

# I will survive (in Spanish)... or will I?

The British have a reputation for being bad at learning languages, but is it really true? I work for a newspaper which was doing a series of articles about this. As an experiment, they asked me to try and learn a completely new language for one month. Then I had to go to the country and do some 'tests' to see if I could 'survive' in different situations. I decided to learn Spanish because I would like to visit Spain and Latin America in the future. If I go, I don't want to be the typical Brit who expects everyone else to speak English.

I did a one-month intensive course in Spanish at a language school in London. I was a complete beginner but I soon found that some Spanish words are very similar to English ones. For example, *hola* isn't very different from 'hello' and *inglés* is very similar to 'English'. But other things were more difficult, for example the verbs in Spanish change for each person and that means you have to learn a lot of different endings. My biggest problem was the pronunciation. I found it very difficult to pronounce some letters in Spanish, especially *r* and *j*. I downloaded sentences in Spanish onto my phone and I listened and repeated them again and again.

When my course finished I went to Madrid for the weekend to do my tests. A Spanish teacher called Paula came with me and gave me a mark out of 10 for each test and then a final mark for everything.

These were the tests and the rules:

## TESTS

You have to...

- 1 order a drink and a sandwich in a bar, ask how much it is, and understand the price.
- 2 ask for directions in the street (and follow them).
- 3 get a taxi to a famous place in Madrid.
- 4 leave a message on somebody's voicemail.

## RULES

- you mustn't use a dictionary or phrase book
- you mustn't speak English at any time
- you mustn't use your hands or mime or write anything down

## 4 VOCABULARY modifiers

My pronunciation of the stadium wasn't **very** good.  
I was feeling **a bit** nervous at this point.

- a Complete the chart with the words in the box.

a bit    incredibly    not very    quite    really    very

Spanish is \_\_\_\_\_ very \_\_\_\_\_ difficult.  
\_\_\_\_\_ not very \_\_\_\_\_

### a bit

We only use *a bit* before **negative** adjectives and adverbs, e.g. *a bit difficult*, *a bit slowly*.

- b Complete the sentences with one of the words or phrases so that it makes a true sentence. Compare with a partner.

- 1 I'm \_\_\_\_\_ good at learning languages.
- 2 I'm \_\_\_\_\_ motivated to improve my English.
- 3 English pronunciation is \_\_\_\_\_ difficult.
- 4 English grammar is \_\_\_\_\_ complicated.
- 5 I'm \_\_\_\_\_ worried about the next English exam.
- 6 English is \_\_\_\_\_ important for my work / studies.

## 5 SPEAKING

- a How well do you think you could do Max's four tests in English? Why?

*I think I could order a drink and a sandwich quite well...*

- b Talk to a partner.

### HAVE YOU EVER...

- spoken to a tourist in English? When? Why?
- had to speak in English on the phone? Who to? What about?
- seen a film or video clip in English? Which? Did it have subtitles? How much did you understand?
- read a book or magazine in English? Which one(s)?
- asked for directions in English in a foreign city? Where? What happened?
- used an app or website to improve your English? Which one?
- learnt another foreign language? How well can you speak it?

## 6 WRITING

- p.115 Writing A formal email. Write an email asking for information.