

## “Hola, Espanol!” – Intro

All it takes is that first step.

It’s easier said than done, right? How many of us have that thing we’ve been wanting to be able to do for as far back as we can remember? Maybe it’s an idea for a novel you’ve always been meaning to write, or maybe it’s that keyboard collecting dust in the corner of your room. We all have that one thing that we’ve been promising ourselves we are going to accomplish one day. The only problem is, for so many of us, that day never comes. It becomes difficult to dedicate an hour a day to piano lessons when you spend eight hours of that day working and want to also keep an active social and family life. It’s almost impossible to keep training for that Ironman race when the temptation of a Big Mac or some tacos is only a short drive and a couple bucks away. It’s one thing to see ourselves in our heads, with the skills and abilities that we’d like to have. Taking that first step, and *committing* to the steps that follow...that’s a whooole different beast.

This is the problem that I have been facing for a long time. I’ve always been the kind of guy who wants to improve myself in some way. Ever since high school, I would always challenge myself to seek out new things to expand my horizons or just make myself a little bit more interesting. In high school, I tried musicals and cross country. Conor and I wrote scripts and hosted talent shows. In college, I played ultimate frisbee and was an editor for my school’s literary journal. Every new thing I tried was a new adventure, and it all enriched my life in some way.

But everything changed my Freshman year of college when I took that first German class. It was only a Gen Ed requirement. I had taken a little bit of Spanish in high school, but hadn’t done well enough to get the college credit. And since I had to start over, I decided to go with German. I always liked the way it sounded and knew nothing about the language, so why not? Besides, I would do the bare minimum to satisfy the Gen Ed requirements and that would be that.

First, it was easy. Enough of the basic words were similar enough to English for it to make sense. I still remembered the concept of gendered words from Spanish, so that part wasn’t too difficult. But it wasn’t long before things started getting harder...and then harder. Let me tell

you, English grammar is difficult enough, but German grammar is an absolute *nightmare*. Having to not only think about the correct tense to use, but think about how it affected sentence structure was something that I, as an English speaker, am not used to. It was rough watching my average test grades in my German classes fall from B's to C's and even D's. I was so demoralized that when I had made it through the required classes, I was done. This particular little challenge was over; no more language learning for me. Enough of the world knows English and I was sure I could get by.

That was before I went to Vienna. It was my German professor who told me about this opportunity, which consisted of a half-semester, three credit course that culminated in an eight day stay in the Austrian capital. I had saved up enough money from my summer job, and I am always itching for the next adventure- how could I say no? However, even as I stepped off the plane in the Austrian airport, I had no idea how much this trip would change my life. It's a story of its own, but to sum it up I got a taste for travel that I never knew I had. For the first time in my life, I experienced a culture that wasn't American, that wasn't primarily English speaking. I talked to the locals and met travelers from all over the world. Even ordering a pretzel in the limited German I knew was an adventure. Before I was back on American soil, I was hooked. I knew I had to travel and ingrain myself in other cultures. And to do that, I wanted to know more than just English.

And so, I enrolled in another German class. It was tough, and definitely hurt my GPA at times, but I stuck through it right up until I graduated college. Whenever I felt like quitting, I would always envision myself travelling through Germany, speaking to the locals in their own native tongue. There were also some more immediate rewards; me and my friend Eric would speak German with each other just hanging out or sitting in the library. It was so cool. I'm still nowhere near fluent, or even conversational for that matter, but I do feel like taking the first step in learning that language definitely enriched my life. Even when it would have been so much easier (and nicer to my GPA) to not do it.

That brings me to this project. I am shifting my focus back to Spanish. My goal is going to be to teach myself to be conversational in the language after only six months of self-teaching. With German, I have only really learned in an academic setting, so this will be a completely new

experience for me. Also, since I haven't even touched Spanish since high school, I am basically starting from scratch.

The reason I am doing this is for the same reason I pushed on in German; to be able to travel and communicate with more people while doing so. But the reason I am writing this blog (aside from holding myself accountable to actually keep learning) is to show that it is never too late to teach yourself a new skill. I have always been awful at learning languages and have always had horrible self-discipline. So, if I can do this in six months, or get close to my goal in that time- so can anyone. It does sound cliché, but it's true – all that matters is taking that first step.

Next week, I will be sharing how my first couple weeks of learning went. I'll be talking about what worked for me and what didn't work so far. I'll see you then.