aspects of Spanish development, like listening comprehension, speaking fluidity and accent reduction.

At the moment there's only the first 100 words. However, this includes over 175+ example sentences with audio.

The rest of the list will follow soon, so check back later.

You're almost there!

Check out the [last lesson](#) in the [Beginner Series](#) when you're ready.

It's a fun exercise that shows you how much you can already say using **only** the first 100 frequently used words list.

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