1. **The Spanish language sometimes works in the same way as English, but often it doesn't.** Your best bet is to celebrate every time the two languages work the same way, but don’t expect it. Definitely avoid the urge to try to establish one-to-one correspondences with words (for example, trying to pair word #1 of a three word Spanish structure with word #1 of a three word English structure, and so on). Chances are, it won’t work, and you'll end up with something like the too-often-heard-and-horribly-incorrect, *Me llamo es Denise.* 😊 JUST SAY NO TO DIRECT TRANSLATIONS!!! (and do say, *Me llamo Denise or Mi nombre es Denise*). 😊 Related Idea: **The cultures that use Spanish often have customs that are different from those to which you may be accustomed.** As with the language itself, try to maintain a welcoming, open attitude as you learn about other ideas or world views.

2. **In a Spanish class, there is little room for English.** *Carro* does not mean "car". *Perro* does not mean "dog". *Me llamo Denise* does not mean "My name is Denise". When we say that something "means" something, we are talking about definitions. "Car", "dog" and "My name is Denise" are not definitions; they are (more or less) English equivalents-- they are translations. When we use the word "car", we are trying to call to mind a specific concept for our listener. We want her/him to envision a structure with four tires that people use to transport themselves on streets. That picture that we see in our minds-- that is what "car" *means*. But the word, that combination of three letters, only represents the concept because a large group of English speakers agree that it does. At some point in time in the past, each person in that group did *not* know what the word "car" represented. There was a moment when each person first learned to associate that particular word with that particular concept. And it wasn't just one time. The association was reinforced often enough for it to stick in the person’s mind. After a while, in fact, the connection between word and concept became so strong that it seemed that the word itself was the important thing. But it's not-- it's just a symbol that many English speakers have agreed upon to call to mind a common vision of a particular concept. Now, if I go to a non-English speaking country, I might not be as likely to find people who will agree with me that the combination "c-a-r" represents that concept. They might have another combination of letters that they prefer. In fact, many in the Spanish-speaking world prefer the combination ("c-a-rr-o"). The letters have changed, but the concept (a structure with four tires that people use to transport themselves on streets) is pretty similar. What's the point? The point is that there are currently 7.5 billion people in the world (más o menos). The combination "c-a-r" represents this concept for many of the more than 983 million English speakers (this number includes 371 million native speakers, as well as the 611 million who speak English as a second language). The combination "c-a-rr-o", also, might resonate for many of the more than 527 million Spanish speakers (436 million native; 91 million non-native). But the concept itself probably exists for the vast majority of the 7.5 billion-- the majority of the people can envision the concept, regardless of the word they choose to represent the concept. And, since not just in this example, but, in general, it is the concept that is substantial, as you go learning new terms and grammatical constructions in Spanish, doesn't it make sense to focus on what they *mean*, rather than what the combination of letters looks like in English? When you learn *perro*, learn that the word represents a domesticated animal that lives in your house and barks. When you learn *Me llamo ...*, learn that the combination of words represents what you say when you want to let somebody know what words to speak to get your attention.

3. **The classroom provides a unique opportunity for you to practice new structures and expressions.** Five hours a week, you’ll find yourself in a privileged space where you can hone your Spanish communication skills without worrying that the mistakes that you (will inevitably) make will get you into trouble. This practice time is essential; Spanish is a language, and language is about communication, and you must practice communicating in order to solidify your language skills. In this wonderful space, the majority of the people are working toward the same goal of communication as you are, and they are ready and willing to help you get there. Take advantage of the situation by coming to class prepared, interested, and ready and willing to experiment in Spanish.

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4. **Mistakes in the classroom are inevitable, but also welcome.** If you do come to class with an good attitude and an adventurous spirit, chances are you’re going to make many mistakes. This is perfectly natural and is nothing to fear. Little by little, as you practice new constructions and vocabulary terms more and more, you’ll make less and less mistakes when using them. And then you’ll learn more new constructions and more new vocabulary terms and you’ll start out making many mistakes and little by little, as you practice them, you’ll make less and less, and so on. This is the process of learning. Anybody who isn’t making any mistakes is probably not doing much learning (and perhaps should be in a more advanced class), since clearly s/he is already very comfortable with the material. For the majority, though, the mistakes will come. This is one reason that it is so important to pay attention. If I’m conversing with a student (it may be you or someone else), and you aren’t sure whether the student is expressing a concept well, pay attention to what I say in response. Do I repeat her/his words with modifications? If so, what are the changes that I’ve made?

5. **Confusion or partial understanding does not automatically signify failure—learn to say No comprender.** From my perspective, one of my most important jobs is to encourage you to actively engage in what's going on around you at all times. If you’re not hearing anything new, if all is very comfortable for you, chances are that you’ll relax and slowly disconnect. But if things are moving fast, you have to pay attention so that you don’t get lost. It’s during these times, when you’re forced to take incomplete information and use your critical thinking skills to figure out what’s missing, that you are actively learning. You will not understand everything that I say; but you’re not expected to. Focus on getting the gist. If I instruct the class to do something, and you don’t understand, first try to figure it out by observing those around you; if you still don’t understand, simply raise your hand and tell me, No comprender.

6. **You may not get to express everything that you want in class exactly as you would like to, but you can probably be a lot more creative with language than you think.** Learn to say Más o menos and No importa. While it’s wonderful to reach for the stars, there are also times when you need to look around and appreciate the beautiful flowers that surround you. You’ll be learning an incredible amount of Spanish this semester, but invariably there will be times when you find yourself lacking an ideal term or construction because you can’t possibly learn everything this semester. Accept, first, that it is probably not crucial to be precise at this level and in this situation (as it might be more so, say, in an emergency room). Know that if you do end up finding an alternate way to express the idea, it might take you quite a bit of work and down a few different pathways. And, if you don’t find that pathway, allow yourself to be satisfied at times with expressions like más o menos… You want say that your car is silver, but you don’t know the term for that color in Spanish; let’s say that you do, however, know gris (which is similar), but you don’t know how to express the idea of “shiny”? Well, for now, you might just have to settle for: Mi carro es gris, más o menos… Or, if you don’t even know gris yet, maybe: Mi carro es más o menos… como… negro y blanco… combinación … Or, if you don’t know negro and blanco yet, Mi carro es… ¡ay! ¡no importa! (This, by the way, is unlikely to happen much; you’ll rarely find yourself in a situation in which I ask you to discuss something for which you have not already been given the tools that you need to communicate your ideas; this will happen if you’re trying to talk about things that are beyond or unrelated to what the rest of the class is discussing).

7. **There are as many different levels of Spanish proficiency in our classroom as there are students.** At any level (first, second, third semester), there will always be some students with more or less experience in Spanish than others. The experience itself also varies; for some, there were classes in high school; for others, it’s a question of heritage; for still others it is only what they have studied OCC-- nothing more, nothing less. It is both unrealistic and unwise to look to others to determine whether or not the level at which you find yourself is appropriate. If you’re unsure, come speak with me. **Special note to those who have more background in Spanish than others:** Part of learning to speak a language well is
There are many varieties of Spanish, both regional and situational. There is no such thing as a "Pure Spanish". Rather, there are at least as many varieties of the language as there are Spanish-speaking countries (20, plus Puerto Rico), and even more than that, since there is variation within countries, too. There are also different levels of formality--differences in language based on the situation in which the speaker finds her/himself. What this means for you (particularly if you have some history with Spanish--high school studies, Spanish-speaking grandparents, summer vacation in Argentina, etc.), is that you need to happily accept that there is virtually always more than one way to express a concept. Do not say, for example: "What do you mean that my Toyota Prius is a coche?!? It's a carro--that's what my high school Spanish teacher said, and that's what my abuelita says, and that's what they said when I went to Mexico last summer!" Instead, say: "Muy bien--now I have two ways to represent this concept...The more, the merrier!" Note, by the way, that in this class (on exams, for example), you will be responsible for the vocabulary expressions presented in the book and/or by me. [Click here to see some of the variety of the English language]

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9. Sometimes the journey is more important than the destination. When working on activities in the classroom, you may not have time to complete the activity before I stop you. This may be frustrating for you until you realize that the point was probably not to answer each one of the seven questions but rather to discuss your family with the other group members. As long as you performed the task conscientiously, you're probably fine having only gotten to #5. Related Idea: What you consider to be the destination is probably just a pit stop. If you do make it to #7, you don't get to stop there. As long as others are working, as long as I haven't instructed you to stop, there is always another question that can be asked, always more information to give. Your group may have to go back to question #2 of the activity and discuss it in more detail. What you should not do is simply stop and sit silently, believing that you've finished the task. The point is always to continue the journey...

10. Learning a language really is fun. While this is a five-unit course that will require quite a bit of effort on your part, and while there will likely be times during the semester when you'll feel frustrated in class, learning a language can be one of the most fun, most rewarding experiences of your life. Because, what is language, but a tool to communicate with others; and what is more enjoyable than sharing our thoughts, dreams and experiences with those around us? Beyond everything else, remember to enjoy yourself in this class!