

Chapter 1

Mastering Spanish through Word Games and Puzzles

In This Chapter

- Finding — and harnessing — your motivation
- Building new brain capacity
- Making the most of your studies

You have some Spanish floating around in your head, and it's not just the kind that you see on the menu of your favorite *taquería* or fast-food restaurant. Maybe you're taking a class right now, or maybe you took some Spanish in high school or college a million years ago. Maybe Spanish is linked to a hazy memory of childhood, of speaking with a relative or family friend from the mother country; perhaps you have Spanish-speaking friends or colleagues and would like to be able to appreciate the culture more. If you want to renew, relearn, and refresh the Spanish in your head, you'll be happy to know that puzzles and word games are a fun and effective way to do just that.

Tackling a New Language: It's Never Too Late

The best time to learn a new language is right now! In fact, the most important thing you inherit as a member of the human race is the innate capacity to learn language. Each of us learns at least one during our lifetime, and some of us want to learn more than one.

Knowing another language enables you to see the world through the eyes of the speakers of that language, and they do see it differently. When you can grasp and appreciate others' understanding of the world, you can get out there and engage with all those other fascinating people and be receptive and ready to enrich your life experience.

Language is humankind's greatest invention. It's so much more than grammatical rules and vocabulary; it's a window through which you can view the values and perspectives of the people who speak the language, and it's a mirror that reflects our common cultural heritage and humanity.



Figuring out something new doesn't have to be drudgery. Puzzles and word games offer you the chance to have some fun while you progress through your Spanish education (or any other education, for that matter). Mastering a language doesn't have to be dry, boring, and intimidating. If it's fun and recreational, it doesn't feel like work, and you remember your newfound knowledge better!

Expanding the Language Centers of Your Brain

When you exercise your body, it gets stronger, healthier, and more flexible. The same is true for your brain. The upcoming sections explain what happens when you exercise your brain.

Creating new storage files in your brain

By stimulating and exercising the parts of your brain that process language, you create new storage space where you can stash Spanish words and phrases. In other words, studying another language makes you smarter because it increases your brain capacity! This “brain remodeling” opens up your memory space and benefits *all* linguistic output; as you work on your Spanish, you liven up and clarify your English at the same time.



The best way to understand fully your own language is to study someone else's. No wonder schools have foreign language requirements!

Sharpening your memory along with your pencil

Puzzles give you a fun outlet to practice and reinforce your language talents. Practice is the most beneficial way to get all that information to stick in your memory. The more you practice, the better your memory gets!

Some of the puzzles in this book include only Spanish words, which gives you the opportunity to think in the target language and to become more comfortable with the new spelling combinations and structures that you need to absorb to become fluent. As you solve these Spanish-only puzzles, you reinforce new spelling patterns and sequences. (And spelling in Spanish is *much* easier than spelling in English!)

Many of the puzzles and games ask you to translate from one language to the other, which improves and develops your dictionary skills. Before you know it, your English vocabulary increases because you have absorbed Spanish words with similar spellings and nearly identical meanings. (For English speakers, Spanish is an ideal first foreign language to learn because of the huge number of corresponding words, which provides an immediate sense of success and understanding for the learner.)



Translation is an extremely important tool for acquiring vocabulary and for making you feel confident and successful. However, translation also reinforces the idea that language is just words and gives a false impression that absolutely everything has exact linguistic equivalents. To really grasp a language, you have to become comfortable with how it works as a whole, inside and outside of everyday environments, instead of expecting it to mirror your own language. We set up this book with thematic chapters to give you those realistic contexts and situations so you can remember the vocabulary more easily and logically.

In some cases, a puzzle or game furthers your Spanish studies simply by exposing you to spelling, subject matter, names, or cultural items. We hope that finding a new word or name piques your interest, and that you're inspired to find out more about that particular item.



The more context you can associate with your newfound knowledge, the better you're able to remember and appreciate what you've acquired. Connect the names, themes, or cultural tidbits with the vocabulary you're studying, and you get a mental picture that won't disappear from your memory anytime soon.

Building Vocabulary the Easy Way

This book doesn't just throw a bunch of words and phrases at you in a haphazard fashion. We present Spanish vocabulary in a thematic way, with logical categories and context. These themes echo basic

Spanish courses, textbooks, and phrase books. Each chapter is dedicated to a particular theme, and we created a variety of different puzzles for each chapter, so you get a diversified linguistic workout. You don't have the drudgery of dealing with huge word lists with these puzzles; instead, you have the pleasure of getting the vocabulary in little bites rather than huge, overwhelming gulps.

Puzzles and word games tickle the visual and the intellectual sides of your brain. Some of the games in this book are very visually oriented; others require more systematic and deliberate approaches. All of them provide you with a quick, delightful way to practice and an immediate sense of satisfaction and achievement. In every case, you are exposed to as much Spanish as befits the type of puzzle.

Achieving Success Inside or Outside the Classroom



As you go through the puzzles, keep in mind *las tres palabras claves* (the three key words): *práctica*, *perseverancia*, and *paciencia*. These are, in order of importance:

- ✓ **Practice** creates all that new brain storage space and stimulates even more learning.
- ✓ **Perseverance** keeps the acquisition and motivation processes going strong.
- ✓ **Patience** keeps you focused on your goal for taking up Spanish in the first place, whether it's getting a better grade in class; being able to converse effectively with the natives during your dream vacation to South America; or initiating, reliving, and appreciating an engaging memory with a Spanish speaker (and maybe bringing new meaning to the term *Romance language*).

Buena suerte. . . ¡y al toro!