

Visual Link Spanish

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Price: \$199 (Currently on sale for \$134)

{sidebar id=2}View Software Comparison Chart

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The Background

Apparently, the founder of the U.S. Institute of Languages, David Clark, after years of teaching Spanish at the university level, was frustrated with how graduating students were still unable to carry on a conversation in fluent Spanish. In trying to solve this problem his research showed that most courses are structured in such a way that so much time is spent teaching grammar rules, verb conjugations, vocabulary and sentence structure that they rarely got around to teaching students how converse in Spanish. He also noticed that the most effective courses, those which resulted in conversational fluency, were those which reversed this approach, teaching conversation before teaching the rules of grammar, conjugation, and so on.

{sidebar id=1}The method used by Visual Link Spanish is precisely this "backward" approach, and is why you'll find that within minutes of starting the course you'll have already mastered a thread or two of conversational Spanish - likely with a puzzled and pleasantly surprised expression on your face. This "top down" approach to learning Spanish is also one reason why the lessons are so captivating, since learning rules of grammar and syntax is not exactly what most would describe as fun. Learning how to actually construct sentences frees you from the burden of learning words by rote and you'll find you have an easier time remembering words and phrases too.

What's Included

This is not the only method used to engage the audience. As with other software courses there are quizzes, puzzles and you interact with the program both visually and aurally. One useful feature of Visual Link Spanish allows you to break away from your current lesson and listen to native Spanish speakers pronounce a word or sentence. Another feature is that you do all of this at your own pace - there is such a noticeable lack of pressure that it almost seems like a game rather than the fully fledged language course it is.

The course comes complete with a book, a manual and 12 CD's. The promise is that you'll learn 500 words of Spanish.

Criticism (Sort of)

Ordinarily we'd say 500 words is not a lot, but the point is that you'll be able to use those words in everyday conversation easily and naturally, and we feel that this effectively negates the criticism. Furthermore, the folks at Visual Link Languages have additional courseware to take you well beyond those 500 words, so Visual Link Spanish provides a very strong basic foundation for further studies.

Another criticism one could make of the software is that the interface is a bit too "friendly", if that's possible, and that the cute animated characters might throw some people off. However, after considering the diverse target audience we feel this is probably intentional and by design, possibly a result of careful research into what best puts people at ease. In any case, this is a question of personal taste and does not detract from the quality of the lessons.

Our Rating

Finally, because this course is in an incomparable class of its own, and because it is so obviously successful and easily fulfills its promises, we are giving it a high score of 100% and would gladly recommend it to anyone. Most importantly, you will undoubtedly learn to converse in Spanish, and this is what most people want.