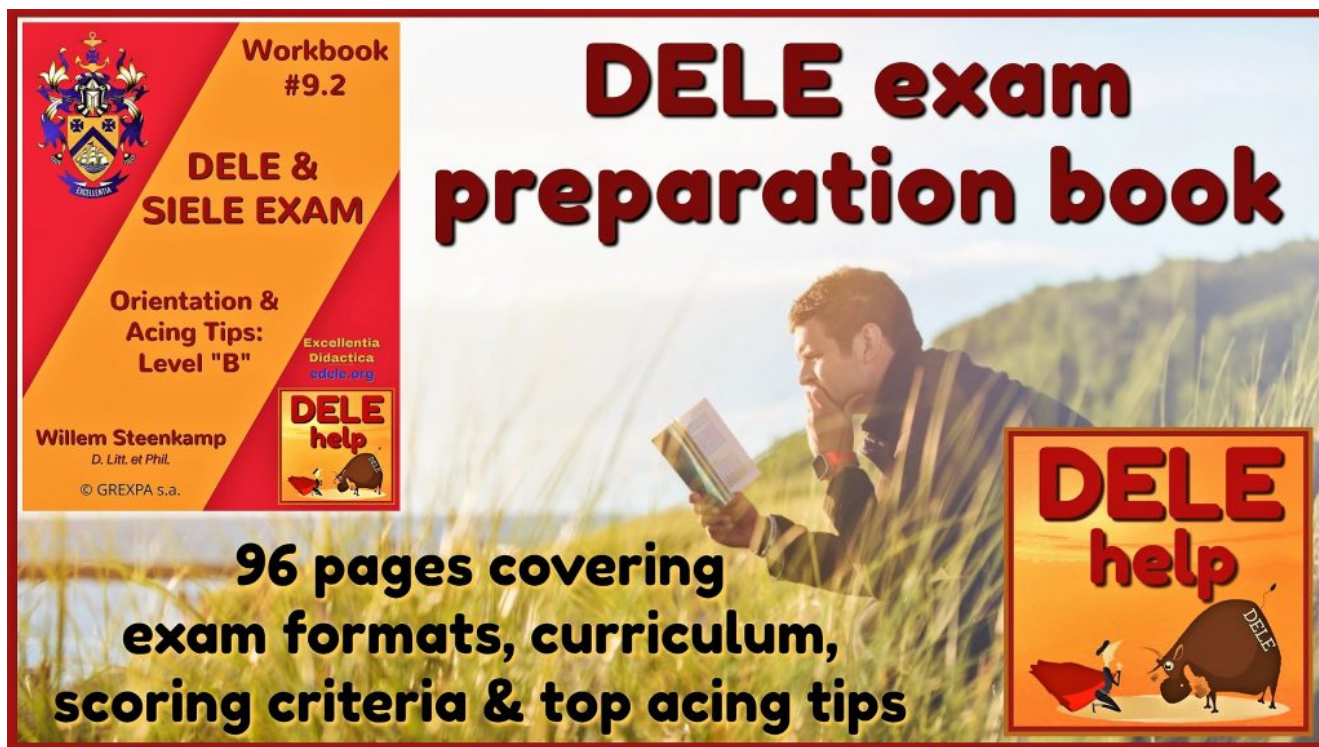


FREE DELE/SIELE EXAM PREPARATION BOOK IN ENGLISH



Workbook #9.2

DELE & SIELE EXAM

Orientation & Acing Tips: Level "B"

Excellencia Didactica exdele.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

DELE exam preparation book

96 pages covering exam formats, curriculum, scoring criteria & top acing tips

DELE help

Your free DELE/SIELE exam preparation book that explains, in English, all you need to know for effective exam prep

The DELE/SIELE – a different kind of exam

The DELE exam (of Spanish language competency) is very different to the typical school or college foreign language exam. If you want to prepare correctly, then from the very start you need to be well informed about these differences – the unique goals of the DELE system, the assessment criteria that the examiners will use to score you, and the curriculum content. If you do not know and understand these key characteristics of the DELE – if you do not have a proper DELE exam preparation book explaining them – then you simply won't be prepared to give the examiners what they are actually looking for. This applies as well to the DELE exam's new

online twin, the SIELE, which shares the goals, curriculum and assessment criteria of the DELE, as well as to the American OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview).

Unfortunately, what little material exists about the DELE's desired outcomes, assessment criteria and what the curriculum contains, is not

easily accessible. The curriculum and assessment protocols are only available

in high academic Spanish – policy documents written by academics for academics.

Very few Spanish tutors know much about how the exam actually functions i.t.o.

the **assessment**, as distinct from describing

the simple format. This means that many candidates enter the exam poorly

prepared, expecting something similar to school or college.

More often than

not, their preparation has consisted essentially of grammar revision – but

grammar is just one of the nine chapters of the official DELE curriculum describing

the prescribed exam content for the exam.

Astute students, when they first encounter a DELE exam paper, immediately sense that this is a very different kind of challenge. Because

the DELE tests what you can actually DO, in terms of really communicating in

Spanish – it doesn't set out to test merely what you KNOW. It is no surprise,

therefore, that one of the highest-frequency search terms on the internet

regarding the DELE exam, is "DELE exam preparation book".

Which hitherto has

not existed, in English.

About this DELE exam preparation book

Having myself prepared for (and passed) the DELE C2 exam, I have lived these frustrations. When I started preparing, I did so with a personal background that had made me aware of the importance of understanding assessment criteria. I had been sensitized to the science of didactics and assessment methodology during the time that I served as head of the South African diplomatic academy. This was during the transition to democracy in South Africa. I had to completely overhaul the training to make it suited to the needs of the New South Africa (after my stint at the academy, I had the great honour and privilege of representing i.a. President Nelson Mandela as ambassador).

In preparing for my DELE C2, I therefore quite naturally wanted to know what the curriculum entails, and with what criteria the examiners will use to assess my efforts at speaking and writing Spanish. Nobody could really tell me, in any detail. Yes, I could get acquainted with the format, in the form of model exam books. But I could find no DELE exam preparation book that explains the assessment criteria, the actual deliverables or “outcomes” that the DELE system wants candidates to be able to produce, and which defines the content prescribed in the curriculum.

Because of my experience heading the academy, I knew how vital understanding such “targeting” is, if one is to do well in any exam. I therefore set out digging and eventually got hold of the scoring matrixes, the instruction protocols for the examiners, and the massive, complex curriculum document. Taken together, what an eye-opener! I saw, for example, that three of the ten chapters of the curriculum dealt with history, geography, culture and tradition – to ensure a sufficient level of inter-cultural sensitivity that would, for example, enable one to correctly contextualize the meaning of many common Spanish expressions. I also saw that entire chapters are dedicated to identifying the “**can do**” statements or actual communicative tasks that candidates must be able to perform at each level, the “intercultural dexterities” that candidates must have developed, and the “genres of discourse and textual products” that the candidates must master – to name just some.

Do you know the “can do” statements?

DIn the curriculum omnibus, I was particularly struck by the chapter “functional language use” (what the Americans call the “**can do**” statements) which lists all the communicative tasks that you are expected to be able to perform at each level. This ranges from basics for beginners such as asking directions, to – at the higher levels – such sophisticated

tasks as introducing a toast at a formal reception. These “can do” statements encapsulate the true scope of the prescribed curriculum for each level – but how many students know about this, and are ever prepared to be able to produce these essential deliverables?

The goals of the DELE / SIELE system

What I found even more important than the curriculum as such, was the policy material explaining the goals of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (of which the DELE / SIELE is the Spanish iteration) and the four assessment criteria that examiners use to score your efforts.

The CEFRL came about because of the abolition of the internal borders in the European Union. This allowed EU citizens to live, work or study in any country of their choosing. This borderless new union made it essential for the likes of employers and post-grad schools at universities, to have access to reliable certification of the actual ability of an applicant to truly understand the new target language and to make him/herself understood in it. And it was apparent that school and college certification simply didn't reflect a candidate's actual communicative ability. For example, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages recently found, in a survey, that only 0.5% of students at high school and college who majored in a foreign language, could actually

maintain a conversation in that language. The authors of the CEFRL set out to try and correct this with their new policy, and the first thing they did was to change completely the focal point and goals of language tuition.

No longer would the language as such be the focal point, as it is in the academic study of Spanish in high school or college. In academic study of Spanish, the language is dissected and analysed, as one would dissect frogs in Biology – without yourself becoming a frog. The CEFRL threw this approach overboard. Instead, it takes the student as focal point: the student as “social agent” who must be able to perform real-world communicative tasks in a foreign-language environment. The objective is thus not to fill the student’s head with abstract academic knowledge about the language as subject matter, but to equip the student to be able to **DO** – to actually use the language in real-world communication. To understand what you read or hear, and make yourself understood when you speak or write. This means, to master the **four communicative competencies** of listening and reading comprehension plus written and oral expression (which form the four units that the DELE exam consists of).

The four DELE assessment criteria

So, if the examiners aren’t primarily intent on checking eagle-eyed what you know about conjugating Spanish verbs, but are assessing whether you are actually communicating effectively when you speak or write: what criteria do they use to score your effort? This, clearly, you simply **HAVE TO KNOW** if you are going to be able to give them what they are looking

for.

There are four assessment criteria, which at first glance seem very generic and woolly, if you don't have a proper DELE exam preparation book that can clarify what is meant with each. Most students are quite surprised when they first learn that, for the oral expression for example, these four equally weighted assessment criteria are: coherence, fluency, sufficiency of linguistic scope, and correctness. In other words, 50% of your score will be assessed on coherence and fluency – but what does that actually mean, in terms of what is expected of you? What is understood under each of these criteria, and how are they applied to assess an individual's performance, so as to arrive at a final score of pass or fail?

Our free DELE exam preparation book

Because being totally familiar with each of these assessment criteria is so very evidently of utmost importance to students who want to prepare correctly for the DELE, I felt that this was a gap that simply had to be filled. Therefore, I wrote a succinct, practical DELE exam preparation book for English-speaking students. This is truly the product of having “been there, done it”. Our in-house DELEhelp Workbook #9 of 96 pages is written from the student perspective. Its aim is to help you understand the goals, format, assessment criteria and prescribed curriculum content for the DELE, and also to share

with you, practical tips for acing the exam – both in terms of how to prepare, and what to do on exam day.

The best news is: **DELEhelp's** DELE exam preparation book is available to you, entirely free and with absolutely no obligation to sign up with us for classes. Of course, we hope that it will help convince you of our ability to add value to your DELE exam preparation. But the decision whether you want to use our expert 1-on-1 tuition via Skype at only US\$12 per hour, is yours and yours alone.

Also serves for SIELE exam preparation

If you are preparing to do the new **online twin** of the DELE exam, called the **SIELE**, you should also use this same DELE / SIELE exam preparation book, since the goals, criteria and curriculum are shared (it is the same official who signs both the DELE and the SIELE certification, namely the Director of Studies of the Instituto Cervantes). As you can imagine, we have also developed an additional workbook about acing the equivalent American OPI test (the Oral Proficiency Interview). You can ask for this as well, if you are preparing for the OPIc.

TOP DELE EXAM BLOG POSTS: QUICK LINKS

to 16 top exam prep blog posts
of the past 3 years, conveniently
together: just click on the cover
below of the one you want to read



To go to this blog post, just click on image

Since you are currently reading this blog post, you may already be aware of the many valuable articles guiding SIELE and DELE exam preparation that are available free in our *DELEhelp* blog. If, however, this is your first “landing” on our blog, check out the content list – you will see the dozens of posts with useful tips about how to ace the oral and the written expression tests, how to plan and what to focus on in your DELE exam preparation, how the DELE exam final score is calculated, and many more topics. We are pleased to offer you all this material free in our blog, in the hope that it, too, will show you what our expertise can mean to you, for improving your chances of doing well in the exam. Of course, once you do sign up with us (if that is your choice) then you will receive the rest of our series of one-of-a-kind in-house DELE exam preparation books, again

entirely for free, as part of the resources that we provide to every one of our students.

At a minimum, though, we hope that by reading this free sample DELE exam preparation book (number **9.2:**

DELE / SIELE Exam Orientation and Acing

Tips), you will understand how different the DELE is. We hope that you

will start to sense that extra confidence that comes from knowing precisely

what you are up against. Also, that you

will understand how you should best prepare yourself to meet the unique

challenges presented by the DELE / SIELE exam, or the OPI.

Seamlessly ties in with our 1-on-1 tuition via Skype

Properly planned and personalised preparation firstly requires such understanding as foundation, but also needs a proper initial **diagnostic** of your strengths and

weaknesses as basis. Plus expert, experienced guidance that will provide you

with feed-back and correction when you invest your time and mental energy in

the essential practice, practice, practice required to become fluent, coherent

and correct in your oral and written expression.

Such expert guidance is best provided one-on-one, not in group classes dominated by the lowest common denominator. And why not use modern online tech to have expert tuition in the

comfort of your own home, with flexible scheduling, and at low-low rates that reflect Central American overhead costs, not those of North America or Europe...?

To ask for your free copy of our DELE exam preparation book, simply click on the image below and send us the completed **contact information form** so we can e-mail you the download link (it is available as a .pdf e-book).

Workbook #9.2

DELE & SIELE EXAM

Orientation & Acing Tips: Level "B"

Excellencia Didactica edtdo.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

free DELE / SIELE / OPI exam preparation book

96 pages covering exam formats, curriculum, scoring criteria & top acing tips

DELE help

click on image to ask for free workbook

Buena suerte with your Spanish exam preparation!

Saludos cordiales

Willem

**Personalized, 1-on-1 tutoring
via Skype for DELE / SIELE & OPI,
US\$14 p.h.**

See more on our website:
<https://edele.org>

(click on this image)



**Sefardis, there's still time
to pass the DELE A2 Spanish
exam**

Sephardic Jews return to Spain

The central graphic features the Spanish coat of arms, which includes a crown at the top, a shield with various symbols, and two pillars on either side. A large, blue Star of David is superimposed over the right side of the coat of arms. The background is a textured, golden-yellow surface with red borders at the top and bottom.

Still time for your DELE A2 exam

New concession! Still time for Sephardic descendants to pass DELE A2 Spanish exam

If you are of Sephardic descent and you are keen to apply for Spanish nationality, then there's great news – a new concession by the Spanish authorities means that you can do the DELE A2 exam **AFTER the 30 September 2019 deadline** for having handed in your nationality application, and still have your DELE results accepted. **There definitely still remains sufficient time to prepare to pass, even for beginners.**



Sefardis - great news!

**For Spanish nationality,
you can now do
the DELE A2 exam
AFTER
your application is filed
(application deadline = 9/30/2019)**

You can submit your results for a further year, on condition that you must formally have initiated your nationality application on 9/30/2019 latest.




<https://delehelp.org>

Please remember – you **MUST** have filed your nationality application by 9/30/2019 latest

THE SPANISH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS:

The Spanish “right of return” law of 2015 allows applicants of Sephardic descent a limited window to **file their applications** for expedited Spanish nationality. The deadline has already been extended once (and the law only allows for that one extension). It expired on 30 September 2019. It is theoretically possible that it may be extended again, but this would likely require amendments to the original law, not just a simple administrative act (as with the first extension). Reality is that the somewhat inconclusive 2019 Spanish general elections has left the Cortes (national assembly) with other pressing priorities. Another complicating factor may be that the Muslim world is questioning the fact that, whilst in 1492 Jews **and** Moors were expelled from Spain, only descendants of those Sephardic Jews are currently being invited back in.

One of the requirements under the Sefardi return law, is that applicants must show proof of having mastered basic Spanish. This is tested by means of the DELE A2 exam, administered by the Instituto Cervantes. The A2 is the second lowest level of Spanish in a system that goes up to C2. A2 is really “survival Spanish”, with elementary grammar and its vocabulary focused on the candidate’s immediate needs and for describing his/her close living environment. The DELE exams are offered world-wide, on a limited number of days per year. The dates for **2020** are shown below .

 DELE EXAM DATES 2020 (COVID-19 revised) April & May 2020 sittings = CANCELLED		
EXAM DATE	REGISTRATION DATE	EXAMS OFFERED
31 July	8 July	A2
11 September	19 August	A1, A2/B1 for school kids A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2
2 October	9 September	A2, B1, B2, C1
23 October	30 September	A1, A2/B1 for school kids A2, B1, B2
13 November 14 November	14 October	A1, A2/B1 for school kids A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2

Revised 2020 DELE exam dates

From February 2020 there's a streamlined and improved **new DELE A2** exam format. The essence of the curriculum and assessment criteria remain, but it's more targeted to the needs and experience spheres of those seeking Spanish nationality, and slightly shorter with fewer tasks and questions – so it should be easier to pass. For more details, see our blog post:



DELE help

**the new (easier)
DELE A2 exam**

e 
 Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera

The new DELE A2 exam explained

A problem with the DELE is that the results typically only become available three months after the exam date. The actual diploma usually arrives a further three months later. Furthermore, accredited exam centers are relatively few, and have limited numbers of seats available for the exams. These practical problems with the DELE, have caused the Spanish Justice Ministry to **DE-LINK** the **submission of the language exam RESULTS** (as well as those of the CCSE culture & constitution exam, also managed by the Instituto Cervantes) from the **filing of the actual application** as such.

The concession now made by the Spanish authorities, means that – on condition that you officially filed your nationality application before or on 30 September 2019 latest, then your DELE / CCSE results will be accepted beyond that date, including for exams taken AFTER the closing date for applications as such (i.e., 30 September 2019).

Exactly till when candidates will be allowed to sit for the exams and still qualify, is unfortunately somewhat unclear at the moment (we are urgently working with our local Spanish Embassy to have this definitively cleared up). The web-site of the Jewish Federation of Spain avers that the exams can still be done through the whole of 2020. The actual notification of the concession, published by the Spanish Ministry of Justice in their official gazette on 19 June 2019, speaks of a period of “one year, which can be extended or reduced” for **HANDING IN YOUR RESULTS**. Unfortunately, it fails to state whether the year is to be calculated from the date of publication of the notice, or from 1 October 2019. It is also debatable whether such a right, once accorded, can legally be “reduced”, since that appears to be contrary to Spanish law of administrative procedure. The Instituto Cervantes, for its part, wasn’t clear what the last qualifying date for **ACTUALLY SITTING THE EXAM** would be (as distinct from the last date for handing in

results).

Please remember that registration for the exams close about four weeks prior to the exam date. Please make sure that the exam center that you aim to choose, will **definitely** be presenting the A2 on these dates. Not all centers choose to present all of the DELE exams offered by the Instituto Cervantes in any given year. Also be sure to ask whether the particular center must first meet a quota of candidates before Madrid will send them examiners (for the oral; not all centers have locally-based qualified oral examiners always to hand). Students have had the unfortunate experience of registering at such centers, and then receiving an e-mail from them on the last day of registration saying: “sorry, we didn’t meet the quota so we won’t be offering your level after all”. This then leaves the student in the impossible situation that it is then too late to search for another center.

Considering that this is truly a “once in a lifetime” opportunity and that it is now rapidly running towards its close, it makes sense to not put all your eggs in the basket of one exam session. Many things can go wrong – health-wise, business or family, impeding one to actually sit the exam as intended, or even on the day itself you may not be at your best, for any number of reasons. **It thus is wise, as a precaution, to also register ahead, in time, for an additional, “fall-back” session.**

The regional head office of the Instituto Cervantes for North and Central America is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico (they are also an exam center). If in doubt, don’t hesitate to contact them: <https://albuquerque.cervantes.es/en/default.shtm>

A last point about the registration process: if you suffer any disability that may impact your ability to fairly complete the exam, such as being hard of hearing (which may be a problem if you have to listen to the audio of the listening comprehension test over a public sound system in a group context, rather than having earphones) you need to take this up with your center from day one.



WITH PROPER PREPARATION, THE DELE A2 EXAM IS RELATIVELY EASY:

As far as the exam itself is concerned, it is NOT the Spanish Inquisition. It is not a “gotcha” type of exam trying to catch you out. It is a real-world, very practical test of your competency at communicating intelligibly in basic Spanish. The oral examiners are trained to try and put you at ease, and the exam papers as such are full of helpful guidance, so please don’t rush reading them – read them carefully, at least twice. The DELE is not like your typical school or college language exam. It is not hung up on grammar, or on marking you

negatively for every small mistake. It is all about communication; about messaging: can you understand a simple message and are you able to convey an understandable message in turn? The four equally-weighted scoring criteria of the speaking and writing segments of the DELE are: coherence, fluency, ample vocabulary, and accuracy (the latter encompassing pronunciation, spelling, and grammar). The examiners are under orders to ignore “slip of the tongue” type grammar mistakes that don’t impact the clarity of your message.

So, can a beginner start now and hope to pass in time? **Definitely, YES.** On condition, of course, that you are dedicated, apply yourself, and have access to a 1-on-1 coach. That “personal trainer” must work with you i.t.o. a personalized study plan, based on first of all doing a proper diagnostic of your level, aptitude and learning preferences.

As a concrete example: in 2018 we assisted a student who came to us at the beginning of May. He was based in **Iceland** (where there isn’t much opportunity to practice Spanish!) and he wanted to do the May 19th 2018 exam as a “dry run”, while really aiming for the July exam. Here is an extract from his registration form with us:

Address

Currently living in Iceland.

Academic Qualifications obtained

BFA in Graphic Design. No qualifications in Spanish.

Your current level of Spanish:

Beginner level.

When can we do a Skype interview about your needs?

My schedule is currently very open. I’d love to get started as

soon as possible.

Which aspects of your Spanish do you need help with?

I'll be taking the A2 exam for the Sephardic Jews Spain Right of Return. I'm scheduled to take the test on May 19, I'm not sure I'll pass the first time, so I'm currently planning to take it again in July.

Well, this student took 20.5 hours of very focused, structured classes with us via Skype, starting on 3 May, and on 19 May he passed! And he isn't the only one to have achieved that kind of progress, by any means. I could cite a whole list of similar cases. YES, IT CAN BE DONE! (It is based on just such testimonies that the Jewish Federation of New Mexico kindly recommends us to Sefardis who want to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity).



**The Jewish Federation of New Mexico
is Your Link to Spain**

<https://sephardiccertificate.org>

LOOK
who
recommend
us for
DELE A2
exam help

<https://edele.org>

The website <https://edele.org> based in Guatemala has also been very helpful for applicants seeking to improve their Spanish enough to pass the A2 exam. The director's name is Willem Steenkamp, ws@edele.org, and their phone number is +502 77 910 042. Here is the link to a blog post:

<http://www.delehelp.org/sephardic-jews-spain-right-of-return-dele-a2-language-test/>

Individual tutorials may be as low as \$10 per hour.



OUR *DELEhelp* TUITION VIA SKYPE IS PERSONAL AND FLEXIBLE:

Our tuition is always based on a personalized study plan, which we design for you, based on the initial diagnostic that we do as first step. We believe in being maximally flexible regarding hours. We are open seven days a week, from early to late in the evening and you can reschedule or cancel up to one hour before the booked time for your Skype session, without any penalties. You get our specialized *DELEhelp* in-house workbooks and related resources FREE. We bill you at the end of each month via PayPal, so you don't have to send us any personal or credit card data. You are billed only for the actual Skype interface time, at just **US\$14-00 per hour** (which thus includes our class prep and homework review time, plus our in-house resources, for FREE). I'm pretty sure that you won't get a better rate anywhere...

At *DELEhelp* we go way beyond grammar, covering each of the four communicative competencies being tested in the DELE. We thoroughly familiarize you with the exam format and curriculum. We inform you about the four scoring criteria applied by examiners in evaluating you in the oral and writing tests. We also coach you in the "distractor" techniques used by examiners in the multiple choice reading and listening comprehension tests. Our tuition is hands-on, simulating exam reality. It is absolutely goal-driven (i.e., entirely focused on helping you to **pass the exam**).

Above all our tuition is practical, informed by our own first-hand experience of the exam, from the perspective of an English-speaking student. It is an intensive, one-on-one effort to help you develop your actual communicative ability

in Spanish, so that you can **demonstrate the real-world skill sets** that the DELE's four equally-weighted scoring criteria evaluate. Our aim is to help you perform optimally in the exam setting. We help you to develop your actual communicative competencies. We DO NOT simply lecture you school-style about the "rules" of the Spanish language (which merely allows you to "know" in the abstract, instead of enabling you to actually DO).

Your personalized study plan will provide for 2/3 self-study and 1/3 Skype interfacing with the tutor (i.e., for every hour of Skyping, we assume two hours of guided self-study). The Skype sessions serve to practice the things one cannot really do on one's own at home, such as practicing for the very important oral expression part of the exam. The sessions also serve to give feed-back on the self-study assignments (for example, practicing writing in Spanish) and reviewing with you, your mock exam results. We include a lot of realistic simulated exam practice – using actual previous exam papers as well as model exams.

If you want to know more about the A2 exam and how best to prepare, have a look at our earlier blogpost on the topic:

Spain's "right of return" law for



Sephardic Jews Spain return DELE A2 language test (click on image to go to blogpost)

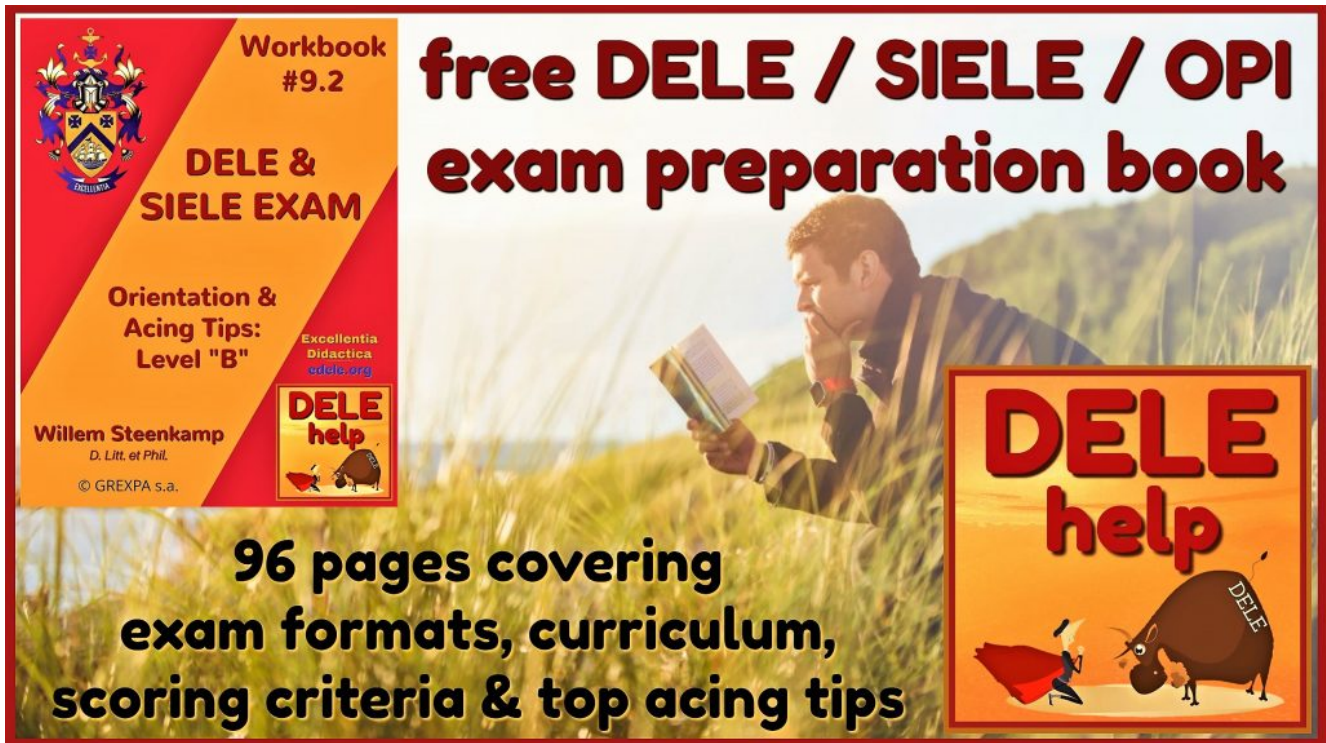
The following blogpost will guide you about WHAT to learn, and HOW to do it: <http://www.delehelp.org/dele-siele-oral-writing-how-to-learn-and-what/>

Our DELEhelp blog is full of useful guidance about all aspects of the DELE exam – browse the past postings at www.delehelp.org

To know more about our DELEhelp course package, please go to our secure website: <https://edele.org>

Don't forget to ask for our free, 96-page workbook of "**DELE exam orientation and acing tips**", by simply filling in the contact info form linked to the image below (just click on it).

We look forward to helping YOU ace your DELE A2 exam before the Sephardic window closes: *"¡Si, se puede!"* (Yes, it CAN be done!).



Workbook #9.2

DELE & SIELE EXAM

Orientation & Acing Tips: Level "B"

Excellencia Didáctica edele.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

free DELE / SIELE / OPI exam preparation book

96 pages covering exam formats, curriculum, scoring criteria & top acing tips

DELE help

click on image to ask for free workbook

The DELE and FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE USE

The DELE Exam Curriculum's important chapter on "FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE USE"

Learn about the "can do" statements
defining the communicative tasks
that you have to be able to perform



DELE exam functional language use segment is a key part of curriculum

Why is "functional language use" an important curriculum component?

The DELE / SIELE exam curriculum consists of much more than grammar and spelling. The same applies to their American equivalent, the OPI. Because the DELE / SIELE & OPI test "communicative competency", they are focused on what you can actually **DO**, more than on what you abstractly know. (For the sake of convenience, from this point on I will refer simply to the DELE, instead of each time the DELE / SIELE & OPI).

In this blog post we will examine the DELE's curriculum component that identifies the "functional language uses" prescribed for every level, i.e., A1, B2, C1 etc. This means, which everyday, functional uses of the Spanish language a student needs to master, in order to do well in the DELE exam (or, plainly put, which typical tasks of real-world communication – the OPI's "can do" statements). Examples of such "can do" statements would be: can I identify myself to an official? Can I ask for directions? Order a cup of coffee? Introduce a toast at a wedding? (the latter at the upper

levels, of course!).

“Functional language use” signifies the everyday communicative tasks that the student must be able to perform well, as assessed in terms of four scoring criteria: fluency, coherence, correctness and sufficiently ample linguistic scope (i.e., knowledge of vocabulary and expressions). Some more examples of these functional uses would be tasks such as to ask for information or for a favor. Or it could be to express an opinion or sentiment, such as disagreement or repentance. It includes how to relate socially, such as in the tasks of responding to words of welcome, or extending sympathy. It also includes influencing a situation, such as how to give an order or to deny permission. Another set of functional language uses relate to structuring a conversation – for example, tasks such as how to greet someone and how to respond to a greeting.



How important is “functional language use’ in relation to the other curriculum components? Very! Grammar and pronunciation/spelling are but the first components of the DELE curriculum, which has ten in all. The next main component is “functional language use” (i.e., the “can do” statements). Because the DELE exam does not pose college-style questions that test theoretical knowledge, what you should be expecting, is for your ability to perform these functional tasks to be tested instead. These tasks happen to also be typical of communication in real life, so mastering them not only serves to help one in the exam, but prepares one for the demands of everyday interaction – which is exactly what the DELE system is designed to foster and measure.

What the section on “functional language use” also does, is to give a good, practical indication of the SCOPE of matter that must be mastered for each level of the exam. In that sense, it is like a built-in “exam spotting tool” that students so much wish to have.

Now, simply to be practical about this blog post, it should be evident that dealing here in detail with the required functional language use competencies as listed in the DELE curriculum for every single level of the DELE system would be too much ground to try and cover in one blog post. We will, therefore, focus here on Level B, because it sits in the middle of the range and students at other levels can get a good idea of what their level’s requirements would likely be (all three levels follow the same structure and headings in relation to this particular component on functional language use). In addition, we will provide links at the end of this blog post to this curriculum component for each level, for your convenience.

Our purpose here is not to give you fully developed phrases as examples of the typical manner in which Spanish-speakers accomplish each of these functions. Again, this is because (even if we limit ourselves to level B) that would require the volume of a whole book, not a mere blog post. The idea here, in this blog post, is to **introduce** and sensitize you to the TYPE OF FUNCTIONS that the DELE requires you to be able to perform. We will present these in English (because the original curriculum documents are, of course, in high academic Spanish) so as to make them more accessible to especially the lower-level students. The links to the “functional language use” curriculum segment for each of the DELE’s A, B & C levels – which we provide at the end of this blog post – will however lead you to the somewhat wider detail of the original documentation. But not even in the original curriculum itself, will you find full examples of the typical phrases you will need to be able to form and articulate in order to perform

these everyday functional tasks – that, your expert 1-on-1 tutor will have to help you with, via Skype.



Related to the emphasis on mastering functional language uses in order to communicate competently, is a growing trend towards following a **lexical approach** as the best way to acquire a new language (“lexis” meaning internalizing “word chunks” or expressions and patterns of language, instead of mostly studying grammar rules – see our blog post: <http://www.delehelp.org/learn-to-converse-in-spanish/>).

This lexical trend plays into the DELE’s focus on tangible outcomes, not merely on abstract knowledge. Also important is tradition and culture, since clearly there are broadly standardized speech “formulas” / norms of good conduct, for how to appropriately perform these “functional language use” tasks, such as commiserating with a bereaved person, for example. The best way to master these everyday communicative functions (which is key to doing well in the exam, as well as in real life) is to practice with your expert tutor, doing simulations and role-playing.

Now please be aware that this blog post will, of necessity, have a somewhat weird look to it. This is because we are now going to list (in abbreviated form, in English) the DELE functional language use tasks – doing so under the same headings as used in the original curriculum document. Remember, this serves as an **introduction**, to give you a feel for the scope and nature of what is required (and, if you still labor under any illusion that the DELE’s curriculum is all about learning the rules of Spanish grammar and spelling, to disabuse you of that notion). For set 1, we will give some examples (as contained in the actual curriculum document) to illustrate what is meant under each function.

DELE Curriculum Level B: FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE USE



Set #1: Ask and give information:

- identify; (example: *¿Quién es la hermana de Raquel?* *-La (chica) morena que está hablando con Pablo.* Who is Raquel's sister? The brown-skinned girl talking to Paul);
- ask for information (*¿Sabes si / dónde / cómo...? ¿Sabes cómo se hace la sopa de marisco? ¿Puedes / Podrías decirme si / dónde / cómo...? Por favor, ¿puede decirme dónde está la estación?*);
- give information;
- then request confirmation.

Set #2: Express opinions:

- ask an opinion;
- give an opinion;
- ask for valorisation;
- offer valorisation;
- express approval and disapproval;
- position yourself in favor or against;
- ask if your interlocutor is in agreement;
- express agreement;
- express disagreement;
- demonstrate skepticism;
- present a counter-argument;

- express certainty and provide proof;
- express lack of certainty and demand proof;
- invite to formulate an hypothesis;
- express possibility;
- express obligation and necessity;
- express lack of obligation and necessity;
- ask about knowledge of something;
- express knowledge of something;
- express own lack of knowledge;
- ask about the ability to do something;
- express your ability to do something;
- ask if interlocutor remembers or has forgotten;
- express that you remember;
- express that you have forgotten.

Set #3: Express preferences, desires and wishes:

- ask about tastes and interests;
- express tastes and interests;
- express aversion; ask about preferences;
- express preferences;
- express indifference or absence of preference;
- ask about desires;
- express a desire;
- ask about plans and intentions;
- express plans and intentions;
- ask about state of mind;
- express joy and satisfaction;
- express sadness and sorrow;
- express pleasure and happiness;
- express boredom;
- express satiety;
- express anger and indignation;
- express fear, anxiety and preoccupation;
- express nervousness;
- express empathy;
- express relief;

- express hope;
- express deception;
- express resignation;
- express repentance;
- express embarrassment;
- express surprise and longing;
- express admiration and pride;
- express affection;
- express physical sensations.

Set \$4: Influence the interlocutor:

- give an order or instruction;
- ask a favor;
- ask for an object;
- ask for help;
- plead;
- repeat an earlier order;
- respond to an order,
- petition;
- ask permission;
- give permission;
- deny permission;
- prohibit;
- reject a prohibition;
- propose and suggest;
- offer and invite;
- ask for confirmation of an earlier proposal;
- accept a proposal,
- offer a proposal;
- reject a proposal,
- offer an invitation;
- counsel someone;
- warn;
- menace (only B2);
- reproach;
- promise and commit yourself;

- offer to do something;
- calm and console.

Set #5: Relate socially:

- greet;
- return a greeting;
- direct yourself at someone;
- present yourself to someone;
- respond to a presentation;
- ask about the necessity for a presentation;
- solicit to be presented;
- welcome someone;
- respond to a welcome;
- excuse yourself;
- respond to an excusing;
- thank someone;
- respond to thanks;
- present your sympathies/condolences;
- propose a toast;
- congratulate;
- express good wishes;
- respond to congratulations and good wishes;
- pass on greetings, wishes for better health;
- respond to being wished;
- take leave of.

Set #6: Structure a discourse:

- establish the communication or react to communication being established;
- greet and respond to a greeting, ask about someone and respond to such a query;
- ask for an extension and respond to such a request;
- ask if you can leave a message;
- ask how things are going, and respond;
- request to start relating something and respond;
- introduce the theme for relating something and react;

- indicate that you are following the telling with interest;
- attract the attention of the speaker;
- introduce something into the conversation;
- organize the information;
- reformulate what was said;
- highlight an element;
- quote;
- open a digression;
- close a digression;
- reject a theme or an aspect of the theme;
- interrupt;
- indicate that the conversation may be resumed;
- ask of someone to keep quiet;
- concede the floor to someone;
- indicate that you wish to continue the discussion;
- conclude a narration;
- introduce a new theme;
- propose closure;
- accept closure;
- reject closure and inject a new theme.

As promised, here is the link to this particular section in the original DELE B-level curriculum document:

http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/plan_curricular/niveles/05_funciones_inventario_b1-b2.htm

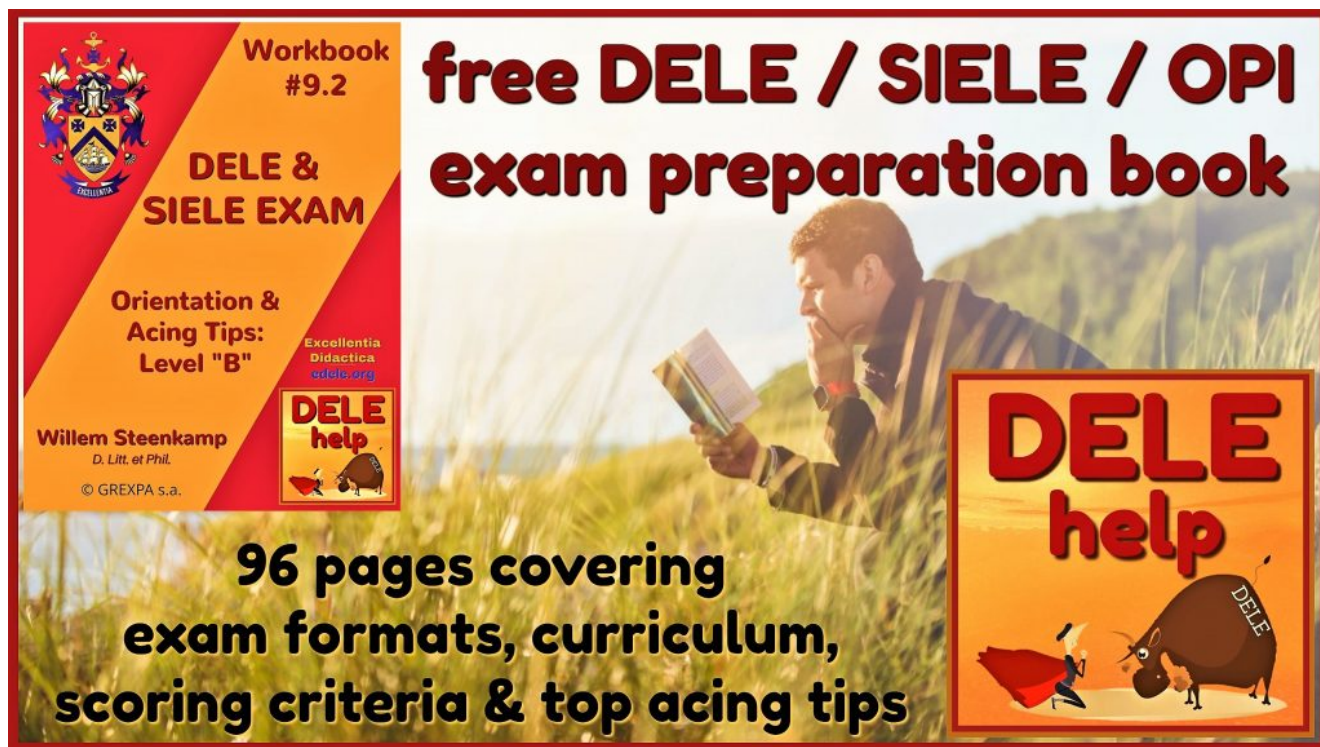
For levels A and B, the respective links are:

http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/plan_curricular/niveles/05_funciones_inventario_a1-a2.htm

http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/plan_curricular/niveles/05_funciones_inventario_c1-c2.htm

I hope that this blog post has given you at least a feel for what this very, very important component of the DELE curriculum is all about. Keep an eye on our blog; as

indicated, we will be posting new segments in this series that will eventually cover all of the components of the curriculum.



Workbook #9.2

DELE & SIELE EXAM

Orientation & Acing Tips: Level "B"

Excellencia Didactica edele.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

free DELE / SIELE / OPI exam preparation book

96 pages covering exam formats, curriculum, scoring criteria & top acing tips

DELE help

click on image to ask for free workbook

Please keep in mind our **FREE OFFER** of our 96-page Workbook #9.2 (DELE / SIELE exam orientation & acing tips) which you can have absolutely *gratis* and with no obligation, simply by sending us a request via our convenient contact form (just click on the image above). This unique free DELE / SIELE exam preparation book covers all aspects relating to the goals, format and curriculum of the DELE system, plus battle-tested tips for preparing yourself to ace the DELE exam.

Don't miss out either on our **other free offer**, which is an exploratory one hour Skype session with myself, in English, explaining the intricacies of these exams and answering your questions – you can make use of these offers with no obligation on you to sign up for coaching.

Best of luck with your exam preparation!

Salu2

Willem

**Personalized, 1-on-1 tutoring
via Skype for DELE / SIELE & OPI,
US\$14 p.h.**

See more on our website:
<https://edele.org>

(click on this image)



Click on IMAGE to go to our secure website

**ONLINE COACHING FOR
DELE/SIELE & OPI**

Our Methodology



- * expert diagnosis of level & individual needs (free)
- * Personalized study plan for 1-on-1 coaching
- * get to know your exam's curriculum & goals
- * understand its scoring & assessment criteria
- * focus on lexis & patterns: reading + radio/TV
- * guided conversation practice with coach via Skype
- * do many mock exams, get expert feed-back

Key elements of our online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI

Our online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI exams of Spanish language ability is based on the fact that these are “**can do**” exams, not tests of abstract academic knowledge. Effective online tutoring that truly helps students, 1-on-1 with their exam preparation, requires special coaching methods which are very different to traditional classroom teaching.

Such coaching must be founded on a well-designed, personalized study plan for each individual student. This needs to be based on a proper initial diagnostic of each individual’s existing level, unique learning preferences and strengths & weaknesses. Done this way, our expert 1-on-1 exam prep coaching is much more effective than taking group classes at a residential school, where the lowest common denominator often drags everyone down and where there is very little opportunity for what is truly essential in any skill development: practice, practice and yet more PRACTICE.

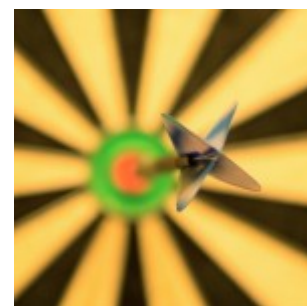
Furthermore, enjoying such personal coaching via Skype in the comfort of your own home, is a lot more convenient, as well as

time and cost-effective than attending group classes. But you probably know that already. What you likely want to know, is **what** (i.t.o. resources) you will be receiving from us, if you should choose **DELEhelp** to tutor you via Skype, and **how** (i.t.o. methodology) we will be going about it. Those are the fundamental questions that we want to answer with this blog-post.

1. THE ISSUES WE WILL ADDRESS IN THIS POST:

- Defining our shared Objectives
- Recognizing the Challenges
- The Exam Components
- Mind-set
- Methodology: OBL / CLT/ Lexical Approach / *Suggestopedia*
- Lexis: Phrases, collocations, expressions and Vocabulary
- Pronunciation
- Correct Grammar & Spelling
- Exam Simulation

2. DEFINING THE OBJECTIVES



2.1 You need a Personalized Study Plan

At **DELEhelp**, our individualized online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI has a single focus. It is to help the unique **you** (i.e., not a group class full of students) to pass your chosen exam.

To achieve this, we first have to develop a personalized study plan, based on your individual needs and learning preferences. People do not have the exact same aptitude for language learning. Personal preferences differ, when it comes to study methods – for example, between those who thrive on structured grammar and those who hate it. Candidates also don't have the

same level of competency in Spanish to begin with. Their respective strengths and weaknesses vary significantly, as far as what they happen to already know (or not know). Equally, and very importantly, there are differences between individuals as to which communicative skill sets they already have mastered.

The four skills are fundamental to everyday communication, and therefore to the goals of these exams – because these **exams**, just like **real life**, revolve around the ability to fluently and coherently **apply** your knowledge in everyday, practical communication settings. Therefore, doing a proper initial diagnostic and developing a personalized study plan for each candidate is absolutely essential (which explains why group classes usually are not optimal for students preparing for these exams).

To arrive at a well-founded individual study plan, we first have to diagnose your current strengths and weaknesses, plus your aptitudes and preferences. By strengths and weaknesses, we don't mean only what you do (or don't) yet know. We primarily need to test what you **can do**, because these exams are a very practical assessment of your competency at communication in **real-world situations**. We therefore have to test your ability to apply your knowledge, and measure your skill at all four task fields, namely reading and listening comprehension, plus oral and written expression. We will, during the first weeks, test your competency at actually communicating in Spanish, with reference to **correctness**, **fluency**, **coherence**, and a sufficiently ample **linguistic scope** (these four elements in bold, are the typical assessment criteria used by the examiners).

Once we have established what you know and can do, we then have to match that with what the curriculum for your chosen exam level requires of you to know and be able to do. In this way, we identify your individual knowledge and skills shortcomings, which we then have to address with a

personalized plan of learning activities and skills coaching. This plan is constantly updated i.t.o. your progress, which we continuously measure during the Skype sessions, as well as by means of regular mock exams (which also familiarize you with your exam's format). This study plan also needs to flexibly fit around your practical constraints as well, such as the study time you have available and your budget.

We will NOT try and make you fit into some boilerplate “package plan” based on a one-size-fits-all syllabus.

2.2 What you need to know about your exam's format and goals



Our shared objective is to develop your real-world proficiency at actually communicating in Spanish, so that you can pass your chosen exam. But how will this proficiency be tested in the exam? What kind of exam is the DELE, the SIELE or the OPI? What does your exam aim to assess, what tasks does it consist of, and how is it scored?

What is needed at the outset, is to ensure that you have a proper understanding of the goals and nature of these exams of communicative competency, which are all now based (whether European or American) on the CEFR – the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Again, they are by nature very different from typical school or college language exams. Only once you know exactly what is required, and how your efforts will be scored, can we then take careful aim at those aspects of Spanish everyday usage which your diagnostics show you haven't yet sufficiently mastered. (For a fuller discussion of how a personalized study plan is drawn up, please see our **DELEhelp** Blog-post below (click on the image to have the post open in a new window):



Click on image to go to blog post

What we **won't** be doing, is to over-emphasize school-style formal teaching of Spanish, because neither these exams nor the everyday communicative challenges encountered in real life are directly concerned with abstract knowledge of grammar – nobody in either the exam or in real life is ever going to ask you to recite conjugation tables. In any event, school or college-style tuition is notoriously inefficient at developing conversational ability – according to statistics from the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) only **0.5%** of US students who majored in a foreign language, can maintain a conversation in the new language, at the end of their regular studies. (For more information on how the human brain processes patterns in order to acquire language, please see our **DELEhelp** Blog-post: “Learn to Converse in Spanish”):



Click on the IMAGE to go to this blog post

The foregoing doesn't mean that you can get by without having internalized the **patterns** of Spanish (grammar is just a handy cram sheet of those patterns). What is essential is the correct **mind-set**. One has to understand that the objective is to develop the skill to communicate, to which end grammar does serve as a handy tool facilitating the identification and comprehension of the patterns you need to be able to apply; knowing the rules of Spanish grammar by heart, however, is not the end goal, in and of itself.

We also assume, since you are enrolling for one of these exams, that you already have some basic Spanish schooling under your belt – we are therefore not going to be presenting you with a generalized beginners course (unless you are aiming for Level A1, *por supuesto*). Our interventions will, instead, be focused on sharpening your proficiency at actually communicating in Spanish. We will be targeting your specific needs and weaknesses according to the individualized program of tutoring we've drawn up, after a thorough diagnosis.

The principal objective with our online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI will be to help you to **internalize**, through guided practice, the **lexis** and the **patterns** of Spanish (lexis

being its words and “word chunks” or collocations, plus expressions, with the patterns being the syntax and morphology of Spanish).

However, comprehensible communication obviously is not enabled merely by knowing the right words and phrases, in terms of merely knowing their individual meaning (as important as such knowledge of semantics undoubtedly is). Comprehensible communication also requires **intelligible pronunciation** as well as the **syntactically and morphologically correct use** of the strings of words (i.e., sentences) that you speak and write.

It bears stressing again that grammar, in this context, must be seen as a useful tool, and not the be-all and end-all of “learning Spanish”. Knowledge of grammar is, in reality, just a shortcut to identifying and internalizing the all-important **patterns** of the language. It is these patterns that you have to “get to own”, to the point of reflexively applying them without having to consciously think (which is what we mean by internalize).

The objective is to develop your ability to instantly and without conscious, calculating effort, roll out the correct phrases and combinations that will convey your message (just as you constantly do in your native tongue, without even thinking about grammar). It is a question of the right mental attitude: your overriding goal (even when learning grammar) must always be to develop the ability to **converse** in Spanish – that is, not merely to know the rules of Spanish grammar, but to be able to apply them. Life is all about the skill of **APPLYING** knowledge, not merely about possessing abstract knowledge; this is the proficiency that’s fundamental to these exams as well.

In essence, we will be concentrating on assisting you to develop and improve your Spanish **communication skills**. This means that, during the Skype sessions, we will primarily be concentrating on **guided conversation practice** – firstly,

because in the case of the DELE for example, it is statistically proven that the **oral section** causes 70% of the students who end up failing the exam, to have failed. Secondly, we focus on conversation sessions because conversation is the one skill that is difficult for you to practice alone at home. Thirdly, targeted conversation shows up any weaknesses in your overall preparation through the lexical or grammatical mistakes you make, which can then be clarified and corrected on the spot. We also believe in the value of doing regular mock exams, to familiarize you with the typical format, but also to use as an ongoing diagnostic tool, so that we can constantly adapt your personal program as needed.

Our task is to get you to be confident and comfortable in your own skin when communicating in Spanish, so that you may do so coherently, correctly and fluently. To achieve this, we have to help you to gain confidence and overcome the natural inhibitions associated with fear of making mistakes in front of others, through the application of some basic principles of teaching psychology (about which, there will be more detail later). These principles of de-suggestion (Suggestopedia) we integrate with the broad modern pedagogical approaches known as Outcome-based, Task-based or Content-based learning, plus Communicative Language Teaching and the Lexical Approach – as will be explained in sub-section 6.

3. RECOGNIZING THE CHALLENGES

It is common wisdom that, whether it is a child or an adult that's acquiring a new language, the end objective is the same (namely, to be able to communicate, primarily through conversation). Evidently, though, there exist practical differences in the circumstances of adults and children when acquiring a language, that are important to realize i.t.o. understanding and meeting the challenges.



In many ways, adults are better positioned to acquire a new language, than toddlers. Adults enjoy definite advantages – such as, for example, having the ability to read. In addition, there are many learning tools adults can access, such as books, audio and video, flashcards and interactive computer programs, which permit intense bursts of immersion. There's also tuition, plus the availability of grammar handbooks that identify and explain the patterns of **morphology** (how words are morphed, such as through verb conjugation, to signify different meaning) and **syntax** (how sentences are put together). Adults, therefore, are not limited to acquiring these patterns just from speech that they randomly hear in their environment, as kids are obliged to do.

Nevertheless, kids have one great overriding advantage: they can devote at least six years of almost exclusive mental focus to the basic process of developing language proficiency, because their every other need is being taken care of (and their brains are, at that age, optimally receptive to language). Very few, if any, adults enjoy the luxury of so much time and focus! Can you imagine how good your Spanish would be if you had six years of total, exclusively focused immersion, as a child would have? Put differently, if you study 10 hours a week for a whole year, you've only done around 40 days, when considering only waken hours.

Yet we as adults typically want to acquire a new language in the briefest of time, while still attending to all our other priorities (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages calculate that a student with above-average aptitude will require 720 hours of the intensive kind of language training that diplomats undergo at the Foreign Service Institute (i.e., full day and freed up from other work obligations), to reach the kind of professional-level proficiency at conversation that diplomats, for example, would require).

Furthermore, kids don't suffer the barrier of inhibition,

which in most adults stifles the very essential willingness to open their mouths and practice.

When adults learn a foreign language, they typically progress through stages – first acquiring the ability to read it, secondly to being able to listen and follow the spoken word, thirdly being able to speak, and lastly to write to native standard. For these exams (as for real life) all four of these skill sets have to be mastered – except of course if you're only doing the OPI as such, or the SIELE S4, which are limited to just the oral skill. The main challenges to communicating effectively, fluently and confidently in Spanish as foreign language can be summed up as being, on the **comprehension** side:

- Establishing a sufficiently ample **lexis** (vocabulary plus collocations and expressions) as well as knowledge of the syntactical and morphological **patterns** of the language, to enable you to understand the meaning of what you are reading or hearing;
- Attuning your ear to enable you to correctly capture and differentiate the words and phrases that others are saying; and

on the side of **expressing yourself** orally and in writing:

- Getting your tongue and mouth accustomed to forming sounds the Latin way, to enable you to pronounce intelligibly;
- Developing a sufficiently ample linguistic scope in Spanish (lexis) so that the right words and phrases come to you with ease; and
- Internalizing the patterns of Spanish morphology and syntax, so that you can reflexively string together words in the correct configuration, when conducting a conversation.

To meet these overt challenges just mentioned, some important **innate** ones also have to be overcome:

- We have to help you undo **unilingual rigidity** (particularly for those who don't yet speak any foreign tongue) because this restricts mouth movement, body language and conversational mental agility. This rigidity, which is a very important hindrance to acquiring proficiency in a foreign language, stems from inhibitions related to our adult ego-awareness, and from lifelong conditioning and casting in one cultural/linguistic mode. It negatively impacts ability to pronounce correctly, and also inhibits the ability to recognize and mentally "own" the lexical and grammatical patterns of Spanish, especially where these patterns differ from that which the student is used to in native English;
- In parallel with overcoming unilingual rigidity, we need to assist you in developing your own confident, uninhibited Spanish-speaking "alter-ego" – this new parallel persona needs to have a correctly-attuned mind and flexible tongue/mouth and body language; and
- As with any distinct type of exam, there is the challenge of building confidence for the exam itself by knowing what to expect of your chosen exam, how to approach it (i.t.o. your lead-up preparation, as well as on exam day itself) and being well orientated about its typical setting, format, sequence of tasks, and the practical do's and don'ts.

4. THE "FOUR SKILLS" AS EXAM COMPONENTS

The modern exams of communicative competency are designed to test different levels of proficiency at everyday communication skills, encompassing comprehension of the written and spoken word, plus the ability to express oneself intelligibly and coherently in Spanish, both in writing and in conversation. It thus includes audio listening elements (to test comprehension of meaning, accents, vocabulary etc.), written tasks (hand-written as well as multiple choice papers) plus oral

presentation / conversation. The length of time allocated to each component varies for the different levels. Rather than re-inventing the wheel by writing up our own version of each level's requirements, we prefer to direct you straight to the original sources:

NB: When you sign up with *DELEhelp* for our online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI, you will be provided with our free in-house **Workbooks** for your particular exam and level. Our e-book #9, for example, is titled ***DELE / SIELE Exam Orientation and Acing Tips***. In its some 96 pages you will find detailed guidance about the exams and how to prepare yourself for presenting your knowledge and skills to best advantage. If you are aiming to do the OPI / OPIc, then you will receive our e-book #8, which is aimed specifically at that test. You will also receive the **entire** series of our Workbooks, all in English, which are all **free** for our registered students, covering topics such as vocabulary / cognate words, expressions and idioms, the history of Spanish, plus a very popular one, WB#2, called ***De-Mystifying Spanish Grammar*** which relates Spanish to the grammatical reference framework with which students are already familiar, namely that of English.

Even if you're not registered as a student, but want to check out our materials, you can make use of our **FREE, NO OBLIGATION OFFER** of our e-books 8 & 9 covering the OPI/OPIc and the DELE/SIELE, by simply asking for the download links, using our easy contact info form – just click on the images below to contact us:

Workbook #9.2

DELE & SIELE EXAM

Orientation & Acing Tips: Level "B"

Excellentia Didactica edele.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

free DELE / SIELE / OPI exam preparation book

96 pages covering exam formats, curriculum, scoring criteria & top acing tips

DELE help

click on image to ask for free workbook

free OPI test prep e-book

to ask for it, please fill in our short contact info form - there's no obligation; just click on this image to access the form

Workbook #8

Prepping for the OPI Oral Proficiency Interview

ACTFL
AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Excellentia Didactica edele.org

DELE help

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

Click on IMAGE to ask for this FREE e-book, with no

obligation.

5. THE MIND-SET TO ADOPT



Before we address the didactic methods available for coaching in preparation for these exams, it is important to stress once again that the candidate's own mind-set regarding mastering Spanish is pivotal. Exam preparation is firstly a question of self-improvement, of self-study. No spoon feeding.

What is at issue, is developing yourself psychologically, intellectually and in terms of practical, physical performance skills – expanding your existing communicative persona as based on your mother tongue, by adding an additional, parallel identity: the new Spanish-speaking you.

One's mother tongue is perhaps the most definitive expression of one's culture. It is of such importance in the life of individuals and societies that the way we speak it, seriously type-casts us: as nationals of given countries, natives of particular places, members of a given social strata.

To function effectively as communication medium for any given society, language requires a high level of conformity within that group. Language is a code, and like any code it must be shared with exactness and precision, in order to unlock the same meaning. Individuals cannot freely construct phrases and pronounce words to their own whim or delight, and hope to be clearly understood. Therefore, in our formative early childhood, we are conditioned to conform to the communication parameters of our family's peer group – their language use, their way of pronouncing (such as in regional dialects or class-based speech), even to types of body language. This is the reality of societal conditioning, which underpins the hurdle of **unilingual rigidity**.

As Steven Pinker and like-minded researchers have shown, up to the age of six a child **instinctively** acquires its mother tongue from its immediate environment – just as a spider has the innate skill and instinct to spin webs, our species has this instinct as our particular “thing” (together with the ability to walk upright, of course). There is strong proof that our species is genetically “wired” to **acquire** (as opposed to abstractly **learn**) the ability to communicate in the mother tongue, with adaptations of the brain that facilitate this acquisition as the uppermost developmental priority, up to the age of six. Thereafter (unfortunately) the brain has to start allocating resources to other priorities and consequently the learning of another language can get crowded out – even though the latest neuroscience has shown that our brains process language acquisition exactly the same, whether it’s 1st or 2nd language, or as adults or toddlers.

It is also important to understand that what the young child acquires is the skill to communicate, rather than merely abstract “knowledge” about the features of a particular language – definitely without yet consciously being able to describe its grammar “rules”, for example (even though they can apply the patterns). Communicating also requires skill at using one’s articulation tools to form sounds. Styles of pronunciation are therefore also fixed in childhood, so as to conform to the accent or dialect of one’s peer group (a quick aside – a respected linguist once defined the difference between a “dialect” and a “language” as being merely that the speakers of the latter possessed an army and a navy, meaning that they could enforce the official supremacy of their dialect, over those of other groups...).

From very early childhood, as part of this human quest for conformity, we accustom ourselves to our own language or dialect’s accent – its particular “mouth gymnastics”. We also learn to conform to its socially acceptable customs of non-verbal communication (for example, British “stiff upper lip”

versus “Latin exuberance”) in body language. Then – from the beginning of formal schooling – we are drilled to conform to the written character sets of our language, abiding by its rules of spelling.

Understandably, because conforming is of such importance, our particular communication mode quickly tends to become a **rigid fix**, with the tongue and jaw seemingly inhibited from forming sounds at variance with the mother-tongue pattern. Without re-conditioning, the mind also seems incapable of according “non-conforming” sound values to the familiar letters of our alphabet that we see when reading – even if reading a foreign language.

To compound matters, our equally highly conditioned ears seem reluctant to differentiate and de-code unfamiliar sounds reaching them. Worse still, when we listen to our own speech, our hearing tends to selectively “hear” only the sounds that we ourselves had mentally **intended** to form. We do not register accurately the **actual** sound (often highly mutilated by our stubborn jaws and tongues) that in fact escape from our mouths; this is why we have to use a recording device and record ourselves when practicing, so as to re-listen, in order to be fully aware of our own shortcomings in pronunciation.

We are also inhibited by our fragile adult ego. We are o-so-afraid of making fools of ourselves in public. And what more revealing way to demonstrate “foolishness” than to incorrectly speak someone else’s language?

It therefore stands to reason that, in order to speak Spanish like a “native”, we have to first acquire the right mind-set. We have to be willing to “go native”. Then, we have to consciously re-accustom our minds, jaws, faces, tongues, hands – everything we are – to the demands of an additional cultural identity; in essence constructing an “alter-ego” for ourselves that’s “native” to Spanish culture and to whom the grammatical constructs, tongue gymnastics and body language

inherent to speaking Spanish “natively” will thus come naturally, without embarrassment or ego interference.

6. **METHODOLOGY – TBL / OBL / CLT , the Lexical Approach & Suggestopedia**

In dealing with methods of tutoring and exam preparation, it would be easy to fall here into the trap of academically discussing all the theories that are nowadays proffered about learning. There’s a plethora of “methods” out there today, with so many acronyms it looks like a Scrabble board.



Please rest assured – that is not what we’re about to do here. We want to introduce a practical, common sense approach to addressing the challenges that we identified earlier, always keeping in mind the need for personalization. We’re not into absolutizing any given method (in most instances, these modern methods seem quite similar, just with different names depending on where and with whom they originated). With us, your online coaching will therefore be driven by you and your unique needs, not by some methodological dictate, as often happens in school systems.

There are, however, common denominators that we have to take note of in most of the methods that are now in vogue, whether they be called task-based learning (TBL), or outcome based learning (OBL), or content-based learning. They all have in common that students need be assisted to acquire the skill to **apply knowledge** – not just to **know**, but to be able to actually **do**. This is the essence of the common European approach to learning adopted in 2005, known as the Bologna Process, which defines qualifications “in terms of learning **outcomes**”, with emphasis on the “importance of **performance**”. Such performance relates to “what students know and **can do**” when they finish their course. You will by now be very aware that these exams share this common European approach, and therefore are

strongly focused on testing competency at actual communication.

Task or outcome-based education originated from a behaviorist approach to teaching. It ties in, in the sphere of language training, with one of the other modern methods known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This method came about thanks to a recognition of the limitations of traditional teaching methods. A study by the University of Illinois found that *“students who were taught communicatively fared no worse on grammatical tests than students that had been taught with traditional methods, but they performed significantly better in tests of communicative ability.”*

In recent years CLT has become more refined, through Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL). In TBLL the emphasis is on the successful completion of tasks; the students' efforts are then marked, which allows for regular progress assessment to be conducted.

In our experience at **DELEhelp**, the best practical approach to selecting an appropriate teaching methodology for each student is a two-track one. Firstly, we have to stay true to our maxim of personalization, dependent on the unique knowledge and skill levels, plus distinct aptitudes and learning preferences of each individual student. Secondly, one has to be guided by the reality that these exams are structured as outcome / performance based, communicative competency tests. Since this is the way the exam is set up, we evidently need to adhere to the same task or outcome based, communicative approach, with emphasis on developing proficiency at performing real-world communication tasks.

At **DELEhelp**, you will be assigned at least two tutors – one who is native English speaking (with a C2 level of Spanish), for explaining challenging concepts in English and to allow you to put your questions in your own tongue. The other tutor is native Spanish-speaking (but with a good working knowledge

of English) to assist you with pronunciation and Spanish lexis and grammar in general, as well with your communicative skills development. For the frequent simulations of the oral exams, you will encounter some of our other tutors who will act as the interviewing examiner, to simulate the exam situation where you have to face an unfamiliar figure.

What is somewhat unique about us, is that we approach the exam prep assistance from the student's perspective – thanks to the fact that I myself, (the Director of Studies of **DELEhelp**), had to pass the DELE exam, at the highest C2 level. It is truly a case of “been there, done it”, with therefore a very clear and practical understanding of what kind of help the English-speaking student needs in order to succeed.

To help you come to grips with the patterns of Spanish more easily and quickly, our in-house workbooks (which are in English), purposely set out to relate the Spanish constructs to the linguistic framework you are most familiar with, namely English.

In the course of our online exam prep tutoring, we focus on:

- the typical tasks set in these exams (reading and listening comprehension, plus oral and written expression);
- regularly assessing progress by means of exam simulations using model exams and the actual scoring criteria (which also serve to familiarize you and provide practical experience); and
- using our Skype interface time primarily for those aspects of preparation that a student cannot do at home, such as practicing conversational fluency (during which we can immediately address any problems regarding correctness of grammar, lexis and pronunciation). The Skype interface time also serves for providing feedback on self-study tasks the student has submitted.

At the beginner levels in particular, we do of necessity incorporate grammar exercises in the tuition (as a handy shortcut to learning the patterns of the language, not as a goal in itself).

In all study plans we stress the importance of self-study: for every hour of formal tuition via Skype, there should typically be at least two hours of guided active self-study, plus as many hours as possible of passive immersion. By the latter we mean, for example, having talk radio or TV running in the background throughout as much of your day as possible, and doing as much leisure reading in Spanish as you can fit into your daily routine. The active self-study consists of doing set tasks (yes, homework) to improve the comprehension and expression skill sets being tested in these exams, plus working on your vocabulary and lexis flashcards. We will expand on this a bit later, but to complete this introduction of methodologies, we need to present a solution for the adult ego problem – with a method that has been proven to work for many learners of a second language, particularly at beginner level.

In the 1970's the Bulgarian psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov developed a teaching method which he called **suggestopedia**. This method was validated in 1978 by a special working group of the UN's educational arm, **UNESCO**, whose formal finding was: *"There is consensus that Suggestopedia is a generally superior teaching method for many subjects and for many types of students, compared with traditional methods."*

Suggestopedia was proven to be particularly useful in the learning of a second language. It is based on the idea that people, as they grow older, are inhibited in their language learning by the unilingual rigidity we mentioned earlier. They instinctively try to force the new language into the communicative mold of their mother tongue – whether in relation to pronunciation, or to grammatical structure. To escape this tendency, the student needs to approach the new

language with a clean mental slate; he or she needs to adapt to the new language and its conventions, rather than trying to adapt that language to their own pre-existing way of using their communication tools. It is, of course, not easy to transform oneself culturally, because sense of identity is so strong and valuable – the “suggestopedic” trick lies in creating a parallel persona for tackling the new language, free of inhibitions of ego or prior conformisms.

Lozanov said that students need to feel confident and relaxed and their psychological barriers must be “de-suggested”. Since the 1970’s, significant development of these principles have taken place and been published under names such as SALT (*Suggestive Accelerated Learning and Teaching*) and *Superlearning*.

Pure Suggestopedia as well as its derivatives are mostly orientated to classroom/group teaching, not to our one-on-one online tutorials. In its original form Suggestopedia has been rightly criticized over the years as not being capable of covering all methodological aspects of language tuition, and it has been superseded by the newer approaches mentioned earlier. Again we must stress that, at **DELEhelp**, we don’t follow any “method” slavishly, nor do we condemn outright any approach – be it traditional grammar (if correctly viewed as a shortcut to the patterns of the language), or Suggestopedia, for that matter. This latter may not be personally appropriate for all, depending on preference and personality, but that it could contribute to your induction into a Hispanic mind-set, is proven fact.

So, how would we help “liberate” you from the constraints inculcated in you by society, and by your (very human) adult ego, using the essence of Suggestopedia?



Firstly, we would ask you to choose and build (solely for the purpose of your Spanish language practice, not as a public persona) your own Hispanic identity, your “alter-ego”.

Choose a name, a nationality, locality / residence, profession, family context etc., and write up a little mock biography which your tutor will use to refer to you by that name / identity. In other words, convert yourself into Pepe Pérez, a taxi driver from Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, for example.

Why do we do this? Because whereas John Smith may be understandably hesitant / reticent to mouth full-throatedly in the Spanish way, the nice roaring RRR’s when for example he must pronounce the name Raul, the newly minted “Pepe Pérez” will have no such psychological hang-ups. And when Pepe mispronounces or says something that could be construed as silly, so what? It’s no skin off John Smith’s nose/ego!

This “mind trick” of mentally adopting, for learning purposes, a parallel identity may sound infantile, but the principle of “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” or “it takes a thief to catch a thief” (or any other idiom which we can twist and misuse to make the point that if you want to **speak like a native, then go native**) has been well proven. You simply *have* to **de-suggest** your mouth, tongue and jaw out of its rigid cultural fix. You *have* to accustom your communication tools, through positive suggestion, to function in a “new native” manner. If not, you cannot avoid sounding in Spanish like the incomprehensible gibberish that you yourself have laughed at in the past, whenever you’ve heard others trying to speak your language, whilst retaining their own “sound system”.

Intelligible pronunciation is absolutely vital to being understood – if you make errors of grammar, your interlocutor can usually compensate in his own mind and deduce what you’re

actually trying to say. Mispronouncing, on the other hand, usually means just a blank stare, indicating that he/she doesn't have a clue what you're talking about (and thus cannot possibly compensate). Therefore, it is rightly said that pronunciation is much more important than correct grammar, **and you can only pronounce correctly if you acquire the native tools and mind-set.** In the course of your online coaching sessions, a considerable amount of time and effort will go towards improving your pronunciation.

A few other psychological tricks you could consider employing to get yourself into the "Pepe Pérez" mold for your sessions with our tutors, as well as for use during your self-study time, is to identify for yourself a **talisman** such as a hat or beret that you imagine a Pepe would be wearing, and putting it on whenever you are "Pepe". Have a glass of tequila, or Spanish/Chilean/Argentinean wine to hand, or a cup of *mate*, and put on bolero or salsa music, or classic Spanish guitar, in the background. We're sure that, with your fertile imagination and originality, you will be able to imagine your own re-enforcers of this idea.

Since these exams are based on the common European framework (CEFR) and therefore correspond largely with the goals of OBL/CLT/TBLL (i.e., "communicative competence"), how do we go about assisting you with your exam preparation? We try to maximize your active interaction, not only with your tutor but also with authentic sources of everyday Spanish, such as found in the media. For this reason, two-thirds of the hours that we recommend you set aside each week for conscious, guided exam preparation (as opposed to informal preparation by means of – for example – listening to talk radio when you travel to work, or reading a novel in Spanish) will be dedicated to such guided interaction **tasks**. Your efforts in completing these communicative tasks (i.e., the outcomes you produce), will be reviewed with you during the face-time that you have each week with your tutor via Skype. The practical application of this

OBL/CLT/TBLL approach will become apparent when we deal, here-below, with the very important aspects of lexis, pronunciation and correct grammar & spelling.

Check this **DELEhelp** blog-post, for a set of links to very useful free sites that can help you with your passive immersion, as well as with the vital flashcards for expanding your linguistic scope:



LINKS to top DELE exam prep RESOURCES

7. **LEXIS (vocabulary and phrases)**

Just as sure as the best gunner with the best machine-gun will not achieve results without bullets, so you will fail if you don't have the necessary "ammunition" for speaking Spanish. This ammo is constituted by your linguistic scope – by the **words and word chunks (collocations) plus link phrases and expressions** that you know. You need to seriously build your **vocabulary** (knowing each new word's proper pronunciation, its meaning, its gender in case of nouns and its irregularities in case of verbs, plus of course its correct spelling). Because, once again, knowing the rules of grammar serves no purpose if you don't have the words to which to apply those rules. These

exams are very strong on testing your linguistic scope. It is therefore imperative that you **read widely**, particularly the better newspapers such as *El Pais* and *El Mundo* (which are available free, on-line).

When you are reading and you encounter a new word or expression, **YOU HAVE TO LOOK IT UP.**

We recommend using an on-line dictionary such as FARLEX.

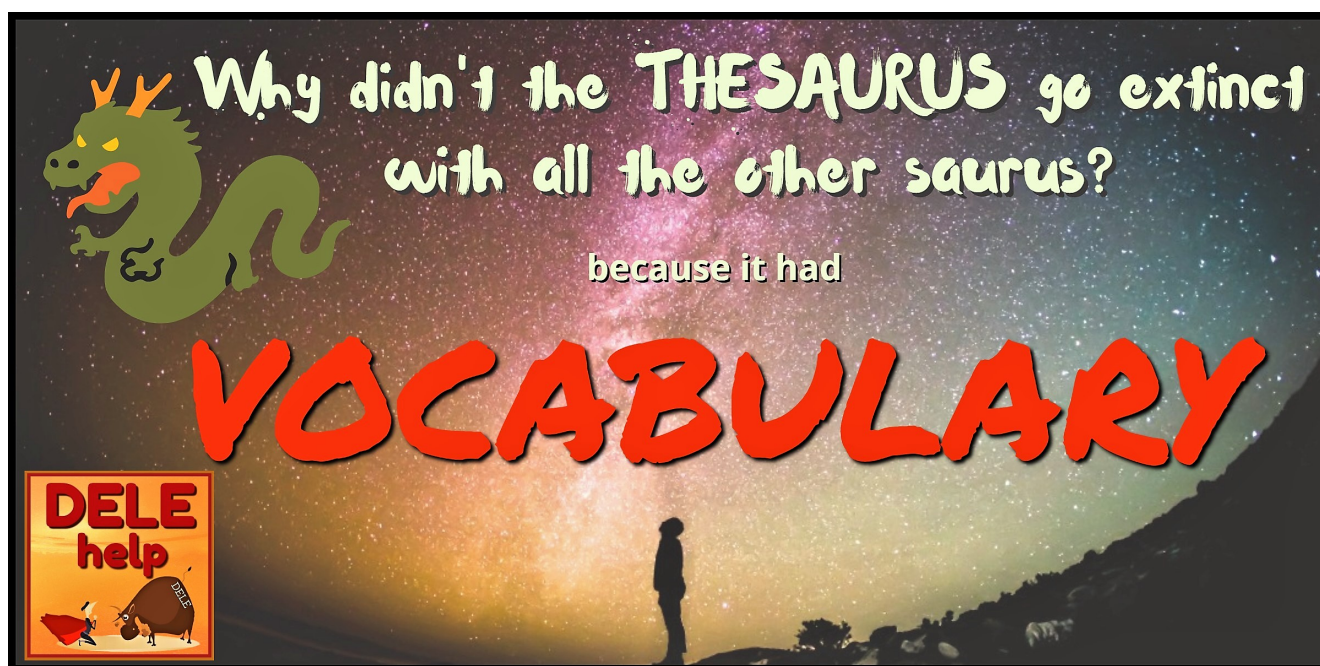
If you are old-fashioned, get yourself a whole stack of note cards, of a stiff cardboard and in a color that you can't read through when held against the light. Note the new Spanish word or expression on the one side, and the English meaning(s) on the other. The modern way, though, would be to have **flashcards on your computer**, using free software such as Cram.com, Quizlet or Anki.

You simply **have** to memorize the vocabulary and phrases. The flashcard method of memorizing has the great advantage over making word lists, that you can easily test yourself. Secondly, while testing / memorizing, you can separate the cards into those that you know (which you put aside) and those you don't, which you put back in the pack. This way, you are not wasting eye and mind time on words you already know; you are focusing only on ones you don't know, and testing yourself till you don't have any "don't know" cards left in your hand. You can also "play" the cards with a mate, or on the computer if you are using Cram, making it more interesting and challenging. Your tutor will be asking you to e-mail him/her your "new words" on a regular basis.

The best way to pick up the vocabulary of colloquial conversation-speak, is to watch Spanish-language **soap operas** – it will also help you with deciphering different regional accents (which DELE and SIELE will be testing you on). Whenever you have the opportunity, you should also be listening to Spanish-language talk radio – with live streaming

now common, it is easy to tune in to stations such as RNE, the Spanish National Radio (see our blog-post on “useful links”, mentioned earlier).

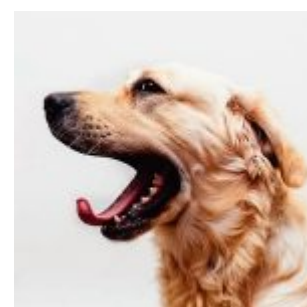
Because language does not consist solely of free-standing individual words, but most often of established patterns of words (such as idioms, proverbs and expressions) we have developed a Workbook (#5: “Spanish Idioms, Proverbs & Expressions”) These expressions you should also transcribe onto individual cards, for learning purposes, paying particular attention to the “link phrases” that the examiners are so keen to see and hear you using. (See this *DELEhelp* blog-post for more on the importance of vocabulary:



Click on the IMAGE to go to this blog post

8. PRONUNCIATION

It cannot be stressed enough that lexis + pronunciation is the true key to being understood.



You have to practice the physical traits of mouth/jaw/tongue involved with pronouncing Spanish, and you have to liberate your mind and muscles from the rigid culture-cast and ego constraints – adopt your alter-ego and just go for it (it's Pepe being *loco*, after all – not you!).

You should also be aware of the problem of the human mind over-riding the human ear – with our minds suggesting to us that we are indeed pronouncing as we intend / would like to, whereas the truth is most often very different. YOU THEREFORE NEED TO RECORD YOURSELF, to hear accurately how you truly sound when you are practicing your pronunciation. During your Skype sessions, your tutor will constantly be focusing on improving your pronunciation.

Once again, TV soap operas and talk radio are excellent tools for picking up the correct way to pronounce words.

During your DELE exam online tutoring sessions there will be time allocated to listening comprehension tasks, working through video clips (from YouTube) to help you attune your ear.

9. CORRECT GRAMMAR & SPELLING

Like most things in life, Spanish grammar becomes easier once you have an understanding of the history of the language, as well as of its evolution from ProtoIndo-European, through Vulgar Latin, to the vibrant Romance language of today. You need also to understand the grammatical structure of Spanish (for instance, the importance of determining the correct *modus* or mood, before deciding on which tense to use).

We believe that foundational knowledge of this kind should be conveyed in the student's own language – in this case, plain English, devoid of unnecessary academic jargon and stuffy terminology. Signing up for tuition with us, you will receive our **Workbook #1: History and Origins of the Spanish Language** and **Workbook #2: De-Mystifying Spanish Grammar:**

**Workbook #2
De-Mystifying
Spanish Grammar**

explaining the patterns of Spanish
by relating them to the English
ones you know

Excellencia
Didactica
edele.org

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.

© GREXPA s.a.

**Workbook #1
History and Origins
of the Spanish
language**

1st novel
published in any
European
language
Don Quixote
Cervantes

1605

1st grammar
handbook in any
European language
"GRAMMATICA"
of the Castilian language
Antonio de Nebrija 1492

Excellencia
Didactica
edele.org

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.

© GREXPA s.a.

10. EXAM SIMULATION

The key tool which we will be using to prepare you for your specific level of DELE, is the model exam. We use as departure point, the e-book series of model exams "Nuevo Examen DELE" written by Prof. David Giménez Folqués of the University of Valencia in Spain, which can be bought online and downloaded from Bubok publishers in Spain. David has been a member of the official DELE tribunal since 2005 (he kindly reviewed our in-house workbooks).

There is no better exam preparation than doing these model papers and assignments, because it provides your tutor (and yourself) with insight into your level / needed areas of extra focus, and it familiarizes you with the exam format as well as the nature of the challenge.

11. TYPICAL STUDY PLANS

Learn Spanish your way

**Your own, individualized study plan and materials.
Courses specifically for English-speakers. Focused on
YOUR goals and YOUR preferred study method. Expert
and experienced online tutoring, one-on-one, via Skype.**

Learning a second language is great - but also tough.
You've seen the many courses and handbooks that are "one size fits all".
They are general, for classrooms. They don't relate Spanish to the
language framework you know - English. They ignore your needs.

eDELE was founded by English-speakers who
learnt Spanish the hard way, knowing your frustrations.
We teamed up with top native-speaking tutors. We designed courses
from the student perspective. With us, you learn Spanish YOUR WAY.



To give you an idea of what our online tutoring study plans typically look like, here are two plans, from both ends of the spectrum – one for A1 level, and the other for C2 preparation:

Level A1

Hola ABC

Thank you for your patience through the diagnostic phase.

As discussed with you today, it is clear that we have to allocate time to improving all four elements of communication as tested in the DELE: reading and listening comprehension, as well as written and oral expression. It is also clear that we have to focus on all four the evaluation criteria, namely expanding your linguistic scope, the correctness of language use, coherence and fluency (the first and last requiring most attention, in your case).

The study plan is based on at least 7 hours of active self-study and 3 hours of Skype interaction per week (i.e., not including passive immersion such as having talk radio / TV on in the background, and leisure reading). It stands to reason that listening to and speaking Spanish is going to be the form of communication you most use in the real world, and it is

also true that most people who fail DELE, do so for failing the oral expression exam. We therefore believe that we must allocate as much time as possible during the Skype sessions to oral interaction, because it helps you with gaining fluency as well as with your listening comprehension, listening to your tutor. It also permits immediate corrective intervention regarding pronunciation and grammar correctness, and shows up gaps in vocabulary/lexis knowledge. Furthermore, it is the one element that you cannot easily practice by yourself as part of your self-study (the written exercises you can evidently do as part of your self-study homework).

The program that we therefore suggest for the three one-hour sessions per week, is as follows (keeping in mind that, from time-to-time, we will deviate from this in order to include mock exams):

Monday:

- 30 minutes vocabulary/lexis flashcard review;
- 30 minutes conversation class based on news items covered on the PracticaEspañol.com website during the previous week.

Wednesday:

- 30 minutes of revision of grammar / written homework you've sent in by the previous Monday evening (try and do one chapter per week of "Step-by-Step", up to chapter 12, doing all the exercises and sending them in – this way we should finish with the DELE A1 curriculum's prescribed grammar in three months, with time left for revision before the exam);
- 30 minutes conversation class based on one of the videos from the attached prescribed list, which you need to preview during self-study (please view 2 videos per week).

Friday:

- 30 minutes of reading comprehension review, from your reading comprehension prescribed book (1 chapter per week);
- 30 minutes of conversation class based on the Spanish books you're reading (links below) doing 7 chapters per week.

Please remember, when you are reading, to read out loud and tape yourself, so that you can review your pronunciation. Also jot down all new words in your flashcard system. Please send us your updated flashcard list every Monday morning. You should prioritize incorporating the words and expressions from our two Workbooks 4 & 5 into your flashcard lists a.s.a.p.

I am also including a link to the Kindle version of a useful little vocab book, which has at the back categories of words like family, food, shops, professions, animals etc.

The book links are:

Model exams:

"Nuevo Examen DELE A1". This e-book was written by Dr. David Giménez Folqués, professor at the Universidad de Valencia, Spain, and member of the DELE tribunal since 2005. It is directly downloadable and very affordable (some US\$11).

Grammar:

One of the best handbooks for learning Spanish is called "**Easy Spanish step-by-step**" by Barbara Bregstein, published by McGrawHill. You can buy the Kindle version from Amazon (i.e., it will download on your iPad and your laptop as well, with the free Kindle app) for US\$7.22 . We have it in the office, so you and your tutor can work off the same page on Skype.

Reading Comprehension:

For reading comprehension practice, we recommend another book which you can download from Amazon Kindle, called Practice

Makes Perfect: Spanish Reading Comprehension.

General reading:

La isla del Tesoro / Robert L. Stevenson Zig-Zag (Kindle):

Stories from Mexico / Historias de Mexico (dual text = print edition) Side-by-side bilingual books:

1001 most useful Spanish Words / Seymour Resnick (Kindle):

For audio comprehension practice, we have selected a number of video clips freely available on YouTube, at A1 level – please see the attached list.

We will periodically be doing mock exams, usually the last Friday of the month, using the model exam e-book listed above – the oral expression part we will do on a Friday, instead of the regular conversation class that day (your interviewing examiner will be one of our tutors not familiar to you, i.e., not Monica). Please do the written portions over the weekend, in one go (as in the real exam, simulating the conditions as close you can). Scan with the CamScanner smartphone app and send to us for review; we will then discuss the following Wednesday during the homework review slot.

iBuena suerte!

Salu2

Level C2 (prepared for an advanced student already very strong on grammar and pronunciation, and needing only familiarization with the exam format and a bit of “polishing”)

Dear XYZ

After the diagnostic we’ve just completed, let me first state that we believe that you should go directly for the DELE C2. You’ve certainly got the potential, and doing C1 first won’t

really add much in the form of experience, since you will be doing sufficient mock exams during your preparation anyway.

In planning your exam preparation, we need to be guided by the exam components, as well as by the exam scoring criteria.

As regards the four exam components, we see you as being well versed in each – written & oral expression, as well as listening and reading comprehension. The ones probably requiring slightly more attention would be written expression and listening comprehension.

As regards the four main scoring criteria, namely linguistic scope, coherence, fluency and correctness, we believe that you will perform strongly in all of them, particularly in fluency and coherence. What we need to keep expanding is linguistic scope, by exposing you to varied vocabulary, as well as expanding your knowledge of the socio-cultural and historical background of Spanish and Hispanic society (please go through the C2 curriculum document in your **DELEhelp** Workbook #9.3 very carefully, in the latter regard).

Having stated above the “what” that we have to do, the real question is the “how”.

You are evidently an excellent, self-motivated student – so most preparation will have to be done on your own, as self-study (the two hours per week that you have available for Skyping, will have to be focused on problem clarification, and on the aspects that are hard to do at home, such as oral presentation). How you schedule your self-study will be entirely up to you. Please keep in mind the importance of passive immersion – keeping on talk radio / TV in the background as much you can, and doing lots of leisure reading, especially of the news media.

As we’ve discussed, because of your already existing level of proficiency we don’t see formal grammar revision in general as necessary. You should identify aspects of grammar about which

you feel uncertain, which we then can address, as and when necessary. In any event, we believe that the oral and written expression exercises will quickly show up little niggles that need to be rectified, which can be addressed there and then. We will, therefore, be setting you written expression homework tasks every week, on the one hand as practice, and on the other to show up grammar and spelling problems, if any. These you should kindly try and return two days before your scheduled Skype session.

As part of your “passive” self-study we would encourage you to read as much as possible, and to diligently expand your vocabulary flashcard list from such reading. Prioritize reading the Spanish-language news media, as indicated in our **DELEhelp** blogpost on useful links: <http://www.delehelp.org/top-dele-exam-resources-links-best-sites/>

To expand your background on Spanish history and also your vocabulary on the Moorish era in Spain, please read the Kindle e-book “**EL Mozarabe**” that I mentioned:

For the listening comprehension, we will have to set time aside during the Skype sessions to do reviews with you (from the YouTube video list attached). You should also be doing self-study, especially with the videos on the **CervantesVirtual YouTube channel** of the Instituto Cervantes, that we have asked you to subscribe to.

The structure of the typical weekly two-hour Skype session will provisionally be:

Review of written expression homework tasks – 30 minutes

Review of listening comprehension videos – 45 minutes

Free-flow conversation – 45 minutes (based on news topics covered during the preceding week in the media, such as reported on the PracticaEspañol website, as well as relating

to chapters you have been reading in **EL Mozarabe**); the objective with the conversation sessions will be to identify grammar lapses, vocabulary shortcomings, pronunciation issues and to improve fluency and correctness in general.

This structure will be open to continuous adaptation as the need arise – the closer we get to the exam, the more time will be dedicated to doing actual model exams and reviewing them (particularly to practice the multiple choice exam format used for reading and listening comprehension testing).

Please let us have your thoughts on this draft study plan.

Kind regards

So, ladies and gentlemen embarking on your Spanish exam challenge, there you have a comprehensive overview of our online coaching for DELE/SIELE & OPI methodology – of **what** we do, **how** we do it, and **why** we do it this way. Please remember that you can request a free, no obligation one hour exploratory Skype session with us, to see if we appear compatible with you and your needs. Just send us your contact particulars with our convenient Contact Information form that you can access by clicking on **THIS LINK**.

Good luck with your preparation!

Willem

**Personalized, 1-on-1 tutoring
via Skype for DELE / SIELE & OPI,
US\$14 p.h.**

See more on our website:
<https://edele.org>

(click on this image)



Click on IMAGE to go to our secure website

[]

**Improve your Spanish
conversation skills**



It's essential to improve your SPANISH CONVERSATION SKILLS for the DELE/ SIELE exams and the OPI tests

You have to improve your Spanish conversation skills to do well in exams like the DELE diploma or "*el examen DELE*" because it's all about testing the ability to **communicate** effectively in Spanish, in real-world situations. This is equally true for the DELE's new online twin, the SIELE exam, and for its American equivalent, the OPI.

Most candidates who fail the DELE exam (some 30% typically do), fail because of having failed the oral test. In fact, 70% of failures are due to having failed the oral test.

So, how do humans gain the ability to converse? After all, small children achieve that skill, without having had any formal language tuition... What can you learn from neuroscience, to improve your Spanish conversation skills?

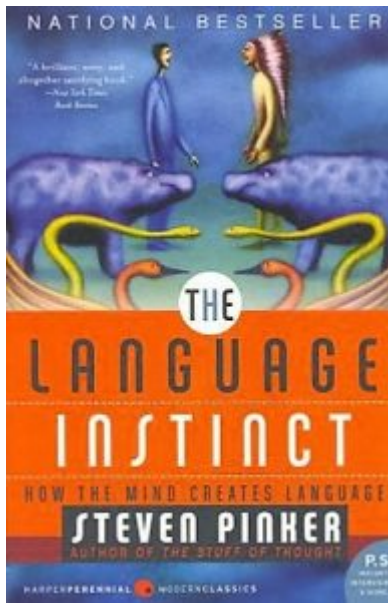
How should you as an adult approach learning, so that you will be able to converse in Spanish? There are many conflicting theories, plus ingrained teaching habits

stretching back many generations, regarding how best to achieve proficiency in a foreign language. But of late, neuroscience has given us very important insights into how the brain actually processes the acquisition of language. This neurological data has taken the debate out of the realm of speculation (where it had lounged for most of history) into proper understanding of the processes involved.

One thing that we have known for some time with certainty, is what DOESN'T work; it has been empirically proven that the traditional school or college-style teaching of a second language fails miserably in producing alumni with the capacity to maintain even a basic conversation at the end of their schooling. Recent figures from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (**ACTFL**) show that **only 0.5%** of school / college alumni who majored in a foreign language, actually achieve that level of competence. Most students taught the traditional way, give up on learning a second language, and those who do finish, have forgotten practically all they had learnt in just three to four years.

In this blog post I will introduce some of the latest and best theories and methodologies for developing proficiency at conversing in a foreign language. This introduction of theory is intended only as a quick orientation for the **practical advice** which comes at the end of this blog post. I will be sharing with you our own battle-tested tips for developing your conversational ability in Spanish, so that you can ace the DELE / SIELE exam or the OPIc.

The Human Instinct for Language:



To understand how to improve your Spanish conversation skills, you first and foremost have to understand how the human brain functions when it comes to “learning a language” – or, more correctly put – how we **acquire** a new language: i.e., develop the ability to communicate in it. (Babies don’t set out to “learn a language”; they instinctively acquire the ability to communicate, just as they acquire the ability to walk upright – both much more through PRACTICE than through abstract learning of theory). Understanding this process is certain to help you in cultivating the right mind-set and study methods for making your DELE / SIELE exam and OPI preparation effective.

It is recognized that the two most important abilities that set us humans apart from other primates and the rest of the animals in general, is our ability to **walk upright** and our ability to **communicate**. Both are vital survival skills. From the survival standpoint the acquisition of mobility is an early imperative. Walking is also a less complex task than the heavily brain-driven skill of oral communication, so babies master that first. It has been shown, though, that listening to the mother’s voice starts already in the womb. Once the toddler is mobile, the brain’s major developmental focus for the next three to five years shifts almost exclusively to honing the ability to communicate verbally.

The ability to master language has been described by the psychologist and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker (in his seminal book “**The Language Instinct**”) as the “preeminent trait” of the human species, as well as our “most important cultural invention ... a biologically unprecedented event irrevocably separating him from other animals.”

For our present purpose, probably the most important

observation by Pinker is that language isn't an academic subject that we are formally taught. Neither do we need, as toddlers, to consciously study it, in order to develop this skill. "Instead, it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains. Language is a complex, specialized skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction..."

While some cognitive scientists describe language as a psychological faculty or a neural system, Pinker prefers to refer to it as a human instinct, because the term **instinct** "...conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs", which spiders are able to do without having had any formal education in design or engineering, but simply because they have "spider brains, which give them the urge to spin and the competence to succeed."

"Superior pattern processing (SPP) is the essence of the evolved human brain"

In an article in "Frontiers of Neuroscience" (2014; 8:265) Mark P. Mattson used the above title to describe that aspect of the human brain which allows us to do things that other primates or animals can't. Mattson says: "The types of pattern processing that appear to occur robustly, if not uniquely in the human brain and are therefore considered as SPP include: (1) Creativity and invention ... (2) Spoken and written languages that enable rapid communication of highly specific information about all aspects of the physical universe and human experiences; (3) Reasoning and rapid decision-making; (4) Imagination and mental time travel which enables the



formulation and rehearsal of potential future scenarios; and (5) Magical thinking/fantasy... The human brain is remarkably similar to the brains of non-human primates and lower mammals at the molecular and cellular levels, suggesting that the human brain deploys evolutionarily generic signaling mechanisms to store and retrieve large amounts of information and, most remarkably, to integrate information in ways that result in the generation of new emergent properties such as complex languages, imagination, and invention.”

This tendency of the human brain to seek and process patterns has been widely documented in science. In layman’s terms, Ackerman wrote in **Time Magazine** on 15 June 2004: “Pattern pleases us, rewards a mind seduced and yet exhausted by complexity. We crave pattern, and find it all around us, in petals, sand dunes, pine cones, contrails. Our buildings, our symphonies, our clothing, our societies – all declare patterns”. This was quoted approvingly by Psychiatry professor Bernard Beitman in **“Psychiatric Annals”** (39:5 / May 2009) under the heading: “Brains seek Patterns in Coincidences” where-in he stated: “Our brains seek coherence, structure, and order. Words and numbers order perceptions. Words and sentences package complex experiences ... The brain wants to complete patterns ... We can feel its pleasure in making a correct connection.”

“Languages as an advanced pattern encoding and transfer mechanism”

Addressing language specifically (under the above heading) Mattson went on to write: “Language is the quintessential example of the evolved SPP capabilities of the human brain... Language involves the use of patterns (symbols, words, and sounds) to code for objects and events encountered either via direct experience or communication from other individuals. However, despite it being a remarkable leap forward in evolution, language may not involve any fundamentally new cellular or molecular mechanisms; instead,

language is mediated by recently evolved neural circuits integrated with older circuits, **all of which utilize generic pattern processing mechanisms**. Remarkably, the learning of languages and the potentially infinite number of stories (word sequences) that an individual can construct are accomplished using a finite number of neurons that is established during early brain development ... Presumably, the synapses involved in language are “strengthened” by repetition (listening and talking, and reading and writing).”

It is only necessary to recall one’s own childhood to know that we developed the ability to communicate verbally without any formal teaching. As toddlers we didn’t study grammar, but from about age three and a half, we could construct phrases grammatically correctly. Where we did make “mistakes”, it usually was when the supposedly “correct” English form deviated from the general pattern we had correctly discerned – as in a child saying two “oxes” instead of saying two oxen, because the regular pattern for forming the plural in modern English is by adding an “s” (like in two boxes, or two cows). Oxen is a relic from the past, which has somehow clung on – unlike the word “kine”, which until a few centuries ago was the correct English plural of cow, but which was jettisoned in favor of cows (with “cows” probably before then regarded as child-speak).

As little kids, we didn’t think of particular verbs as being distinct conjugations of some infinitive form – we simply knew that that was the right word for that particular phrase and context. Our ear told us if another child used a word incorrectly, without us being in any way able to explain why it was wrong. We developed our language skills by getting to know words as simply words, plus the familiar patterns of stitching them together in phrases.



First grammar handbook for an European language – Castilian (Spanish), 1492

The advent of grammar studies:

It is obvious that the patterns of languages weren't ever formally designed and ordained by committees of elder cavemen laying down grammar "rules". Languages grew spontaneously, constantly undergoing local variations and unstoppable evolution at the hand (or rather, tongue) of the common folk.

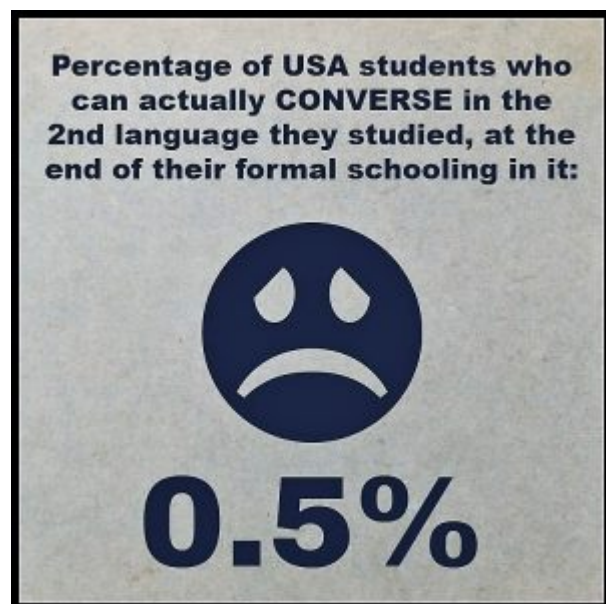
The first visible signs of language standardization started emerging with the advent of writing. The first formal grammar book for an European language was only published in 1492, for Castilian, which now is the national language of Spain. In it, its author, Antonio de Nebrija, laid down as first fundamental rule that: "we must write as we speak and we must speak as we write". What he insisted upon, therefore, is that researchers and academics should not invent language rules, but must observe and record that which actually exists, with all its irregularities (the concept of grammar "rules" is actually unfortunate, because of the connotation that the word "rules" have of being something authoritatively ordained – with

hindsight, it would have been better to speak of grammar patterns).

Because of the natural eagerness of the human mind to create order by means of identifying patterns, it was inevitable that languages would eventually be formally studied. The study of grammar would come to consist of tabulating the patterns evident in any language, such as those for word modification (morphology – for example, the conjugation of words) or the protocols of phrase construction (syntax). It is evident that, by learning and knowing these “rules” or rather patterns, one would be able to predict likely constructs. Now, if we take any sport, knowing the rules of the game isn’t – in and of itself – going to make you a great player. The latter depends i.a. on one’s ability to APPLY such theoretical knowledge instantly and intuitively in actual game settings. This analogy very much resembles the DELE / SIELE exams and the OPI, in which there are no questions on the rules of grammar as such. Instead, all the focus is on the candidate’s ability to apply that theoretical knowledge in real-world communication. (Such tests based on communicative competencies, in any event will quickly enough show the examiner whether you know the “rules”).

Unfortunately, the traditional school system requires standardized curricula and methodologies. This is so because, in order for school tuition to be feasible in practice, teaching classrooms full of students all at once, there just isn’t scope for individualization. And there are many other subjects to be taught, in addition to a foreign language. Therefore, for the foreign language student there cannot be the constant immersion in his target tongue that the typical native-speaking toddler is exposed to every woken hour (in school and college, time for studying foreign languages is limited – usually only some four to five hours per week, homework time included, is dedicated to learning a second language). Furthermore, it is logical that schools – which

are subject to severe constraints of time and organization, whilst dealing with entire class-groups and not individuals – are by the nature of these limitations focused on imparting theoretical knowledge of rules, and not on the individual coaching required to develop actual communicative ability.



As a consequence, schools and colleges are mostly teaching the theoretical foundations of a foreign language, with a focus on reading and writing (all pupils can practice to write at the same time, but certainly all can't practice to speak at the same time). Quite naturally, therefore, schools are setting written exams to **test groups of students' knowledge of that**

which the schools have been teaching, namely theory such as the rules of grammar. Schools are not structured, nor disposed, to focus primarily on the individualized testing of each student's ability to engage in an actual conversation, one by one. Which explains why only 0.5% of US students end up being able to converse in the foreign language they have studied. It's like teaching and testing football spectators for their knowledge of the rules, instead of coaching and assessing the skills of actual, competent football players.

The foregoing is not a condemnation of schools – in many ways the traditional grammar-based approach to foreign language teaching was and is what is practically possible, and no informed teacher is under any illusion that it would, in itself, be enough. Because humans instinctively seek for patterns, it is clearly useful that the patterns inherent to any language's grammar be identified and codified, and also that these be learnt. It obviously is a faster way of becoming aware of such patterns than simply by absorbing them

subconsciously, in the course of years of unstructured immersion. But it is not enough to simply know these rules, if one is to acquire the capacity to communicate effectively. Because while we may be well aware of some rule, if our minds and tongues aren't practiced in applying it in conversation, then something contrary is likely to slip out – no matter how well we may have “known” that that was the wrong way of phrasing it.

Another major drawback inherent to the traditional way of teaching, is that it inevitably leaves the student with the impression that language consists of individual words, which must be strung together in accordance with set rules, such as that of conjugation – like stringing individual pearls on a necklace. In reality, though, language for the most part consists of “chunks” of words in the form of well-established phrases with agreed meaning.

As kids we pick up and become skilled in using these “chunks”, like: I am going to school; I am going in the car; I am not going to grandma's etc. We comprehend that the basic chunk stays the same, we only have to change some words to suit the need of the moment. This truth was recognized some two decades ago by Michael Lewis, who called for a new, complementary approach to the traditional way of teaching language, which he called the “lexical approach”. This approach was not intended to replace traditional learning, but to supplement it; Lewis and his followers see it more as an **enhanced mind-set**, a better understanding of how we actually acquire language, which would broaden the learning methodologies beyond their traditional focus and strive for an outcome of actual conversational competency.

The Lexical Approach:

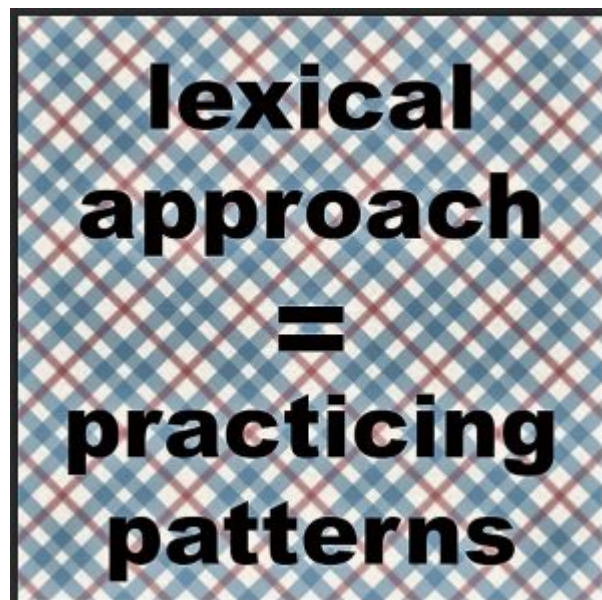
Olga Moudria wrote an excellent summation of the Lexical Approach, published by the ERIC Clearing House on Languages of Washington DC. Here are some extracts: “The lexical approach

concentrates on developing learners' proficiency with lexis, or words and word combinations. It is based on the idea that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as **unanalyzed** wholes, or "chunks," and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar (Lewis, 1993, p. 95). Instruction focuses on relatively fixed expressions that occur frequently in spoken language, such as, "I'm sorry," "I didn't mean to make you jump," or "That will never happen to me," rather than on originally created sentences (Lewis, 1997a, p. 212)." (A key concept that Moudria points to here, is that we comprehend and internalize word chunks without first **analyzing** them – i.e., grammar doesn't enter into the picture).

She continues: "The lexical approach makes a distinction between vocabulary—traditionally understood as a stock of individual words with fixed meanings—and lexis, which includes not only the single words but also the word combinations that we store in our mental lexicons. Lexical approach advocates argue that language consists of meaningful chunks that, when combined, produce continuous coherent text, and only a minority of spoken sentences are entirely novel creations. The role of formulaic, many-word lexical units have been stressed in both first and second language acquisition research...

"Comprehension of such units is dependent on knowing the patterns to predict in different situations. Instruction, therefore, should center on these patterns and the ways they can be pieced together, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur...

Moudria concludes:” Zimmerman (1997, p. 17) suggests that the work of Sinclair, Nattinger, DeCarrico, and Lewis represents a significant theoretical and pedagogical shift from the past ... they challenge a traditional view of word boundaries, emphasizing the language learner’s need to perceive and use **patterns of lexis and collocation**. Most significant is



**lexical
approach
=
practicing
patterns**

the underlying claim that language production is **not a syntactic rule-governed process** but is instead the retrieval of larger phrasal units from memory. Nevertheless, implementing a lexical approach in the classroom does not lead to radical methodological changes. Rather, it involves a change in the teacher’s **mindset**.

Donovan Nagel of the Mezzofanti Guild summed up the lexical approach very effectively in layman’s terms: “Languages are acquired in prefabricated **chunks** – words, collocations and expressions that we hear repeatedly. This is why kids go from babble to speaking – to the amazement of their parents – seemingly overnight. To give you an example, ‘*I want*’ is a chunk. You’ve used those two words together in that order a multitude of times in your lifetime. It’s a set expression that you heard and learned as a whole, and are able to create an infinite number of expressions by adding another chunk (a name or an action). Thus, *ice-cream* and *to go* are other chunks that you’ve also learned. What we do as fluent speakers is essentially put together or insert pieces of prefabricated language. Very little of what we actually say is original content.

“I would go a step further and say that every verb tense you know was learned as a prefabricated item. For example, you

didn't learn the verb *write* and then learn how to conjugate it. You learned *I write, she writes, they write*, etc. as whole items and over time you gained an ear for what sounds right and what doesn't. When you hear something that doesn't quite sound correct (e.g. *they writes, he wried*) you immediately detect the error – not because you're aware of grammar, but because you're so used to the correct, prefabricated forms that anything else doesn't sound right."

Barriers to adults developing conversational competency in a foreign language: The main barriers to communicating effectively, fluently and confidently in Spanish as foreign language can be summed up as follows:

- Lack of a sufficient memorized and rehearsed **lexis** (consisting of an ample vocabulary of words correctly pronounced, plus expressions, idioms and common phrase "chunks", including link phrases);
- Insufficient knowledge of the grammatical patterns of the language (its word morphology and the syntax for phrase construction), and lack of practice in the instinctive and fluent, correct use of these patterns;
- Inability to correctly form Hispanic sounds (phonology) because of lack of sufficient guided practice, not adapting the body's articulation tools to the Hispanic way of forming sounds, plus inhibition; and
- An un-attuned ear, not able to correctly capture and understand what others are saying, particularly in the case of accents and dialects.

To meet these four direct challenges just mentioned, some related innate ones also have to be overcome. Foremost is the need to undo **unilingual mother-tongue rigidity** (which is present in those who don't yet fluently speak any foreign language). By this is meant that we have been exclusively conditioned from early childhood, to speak in the manner and style of our own cultural peer group, with our mouths knowing only how to form the sounds of our mother tongue. Apart from

this physical rigidity, there's often also a mental one associated with unilingualism, namely that such persons don't want to see that there are many different ways in which languages can in fact construct phrases – ways that, though different, in themselves do have an internal logic of their own, which is no less logical than that of the familiar structure of their mother tongue. (This tendency to throw the hands up in the air in frustration and say that “the Spanish way makes no sense” is common among those who are subjected to tutoring based essentially on learning grammar without sufficient emphasis on lexis, and without having been given any explanatory reference framework for the historical why's and how's of the differences between the two languages).

Such rigidity restricts conversational mental agility, because we think in our mother tongue and thus first have to mentally translate before we speak. It also inhibits the ability to accept and mentally “own” the lexis, grammatical patterns and structure of Spanish – which sometimes are very different from those of English – as being equally valid and logical in its own right.

Unilingual rigidity also restricts articulation (mouth movement etc.) and body language to one rigid mould. This stems from lifelong conditioning of the body's articulation tools through having been used in only one cultural/linguistic mode, forming sounds for the letters of the alphabet in one way only. To illustrate – a lifetime of pressure to conform to, for instance, a “stiff upper lip” style of verbal expression will clearly limit one's ability for sometimes exuberant Latino-style expression, if it is not recognised and consciously addressed. Such rigidity in the tools of articulation negatively impacts ability to pronounce intelligibly (like Orientals having difficulty with “RRR” and Anglos with the letter “J”, saying “HHHoasey” instead of “GGGosy”).

Another important debilitating factor is our inhibitions,

related to our adult ego-awareness, because we fear making mistakes in front of others. This causes us not to want to practice conversing with others, and we become part of a wallflower syndrome.

**Personalized, 1-on-1 tutoring
via Skype for DELE / SIELE & OPI,
US\$14 p.h.**

See more on our website:
<https://edele.org>

(click on this image)



Click on IMAGE to go to our secure website

OUR TOP TIPS FOR HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SPANISH CONVERSATION SKILLS

The WHAT of becoming proficient in conversation:

The first thing to get right, is **mind-set**. Your objective should NOT be “I want to learn Spanish” (because that is aimed at acquiring theoretical knowledge about the language). You should consciously decide that “I want to develop the capacity to converse in Spanish” (which entails not only knowing the theory, but the practiced and honed skill of integrating and applying your knowledge in real-world situations). What you want to be, is an accomplished football player, not just a coach potato football rules boffin.

With your objective clearly defined, it is important next to identify the skills and knowledge sets that are essential to

develop, in order to acquire the ability to converse in Spanish. These elements then become the “to do” list of your preparation plan. The ultimate phase will be to add to this “what to do” list, the very important “how to do” component.

What, then, is necessary, in order to be able to actually maintain a conversation in a foreign language? You must firstly have the **ability to understand** what your interlocutor is saying to you, and secondly you must be **able to make yourself understood**.

For both understanding and being understood, you first of all need something that actually, for the DELE diploma, is one of its four main oral exam scoring criteria, namely a sufficiently ample “**linguistic scope**”. This means that you do have to know (i.e., have learnt to the point of having committed to memory and thus have fully internalised) the words, expressions and common “word chunks” making up the lexis of the language, so that you can identify them upon hearing, as well as instantly reproduce them in your own oral expression. This essential knowledge of words and patterns entails knowing the **semantics** or meaning of words, the **phonology** or sound of the word, and its **morphology** or form, the latter signifying the way a particular word is morphed (through conjugation, for example) to convey different meanings.

The second DELE oral exam scoring criteria is “**correctness**”, meaning correct word selection in terms of semantics, correct pronunciation in terms of phonology, correct morphology (in terms of how you have, for example, conjugated a verb), and correct syntax, relating to how you have strung together word chunks to make phrases and sentences.

The DELE scoring guidelines do emphasize that they are not going to be overly finicky about the theory, as long as comprehension on the part of your listener is not made difficult or impossible by your level of incorrectness. This

is, of course, how real conversation in a foreign language actually functions (or doesn't); your listener can, as an intelligent native speaker, compensate for your small errors of syntax or such things as gender accord, even for wrong verb conjugation – what he or she cannot compensate for, is if you completely lack the appropriate words to say what you want, or pronounce them so incomprehensibly that your listener's eyes simply glaze over.

This is to say that, when it comes to the importance of "correctness" in conversation, knowledge of lexis or vocabulary – that is, of the correct word / phrase – and practiced knowledge of how to correctly pronounce it, are significantly more important than knowledge of the "rules" of grammar. In fact, if you are still obliged when you want to say something in Spanish to first try and remember, and then to calculatedly apply these grammar rules in order to mentally construct a phrase before you can utter it, you will have a serious problem in maintaining any kind of conversation. This is the difference between sitting an end-of-school written exam, where you have time to calculate how to apply rules, and real-world conversation, which is an instantaneous give-and-take. Instead of relying on calculated application of rules (which usually signify that you are still thinking in your mother tongue and first have to translate from it) you need to have fully internalized the patterns of Spanish speech (as you had done as a kid, with your mother tongue). Having internalised these patterns, it rolls out correctly almost without conscious thought as to how to say something (thus leaving you free to focus completely on the really important thing, namely the substance of what you want to convey).

The third DELE oral exam scoring criteria is "**coherence**". Are you making sense to your listener? This doesn't only involve having an ample linguistic scope and being sufficiently correct in terms of your Spanish, but also involves the normal rules of logic in the ordering of your thoughts, just as would

apply in your mother tongue. You must be able to structure your discourse logically, for example with clear introduction, a sensible body of substantiation, and a persuasive conclusion. Coherence demands that your mind must be free to give a logical presentational structure to what you want to say, without your mind needing to be overly occupied with the grammar and lexis of how you need to say it. Again, this comes down to having sufficiently internalized the patterns of the language so that you can reproduce it correctly almost without conscious effort, like you do with your mother tongue. This, in turn, comes down to expertly guided practice, practice, and then more practice.

The last of the four DELE oral exam scoring criteria is “**fluency**”. In real life, conversation breaks down when there is no fluency – when you have to constantly interrupt your interlocutor because you could not understand something that he/she said, or when you yourself cannot find the right words or correct pronunciation or appropriate syntax to comprehensibly say what you need to say. Once again, if you need to first translate for yourself and do a rules-based calculation of how to say something, then there will be no fluency. You need to have the lexical patterns of Spanish sufficiently internalized. Especially important to the fluent flow of conversation (and also in the DELE scoring) is the appropriate use of link phrases in order to fluently join up different thoughts or sentences – and not end up uttering a disjointed series of unconnected phrases. You know from conversation in your own language, how important link phrases are – words such as “accordingly”, or “on the other hand” or “as you know” or any of the many such devices that we use to fill blank “think time” between sentences, and to link them together. These are some of the most fixed and most used “word chunks” in the lexis of any language, and knowing these patterns are essential to fluency.

To recap – the what of Spanish that we need to internalize in

order to be able to maintain conversation, are the **patterns** of the language. These are its lexical patterns, of words and word chunks (including their meaning, pronunciation and the patterns for morphing words to signify different meanings in terms of time, number and the like). There are also the patterns of syntax (how words and phrases are strung together to form coherent sentences). This knowledge of patterns we have to internalize, and practice over and over so that we can reproduce it instantaneously without much conscious thought. Without such internalization of the lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactical patterns of Spanish, you cannot hope to achieve the sufficiently ample linguistic scope, correctness, coherence and fluency that will be required in order to maintain a meaningful and effortless conversation that can focus on substance, rather than constantly succumbing to getting stuck on form.

The HOW of developing the ability to converse in Spanish:

Developing the knowledge and skill sets required to maintain a conversation in Spanish, take place essentially in the same way as you learnt your mother tongue as a child (meaning from toddler to teen), but with certain facilitating and enhancing tools added which toddlers obviously can't yet access.



Learning the patterns: The basic manner in which your Spanish will develop, will be by means of assimilating patterns. You can check with just about any fluent speaker of Spanish as foreign language – they will tell you that they don't consciously construct sentences based on grammar rules; they speak Spanish the same way as they speak their native English. They do so intuitively and without conscious mental effort, focused on the substance of their message and not on form. They probably will have to do a double take if you start cross-examining them about the intricacies of the morphology or syntax they had just used – the same as you would, if they do the same to

you about your native English (you'll probably respond that you can't recall why it needs be said that way, but that you know that that's definitely the way it is).

The importance of immersion: To discern patterns, and especially to internalize them in this natural manner, we have to be scanning a vast amount of Spanish. This can only be achieved through immersing yourself in an environment where you regularly hear, see and have to speak Spanish, just as a toddler masters the patterns of his mother tongue over the space of five to six years of such immersion (reaching school-going age, this knowledge and skill for self-expression just get polished, with the patterns he/she already have internalized being clarified and explained, whilst the child continues to benefit from ongoing immersion).



It is therefore evident that any attempt to learn a foreign language with an approach based just on classroom + homework time (i.e., without the addition of immersion and its parallel of adopting a lexical approach), is not going to result in any better performance than the figure of 0.5% reaching conversation ability, as cited earlier.

The relative importance and correct view of grammar: Again, this is not to suggest that formal grammar should or could be substituted. Grammar as we know it is none other than a handy codification of the enduring patterns of a language, as these have been observed over time by qualified linguists. Using the fruits of their labors will clearly help you identify and understand the patterns a lot quicker than you would be able to do with just your own random observation. The key, however, is mental attitude – you have to **study grammar as a very valuable tool**, which will help you spot and comprehend the patterns far quicker and easier. Do not study grammar as if it represents the language as such, as if knowing the “rules” of grammar could or should be – in and of itself – the

ultimate objective. Please realize that knowledge of grammar is no more than a convenient crutch in the early phase while you are still hobbling along, whilst not yet having fully internalized the patterns. Just as you did with your English grammar crutch, you will be discarding it, actually forgetting all about it, as soon as you – figuratively speaking – can walk upright with ease and comfort without it.

How many adult native English speakers do you think ever give a moment's thought to English grammar in their day-to-day conversations? When last did you, yourself?

Always remember, too, that the language patterns codified under the title of grammar (essentially being word morphology and sentence syntax), are intellectual constructs developed almost organically over ages by communities of humans. Since grammar “rules” are intellectual constructs, any intelligent man, woman or child can therefore mentally compensate for most errors they hear in your grammar, without losing track of the meaning you are trying to convey. Studying grammar isn't the be-all and end-all of “learning the language”. It isn't even the most important part of such learning (as evidenced by the ability of others to mentally compensate for your grammar errors, and how quickly this crutch is discarded from your active consciousness, once you've reached fluency). Nevertheless, don't be mistaken – until you are fluent through having fully internalized these patterns of morphology and syntax, you **HAVE TO STUDY YOUR GRAMMAR** – but do so selectively, as we will show, and with the right mental attitude, i.e. that it is a valuable cheat sheet of essential patterns.

The most vital aspect that you have to focus on in your active learning isn't grammar. It is studying the patterns of **lexis**.

Lexis is your top priority: By studying lexis is meant acquiring a suitably ample linguistic scope in Spanish for your particular needs (for example, a missionary doctor is clearly going to require a different lexis to a policeman walking the beat in an immigrant neighborhood). Lexis consists of vocabulary and phonology (i.e., knowing words and their meaning, as well as how to pronounce them) as well as the learning of “word chunks” and common expressions and idioms. The reason why lexis is deemed more important to conversational ability than grammar, is twofold:



- As was earlier said, to be able to maintain a conversation, you firstly need to comprehend. If you don't know the meaning of a word or phrase your interlocutor has used, there is no way you can mentally compensate in order to arrive at a correct understanding of what you're hearing (apart from asking your interlocutor to repeat and explain). It is therefore axiomatic in preparing for the listening and reading comprehension parts of the DELE exam, that “you have to have knowledge of words and the world” (see our earlier **blogpost** on this subject). This is just another way of underlining the lexical approach, which goes beyond the semantics of any given individual word to include its situational context, as part of a regular pattern of use. If you don't have adequate lexical knowledge (i.e., knowing the situational meaning of words and phrases that you hear, and knowing enough about phonology to be able to correctly identify which words you are actually hearing), you cannot hope to comprehend much in the course of any given conversation.
- When expressing yourself orally, lexis is also of vital importance. You have to know the right word or phrase (to the point of not having to search for it), and you have to be able to pronounce it intelligibly. If you

don't readily have the right words and phrases at your disposal, or you cannot pronounce them sufficiently correctly for your interlocutor to be able to identify them, then – even with the best of grammar – there is simply no way that your conversation can blossom because your interlocutor cannot mentally compensate for words that you don't have and which he cannot divine. He will be as lost as you are.

At this point it is important to underline that one should have realistic expectations about the time and effort it will require to reach conversational ability in a foreign language such as Spanish. The ACTFL has calculated that, for a student of average aptitude, it will require 480 hours to reach “advanced low” proficiency (A2/B1 level in the European Common Framework such as the DELE diploma). This translates into doing forty hours per week (8 hours per day) for twelve weeks solid. To achieve “advanced high” level (i.e., not yet “superior”) will require 720 hours for the average student. For the superior proficiency level that diplomats and the like require, it is generally thought that 1,000 hours of intensive preparation is necessary.



Read, read, read –
there's no better
way of

internalizing
language patterns.

What constitutes immersion, in the internet age? The above does not mean that you have to do 1,000 hours that consist solely of classroom + homework time (we've already seen where that gets one!). At **DELEhelp** we see direct tutorial assistance (one-on-one, via Skype) as comprising just one-third of the time you need to dedicate to developing your proficiency in Spanish. The other two-thirds need to be dedicated to active and passive exposure to Spanish, so that you can become familiar with the patterns in actual use. **Immersion** doesn't only signify visiting a Spanish-speaking country and living there for some time. You can immerse yourself totally in Spanish-language books, films, talk radio and news. This is more focused and productive than merely living in a Spanish-speaking environment, because you can select appropriate themes and you can have your tools at hand, such as for jotting down and looking up new words, and adding these to your flashcard list. This combines the mental awareness of the lexical mind-set with all the other traditional learning tools.

There is no doubt that the more time you invest in reading Spanish, the more you will internalize the lexis and patterns of the language, as well as getting to know the Hispanic cultural context – especially if you have given sufficient attention to your grammar as a great tool for helping you to quickly spot and understand those patterns. Reading has the huge benefit of seeing the words, but you need to hear them as well for the sake of phonology (you therefore have to maintain a balance between listening and reading). For this reason, the **Spanish telenovela** (TV soapy) is a great learning tool, especially those that have subtitles for the hard of hearing, so that you can see and hear the word, and also see its situational context playing out on screen.

In any event, whenever you read, read out loud – this provides good practice to your “articulation tools” to adapt themselves to the Spanish sound system, in the privacy of your own home and thus without any risk to your ego. Better still: tape yourself reading out loud, so that you can pick up your pronunciation errors – you will be surprised how different we all sound in reality, as opposed to how we imagine we sound!

Luckily, such “home immersion” in Spanish is nowadays a free option, thanks to the internet. You don’t have to go live in a Hispanic country anymore (if you don’t want to, that is). Check out this ***DELEhelp*** [blogpost](#) for a host of links to free sites, ranging from streamed talk radio, through the major Hispanic print press to free e-books and telenovelas. One needs to differentiate between active learning (such as working on your flashcard lists and memorizing them, or doing homework exercises in grammar, in reading comprehension or writing) and passive immersion. The latter can form part of your relaxation, like reading a book in Spanish (if you are a beginner, look for dual text books that have Spanish on one page and the English on the opposite). Every possible minute that you can have Spanish talk radio streaming live, or the TV running telenovelas in the background, is useful – even if you can’t really concentrate on their content, you will pick up phonology as well as words, phrases and patterns. Knowing how kids learn, you shouldn’t underestimate the value of this.

One of the great killers of people’s ambition to master a foreign language, is frustration (next to boredom, especially if they just do grammar exercises!). Frustration can really grow very quickly if grammar mastery is (wrongly) seen as the be-all and end-all of gaining proficiency in Spanish. You may know, for instance, that every Spanish verb can literally be conjugated into 111 different forms, given the number of different moods and tenses in Spanish. If you get stuck on the idea that you absolutely have to memorize each and all of these 111 possibilities in order to be able to converse, the

task will seem so daunting that very few will not become frustrated.



Develop your own style of speaking that's natural and comfortable for you: Here's another tip – each of us, no matter our language, have a particular own style of speaking that we're comfortable with. We don't use all the possible tenses in normal conversation (as some writers may do in penning high literature). Similarly, when conversing in Spanish, you don't need to have all 111 conjugation options rolling fluently off your tongue. This is especially true in the beginning, while you are still internalizing the basic patterns of Spanish.

What you can do, is to concentrate, for the purpose of speaking, on mastering the present, the idiomatic future and the perfect past tense of the Indicative mood. If you can conjugate these three tenses well, any interlocutor will be able to understand which time-frame you are referring to. These three tenses correspond very well to the way you are accustomed to use tenses in English, because both the idiomatic future and the perfect past in Spanish are compound tenses, using auxiliary verbs (just like in English, which also use compounds with auxiliary verbs to indicate past and future – auxiliaries like “shall” and “have”).

This way of speaking is in fact becoming more common in Spanish, so you won't be regarded as weird – in the Americas, for example, the idiomatic future tense (*futuro idiomático*) is already used exclusively, in place of the traditional conjugated future tense (the idiomatic future tense is constructed by conjugating the verb **“ir” + a + the infinitive** of the action verb: *voy a comer* – I am going to eat). For the idiomatic future tense, you only need to learn the present indicative conjugation of one verb, namely “ir”.

The Spanish perfect past tense (*perfecto de Indicativo*) is constructed with the present indicative conjugation of the verb “**haber**” + **the past participle** of the action verb: *he comido* – I have eaten. The use of the *perfecto de Indicativo* for indicating the past is becoming more and more common in general use such as in journalistic Spanish, in Spain in particular; so again – you will not be frowned upon or thought a dunce. Because it resembles the way English is constructed, it will come easier to you – also since there is only one conjugation to memorize. (We must emphasize, though, that this approach works for **when you yourself are speaking**, but because you cannot control the tenses that your interlocutor may choose to use, you have to **have sufficient knowledge of the other tenses** to at least be able to recognize them, otherwise you may not comprehend what you are hearing or reading; in any event, it is much easier getting acquainted with something to the point of being able to recognize it when used by others, as opposed the level to active learning that’s needed for the purpose of own speech, which demands full internalization to enable real-time application).

For proficiency at conversation, you have to practice speaking (and be guided / corrected): The immersion that we referred to above, needs to go beyond you absorbing written and spoken Spanish. To acquire the skill and confidence to maintain a conversation, you have to have guided practice in speaking. This is often a problem for a home-study student living in an environment where there are few speaking opportunities. Again, though, the internet comes to the rescue, in the form of Skype and its equivalents. Such online tuition and interaction is actually better than what most classroom tuition situations can offer. In the typical classroom you are part of a group, dragged down by the lowest common denominator and by methodologies and curricula that of necessity are generalized, without focus on your particular needs. One-on-one tuition at a residential institution is prohibitively expensive (the actual private tuition itself is very costly ,

and then you have to add travel and accommodation costs, plus the opportunity cost of being away from work or business). On the other hand, such one-on-one, personalized tuition based on an individualized study plan that's custom-designed just for your needs and aptitudes, presented via Skype, is very affordable (at **DELEhelp**, for example, we charge only US\$10 per hour of actual Skype tuition, which includes our free in-house study materials as well as our prep time and the time we spend revising your homework and model exam answers; there are no hidden costs).

The great benefit of having your own expert, experienced online tutor (apart from the low cost and the convenience of studying in the comfort of your own home) is that you have someone you can speak to, who will know how to correct and guide you. A relationship of confidence soon develops, so that the natural inhibitions of ego fall away and you can really freely practice to speak. We have already mentioned the vital importance of pronunciation – it is clearly very difficult to perfect this if you don't have a live human being listening to you and guiding you (no matter what the computer-based interactive packages may claim about their pronunciation software). It is also true that interactive computer packages can tell you if you are answering correctly or incorrectly, in relation to simple things like vocabulary, but can they explain to you? Obviously not.

A useful free supplement for speech practice is the online student exchange, such as iTALKi. This works on the basis that you are connected with a native speaker of your target language, who in turn wants to learn your native language. Of every hour spent with him/her on Skype, you are supposed to speak your target language for 30 minutes while your exchange partner corrects and guides you, and then you switch roles, with you correcting his/her efforts at conversing in English. This is a supplementary resource, because it will at least give you opportunity to practice speaking. The extent to which

your exchange partner will really be able to explain things to you, is a matter of pure chance. Take yourself as example – you may well be able to point out to your exchange partner when they make a mistake, and give an example of the right way to say something, but how good is your current recollection of English morphology, syntax and semantics, for really explaining to him/her when they are confounded by something? Nevertheless, the exchange forums are a valuable supplementary resource, and they're free.

Getting over the ego / fear of failure barrier: A last tip with regard to speaking practice, concerns the barrier in the adult psyche constituted by our natural fear of making a fool of ourselves in front of others. This is perfectly normal, and its inhibiting power is great. There are three distinct ways of overcoming this barrier. The first is to build a relationship of comfort with a trusted tutor, as I mentioned earlier. Another is to get objective proof of your proficiency in the form of certification, such as the gold standard DELE diploma of the Spanish education ministry. This knowledge that you've proven that: "yes, I can!" will boost your self-confidence no end.

A third option (which can be integrated with the first) is to create a situation where you, John Smith, aren't making the mistakes – somebody else is, so it's no skin off your nose. This approach, which is called *suggestopedia*, was originally developed in the 1970's by a Bulgarian psychotherapist by the name of Georgi Lozanov. What it entails, is that John Smith will, for example, arrive at the diplomatic academy, where he will immediately be given a new identity related to his target language – he will become Pedro Gonzalez, a journalist from Mexico City with a passion for football and politics, and an entire back story that John Smith has created for his Pedro identity. All his fellow students and tutors will know John Smith as Pedro, and interact with him as such. This has the benefit of taking John's ego out of play, plus the benefit of

freeing him up to adopt a Latino persona, so that he can escape from his unilingual Anglo cultural and phonological straightjacket and learn to articulate (and gesticulate) like a true Latino. *Suggestopedia* isn't the answer to all the methodological challenges of learning a foreign language – it is simply another tool, to be used in conjunction with others. I have seen its effectiveness during my days as head of South Africa's diplomatic academy (during the transition years to full democracy, before I became ambassador for the New South Africa of President Mandela). I've also seen it at **DELEhelp** – one remarkable fellow really got into the swing of things, designing for himself an identity as a Mexican footballer (soccer player) and every time sitting himself down in front of the Skype camera with his enormous sombrero on his head, dressed in his club soccer shirt and with a glass of tequila in his hand. It wasn't difficult for him to really get into his new character, which completely freed him of his unilingual Anglo mould and assisted him enormously in mastering the articulation of Spanish phonology in no time. If you think it can work for you, give it a try!



This has been quite a long blog post, but I believe the importance of the subject merits such substantive treatment. Obviously much more can be said. So, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to drop me a line – I will do my best to answer, and like everything associated with this blog, my answer will be free and without implying any obligation on your part. You can use the convenient contact form on this page to send me your questions.

Workbook
#9.2

**DELE &
SIELE EXAM**

Orientation &
Acing Tips:
Level "B"

Excellencia
Didactica
edele.org

**DELE
help**

Willem Steenkamp
D. Litt. et Phil.
© GREXPA s.a.

**96 pages covering
exam formats, curriculum,
scoring criteria & top acing tips**

**free DELE / SIELE / OPI
exam preparation book**

**DELE
help**

click on image to ask for free workbook

Please ask for our FREE **DELEhelp** Workbook #9 (DELE / SIELE Exam Orientation and Acing Tips) an e-book of some 96 pages; it is a free sample of our in-house study materials, developed especially for English-speakers. Ask for this unique DELE exam preparation book using our convenient **contact information form** (click on image), and I will send the download link to you, gratis and with no obligation.

You can also ask for our FREE exploratory one hour Skype session, in English with myself, in which I will explain the exams such as the DELE / SIELE and OPI, plus our 1-on-1, personalized coaching methods and answer all your questions (you can use the same contact info form to set up the exploratory Skype session).

Good luck with practicing to improve your Spanish conversation skills! (It is expertly guided **PRACTICE** that makes perfect).

Saludos cordiales

Willem