

WHAT'S THE PASSWORD?

This is a mid-year compilation describing Passwords. The original blog is updated weekly with more ideas. For updates see: <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/2015/whats-the-password-2>

“Language is not a genetic gift, it is a social gift. Learning a new language is becoming a member of the club—the community of speakers of that language.”

–Frank Smith (*Psycholinguist and essential contributor to research on the nature of the reading process. Author of over 20 books on language, reading, writing, thinking and teaching, including the small gem Reading: FAQ, 2007*)



A tool that I use to help my students feel that learning a new language is like becoming a member of a club is the password. Requiring a "secret password" to enter the classroom is a concrete example for them of the idea of exclusive membership. I have required a "palabra secreta" (secret word) for students to enter the classroom for the last several months. I saw Alina Filipescu do this when I observed her classroom in California last April and I have been using it ever since. My students get a kick out of it and so do I.

If you are unfamiliar with the idea, think of using a password to get into a tree house or fort when you were a kid, or better yet, films that portrayed the prohibition era like the 1973 Robert Redford/Paul Newman Oscar winner, *The Sting*. When liquor was against the law customers had to know the secret sign or word to get into a club that was illegally serving alcohol. They wouldn't let in just anyone. And in our classes we are serving up stronger and better stuff than any

bootlegger: ***engaging language acquisition***. So we naturally need a password to allow in only people we can trust with this scarce and valuable elixir.

Here is how to do it:

Explicitly tell students the password and the meaning the day before they will need it. I tell them on Fridays (obviously in the TL): "**Class, I have a secret!**" And, a la Ben Slavic, I have trained them all to: **a)** put a hand to their ear, **b)** lean in and, **c)** stomp on the floor with one foot, all at the same time. This triad of actions has auditory and kinesthetic elements that demonstrate all students are engaged and are paying close attention. It needs to be crisp, obvious, and the stomped foot needs to be loud. And they all need to synchronize their actions. Students do all three actions together and enthusiastically, or we drill it again until they get it right. Once they do, I whisper to them in the TL: "**The new secret word is ____.**" Then I write it on the board in Spanish and in English, if need be. Although after a couple of weeks it barely needs to be written because most students are figuring it out and also remembering it as soon as I say it. They are getting it quickly because their attention is up. The password is meaningful to them and they are familiar with the routine. Students also share it with one another before they get to class if they have missed class--often via text message as they scurry down the hall.

The password is changed once a week or so. If I try to change it every day or even every other day it is too hard for me to keep up. A 3-5 day time frame is long enough for everybody to get good at it. It takes some slower processing kids a couple of days to get fluent with it and to be able to say the password quickly and confidently as they enter the classroom. For those students that were gone or cannot remember the password, I have them step to the side and listen to their classmates as they stream by saying it. Once they remember it, they can jump back into line.

The passwords are expressions that are both common in the language and also fun for kids to say. They often end up being woven into class conversations and stories. They show up over and over in class discussions and personal interviews, usually initiated by students.

I sometimes require students to use appropriate gestures and body language with the password to show that students understand what they are saying. If the tone and gesture

do not correspond to the words, I have them do it again and/or I ask them if they know exactly what it means.

Passwords come in different forms: **1)** Questions by the teacher, **2)** Questions by the students, and **3)** Simple statements. If the password prompt is a question by the teacher, the student needs to give an appropriate answer to show understanding. If it is a question by the student, the teacher responds. If the password is a statement, they just say it. There is no need for a response from the teacher, other than a nod and look of approval.

The benefits of having a classroom password are marvelous.

For the STUDENTS the advantages are:

--**It promotes a sense of camaraderie.** They wait in line to enter the class. No other teacher is doing this and it makes them feel that this class is something special.

--**It primes the social pump.** They help one another to remember the password, whispering it to students that were not there the day before or who have forgotten it. They even text it to one another. It improves connections.

--**It builds anticipation.** They do not enter until I come to the door to greet them. When I come to the door and begin to allow them in, they are relieved and happy to get to their seats.

--**It shows respect.** This built-in level of honoring the subject matter, the instructor and the process does not happen in many other classes.

--**It grants instant success.** Students feel special when they say the password and are admitted. They feel as if they have accomplished something before they even enter the classroom. And those positive feelings can last all hour if I play my cards right. Just like Susan Gross says: *"Nothing motivates like success."* Student that do not know the password or do not say it correctly are not allowed to enter the classroom right away. I have them stand beside me so they can hear a few others saying it right. When they can say it, they feel like they have accomplished something worthwhile.

For the TEACHER the advantages are:

--I get a little bit of time to myself. Even a minute or so alone in the middle of the day between classes helps me to pull my thoughts together and shift gears for a new class. The unrelenting social contact wears on me after awhile, but with a short break I can recover. I am actually more on the introverted side--I just play an extrovert on TV.

--I get to greet each kid individually. Each child knows that he or she is welcome here today, not just because I said it on the first day of school. That kind of daily reinforcement is meaningful to kids.

--I can look them in the eye. We can share a knowing nod that they get it. That shared look lets them know that they are an accepted part of the club.

--I can tell how a kid is doing. Before I did this habitually and certain students would slink in and sit in the back of the class, I may or may not have picked up on how they were doing. It is harder to read body language through a crowd when a kid is sitting and I know that I missed many cues because I did not greet them individually standing face-to-face. But when they are standing right in front of me, I can easily tell at a glance how they are doing and give them the extra care they may require. Their posture, body positioning, hand placement, facial expressions and tone of voice give them away.

--It is a preemptive classroom management tool. They are tacitly acknowledging that this is my space and they need my permission to enter. Makes me feel vaguely like the doorman at a secret speakeasy in the prohibition era (again, think the 1973 Robert Redford/Paul Newman movie *The Sting* here) that only allowed in trustworthy folks; those that were part of the club.

--Kids are using the target language outside of class. I mean, this IS the goal of our teaching language, right? Plus, it doesn't hurt to let evaluating administrators see students using what they have learned outside of the confines of the classroom.

--Kids get to class on time. It helps to get to class early to hear others saying the password. Students that might otherwise saunter in right at the bell get to class ahead of time to be sure they get the password right.

--It sets a positive tone. Some times of the year I need encouragement and so the assigned password is a friendly greeting or word of cheer. Having 30 students in a row say "Thank you so much," or "That is so kind of you," really makes my day and gives me a lift to get through. But not every password needs to be positive. Even sad expressions can work to help us connect, because I act as if I am sympathizing with them.

We have been doing about one password a week. The password can be:

1. A useful idiomatic expression
2. A cultural expression
3. Something fun that I think they will get a kick out of

Here are the PASSWORDS* we have used so far and some possibilities for the rest of the school year:

* Many thanks to Alina Filipescu and Nina Barber for the additional passwords ideas!

I put the translations into English below for the benefit of non-Spanish speakers reading this post, but the students are required to say only the Spanish phrase to enter the classroom.

LEVEL 1-2

1 **Muy amable / Very friendly; Very kind of you** Alina Filipescu was using this gracious expression as her "palabra secreta" the day I observed her and I love the feel of it. Scores of students with this phrase on their lips as they enter class sets a positive tone! This first password, with the emphasis on how common courtesy is expressed in Spanish-speaking countries, is the beginning of infusing elements of Hispanic culture into the curriculum.

2 **¡Qué triste! / How sad!** This is a rejoinder that is fun for kids to say in stories or as we react to personal interviews.

- 3 **Con permiso / With permission, Excuse me** Another classy expression of courtesy that works perfectly when I am "absentmindedly" blocking the doorway. Learning to use courtesies fluently is an important part of learning how to navigate in the culture.
- 4 **¿En serio? / Seriously?** Used this one this week. I could tell that they understood it perfectly by their body language and tone of voice as they said it. I love seeing the different body language versions that kids come up with for this. There must be six or seven different ones.
- 5 **¡Trabaja fuerte! / Work hard!** I got this one from Japanese teacher Betsy Paskvan who says that mothers in Japan do not say "Good luck!" to their children. Instead, they say, "Work hard!" I love this expression because how hard we work is under our control, but "luck" is not. The expression is not necessarily a cultural one for my Spanish students, but it is certainly a good life lesson and I want to reinforce this idea. The feeling of having a whole class say this as they enter is what I imagine a Roman centurion must have felt before a battle when all that passed by him proclaimed "Strength and honor!"
- 6 **¿Qué pasa? or ¿Qué pasó? / What's happening?** Students need to know basic greetings. The password is to ask me this one and I will obviously respond with "nada" (nothing) or "nada mucho" (nothing much), the only acceptable answers if you are cool. **¿Qué pasó?** is a bit cooler question to ask. It feels good to have 30 kids saying "**¿Qué pasa?**" as they enter class. We all feel cool and accepted.
- 7 **Mil gracias / A thousand thanks** This is classier way of saying "thank you very much" than a mere *muchas gracias*. It also reflects the influence of Moorish/Arabic culture that still remains in the Spanish language and culture 500 years after the *Reconquista* when the Moors finally lost the last vestige of control in Spain. I feel like kids are personally thanking me in the most gracious way they can, and that gives me a boost.
- 8 **Todavía eres chévere! / You are still cool!** This is what we say to someone in class that makes a mistake or tries but does not get it right quite. Very handy and encouraging. It also allows me to say "Tú también" (You too) back to students. Every kid gets to hear me say this to them and their classmates in line outside my door times every

¡No me digas! *You don't say!*

¿Qué pasa? *What's up?*

¡Hazlo ahora! *Do it now!*

¡Qué bien! *That's great!*

¡Caramba! *Wow! (positive or negative)*

Vámonos *Come on*

¡Me estas tomando el pelo! *Your'e kidding!*

¡Qué increíble! *That's amazing!*

Me parece bien. *Sounds good.*

Other meanings: What the heck?; Let's do it!; I'm flabbergasted!; Dude!; Right on!; Hell yeah!; Word; Yeehaw! ; Come on!; Bring it on! ; Well, there you go!

The word **¡Órale!** is often used with the word “pues”, which means “then”: ¡Órale, pues!

Here it is used as a snack food brand name:



11 **¿Cómo está usted?** / **How are you? (formal)** This reinforces the idea of formal vs. familiar register for students. It is courteous and good practice for them to hear all of their peers saying this as they enter the class.

12 **¡Ayúdame!** / **Help me!** This is a key phrase in an upcoming story that I want students to know.

13 **¿Me puede ayudar?** / **Can you help me?** Students need to know how to ask politely.

14 **Me despierto a las... / I get up at...** The expression "se despierta" (she wakes up at) is in a book that students are reading at this time of the year. It does not show up much and I wanted students to get some repetitions with it. The prompt is "¿A qué hora te despiertas? (At what time do you get up?) This quick exchange, heard over and over by students in line, helps them to acquire it. It can also help students with numbers. What I like the best though is the opportunity for casual banter when students say they get up very early or very late.

15 **¿Qué tal? / How are you? What's up? How are things?** This is a common greeting that students should become familiar with. It is usually answered with something like "Muy bien" or "Bien, gracias. Y tú, ¿qué tal?"

16 **¿Qué hora es? / What time is it?** Students enthusiastically suggested this because we showed the clip of the fake Spanish soap opera by the same name. Find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6-vm1OiUOw>

17 **No hay una frase secreta. / There is not a secret phrase (password).** *This is a longer phrase but it uses words that students are familiar with. Students are asked to whisper it.*

¿Qué hay de nuevo? / What's new?

¿Mande? / I beg your pardon? This is a polite and classy way of saying "What?" when you do not understand. It is often heard in Mexico. This is another expression that smuggles in cultural attitudes along with the language.

No puedo ver. / I can't see.

Me acuesto a las... / I go to bed at... I stole this password from Alina Filipescu too. It gives some real insight into students' lives and can start some short conversations with me as they enter the classroom: "What? You go to bed at midnight?! Every night? That is way too late, mijo."

¡Déjame en paz! / Leave me alone! This is a good expression to know when making one's way through a crowded market or beach.

Quizás / Maybe Kids love this one because it sounds vaguely naughty.

¡Claro que sí! / Of course!

¡Qué chévere! / How cool!

¡Por supuesto! / Of course!

No tengo ni idea. / I have no idea.

No me importa. / I don't care.

Cálmese, señor(señora). / Calm down, sir (mam).

No vale la pena / It's not worth it.

¡No es justo! / It's not fair!

Me duele... / My _____ hurts. (Students can add any body part they want here.)

¡Ánimo! / Cheer up!

¿Qué hubo? / What's up Also: **¿Quiúbole?**

Mi casa es su casa. / My house is your house. This is a common polite phrase in Spanish culture.

¿Aló? / Hello? This is used to answer the phone. It is not equivalent to **Hola.**

¿Dónde has estado? / Where have you been? Sort of like "Long time, no see."

Buenos días / Good morning

Buenas tardes / Good afternoon

No te creo. / I don't believe you.

Engañoso(a) / Liar In Spanish calling someone a liar (mentiroso) is harsh. When we say it in English we usually mean that someone is trying to trick us.

¡Qué asco! / How gross!

Nos vemos / See you later. Literally "We see each other." Used to say good-bye.

¡Eso es! / That's it! or That's right!

¡Chao, pescao bacalao! / Goodbye, cod fish! This is a fun expression from Venezuela that is used like "After while, crocodile." The word **pescao** is slang for **pescado**, fish.

¿Qué pasa, calabaza? / What's happening, pumpkin? This is a fun greeting in Spanish that doesn't rhyme in English, sort of like "See you late, alligator." The teacher can answer with the traditional, "**Nada, nada, limodada.**"

¡Feliz cumpleaños! / Happy birthday!

Con mucho cariño / With much love/affection/fondness Used when writing an email or letter.

¿Cómo se dice en inglés (español)? / How do you say in English/Spanish?

¡Ten cuidado! / Be careful!

¡Vete! / Get out of here!

Besos y abrazos / Kisses and hugs Used in writing at the end of a letter to a friend.

En enero, abrigo, bufanda y sombrero / In January, coat, scarf and hat

LEVEL 2-3

Key: Expressions in **orange text** are **negative tú form commands** or phrases that **with a subjunctive**--grammatical forms that students are being exposed to more and more in meaningful contexts through the course.

Expressions in **purple text** with a ♦ are **old Spanish cultural sayings**: authentic culture, folk wisdom and language all at the same time!

- 1 **¡No me digas!** / **You don't say!** or **Don't tell me that!** This is a handy expression and one that gives students a negative tú form command, which has the same sound as the subjunctive.
- 2 **¡Qué casualidad!** / **What a coincidence!**
- 3 **¡No tengo la culpa!** / **It's not my fault!**
- 4 **¿Qué son esos?** / **What are those?** The students came up with this one. They begged for it. This expression is a popular meme going around right now and they think it is hilarious to say it and point at my shoes. Look up "What are those?" on YouTube.
- 5 **¡Por supuesto!** / **Of course!** A few students in Spanish 3 did not know this expression, so I added it to this level as well as level 1.
- 6 **Nací el (#) de (mes) de (año)** / **I was born the (#) of (month) of (year).** I give students the prompt "¿Fecha de nacimiento?"/"Date of birth?" in the monotone of a customs officer at an overcrowded border crossing to get them accustomed to this official-sounding language that they will hear when traveling. It also helps to review the date and big numbers in the year.
- 7 **Poco a poco se va lejos.** / **Slow and steady wins the race.** (This will help to prepare them mentally to read and tell the story of [The Tortoise and The Hare](#), an upcoming unit that has a crucial lesson for students --that they need to persevere when they do not have instant success.

- 8 **Todavía eres chévere!** / **You are still cool!** This is what we say to someone in class that makes a mistake or tries but does not get it right quite.
- 9 **¡Eso sí que es!** / **That's exactly right!** or **That is what it is!** This one is fun to say because it sounds like you are spelling out the word "socks" in English: S-O-C-K-S. If you set it up right, this expression can become a bilingual pun. See the lesson plans for a story about misunderstanding this expression [here](#).
- 10 **¡No hagas eso!** / **Don't do that!** This is a negative tú form command that sounds the same as the subjunctive. Expressions like this are added to reinforce the irregular subjunctive forms.
- 11 **¡No te vayas!** / **Don't go!** Another negative command that gives students the feeling of the subjunctive in both the sound and meaning.
- 12 **Va a ser pan comido.** / **It's going to be a piece of cake.** Literally this means "It's going to be eaten bread." Authentic sayings like this infuse the class with culture and give students something interesting to say.
- 13 **¡Se me olvidó!** / **I forgot!** Literally this expression means "It forgot me." The usage of the verb is similar to **gustar**.
- 14 **¡Ojalá que sí!** / **I hope so!** "Ojalá" is a phrase in Spanish that comes directly from Arabic. It means "If Allah is willing" and it is still used often in the Spanish-speaking world. Many students were not aware of the phrase or how it was used.
- 15 **Ojalá que...** / **I hope that...** This plays off of the previous password, but offers students a chance to use the subjunctive. Each student can say something unique. "I hope that there is no homework" is a popular one. Our school's football team was going to the state championship game so there were lots of active hopes this week.
- 16 **No creo que...** / **I don't believe that...** This expression provides another opportunity for students to express themselves with the subjunctive, to hear it over and over in line and for me to respond in kind to each student. It provides all kinds of meaningful repetitions. This one is a bit harder than the expression from last week (imagining a negative, as opposed to a positive, situation), but it fit because it was the

week before final exams, so many students were incredulous at the semester being over, Christmas being around the corner, their grades in some classes and many other issues.

17 **No te preocupes.** or **No se preocupe.** / **Don't worry.** This is an important phrase to know. Even though it is a bit awkward for students to be addressing a teacher in the familiar "tú" form, it is appropriate to practice it here because this saying would mostly be used as a caretaker talk in comforting someone your own age or younger.

18 **Estoy harto de...** / **I am sick of...** Students add something that they are sick of. They generate some fun and creative answers.

19 **No me di cuenta de que...** / **I didn't realize that...** The phrase "darse cuenta de que" (to realize that...) keeps showing up in reading at this level. This is just another version of it.

20 ♦ **No se ganó Zamora en una hora.** / **Zamora was not won in an hour.** Similar in English: "*Rome wasn't built in a day.*" (Worthwhile things take time.) En el año 1072 el rey Sancho II de Castilla (Sancho el Bravo) trató de conquistar la ciudad de Zamora durante siete meses. Al final se ganó Zamora, pero trágicamente el rey se murió antes de la victoria.

A propósito... / By the way...

¿Qué quiere Ud. que yo haga? / **What do you want me to do?**

¿Usted se dio cuenta de que... ? / **Did you realize that... ?** The phrase "darse cuenta de que" (to realize that...) keeps showing up in reading at this level.

Olvidalo. / **Forget it.**

Bien hecho / **Well done**

¡No me molestes! / **Quit bugging me!**

Sigue trabajando / **Keep on working**

¡Qué chévere! / **How cool!**

¡Qué tontería! / What foolishness!

Estoy de acuerdo / I agree

¡Me estás tomando el pelo! / You're pulling my leg!

♦ **A lo hecho, pecho.** / To what has been done, chest. (Deal with it)

♦ **A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda.** / He who gets up early, God helps him. Similar in English: "*The early bird gets the worm*" or "*God helps those that help themselves.*"

♦ **Al mal tiempo, buena cara.** / To bad weather, good face.

♦ **Aunque el mono se viste de seda, mono se queda.** / Even though a monkey is dressed in silk, it is still a monkey. Similar in English: "*You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.*"

♦ **Del dicho al hecho, hay gran trecho.** / From what is said to what is done, there is a great stretch (distance). Similar in English: "*Easier said than done.*"

♦ **El tiempo es oro.** / Time is gold. Similar in English: "*Time is money.*"

♦ **Más vale tarde que nunca.** / More valuable late than never. Similar in English: "*Better late than never.*"

♦ **Mejor pájaro en la mano que cien volando.** / Better bird in the hand that 100 flying. Similar in English: "*A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush.*"

♦ **Poderoso caballero es don Dinero.** / Powerful gentleman is Mr. Money. Similar in English: "*Money talks,*" or "*He who has the gold makes the rules.*"

♦ **Quien se ríe último, se ríe mejor.** / Who laughs last, laughs best. Same as in English.

♦ **No hay mal que por bien no venga.** / There is no bad through which good may not come. Similar in English: "*Every dark cloud has a silver lining.*"



Works for me. If you have any more password ideas, please pass them along so that we can all try them out.

We all get better when we work together, mis amigos.

Bryce