

MFLE Spanish Reference Grammar

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Introduction

'Grammar is the way that words make sense. It is a code or set of rules accepted by any community who share a language.' (Language into Languages Teaching, SEED, University of Glasgow, 2001)

What follows is an attempt to set out the rules of grammar for the structures which are commonly used in the teaching of Spanish for P6 and P7. This is a reference grammar for teachers. It is not intended for use by pupils, unless perhaps as a spell-check for the months of the year, for example.

Why use this resource?

It is appreciated that a number of teachers who have completed their MLPS training may feel a little insecure in their knowledge of basic Spanish grammar. This is understandable, and this reference grammar attempts to be a resource to help. It is by definition very restricted, but closely tied to the requirements of teachers offering Spanish in the primary school.

The fact that it has been produced does not mean that primary school teachers will now be expected to teach grammar formally as it is laid out here. There is no expectation that pupils should work through this grammar resource. As noted above, it is a reference resource for teachers, to try to make them more comfortable with the rules behind the communicative language which they are offering in class.

It is felt that a degree of security about the rules of grammar will make teachers more comfortable in their use of Spanish.

How should I use this resource?

As will be seen throughout the grammar, we do not shy away from explaining simple rules to the pupils. However, such explanations should be done in a sensitive way. There is nothing to be gained in foreign language teaching from leaving pupils unsure and insecure when a simple explanation, where possible drawing analogies with English, would remove doubts and make the picture clearer.

Any explanation of grammar given to pupils should not be taken directly from this resource and projected on the whiteboard. Instead, teachers can use the resource to find out the correct form before going on to explain, in their own words, any basic rules of grammar. These explanations will vary according to the needs of the pupils, some of whom will benefit from a sharper exposure to grammar.

Spanish alphabet, pronunciation and punctuation

This list shows the letters of the Spanish alphabet and how they are pronounced.

A: ah	J: chota (as in lo ch)	R: eray (soft 'r')
B: bay	K: ka	RR: erray (rolled 'r')
C: thay	L: ellay	S: essay
CH: chay (as in ch air)	LL: eyay	T: tay
D: day	M: emmay	U: oo
E: ay	N: ennay	V: oobay
F: effay	Ñ: enyay	W: oobay doblay
G: chay (as in lo ch)	O: oh	X: ekiss
H: atchay (as in ch air)	P: pay	Y: ee-gree-ayga
I: ee	Q: koo	Z: theta

Points to note

- Sometimes 'K' and 'W' are not included in the Spanish alphabet as they normally occur only in words of foreign origin.
- 'CH', 'LL', 'Ñ' and 'RR' count as separate letters.
- Older dictionaries used to list words beginning with 'CH' after all the 'C's and those beginning with 'LL' after all the 'L's. However, that is no longer the case and in most modern dictionaries the words are alphabetised as they would be in English (except that the 'Ñ' comes after the 'N').

Pronunciation

Spanish pronunciation is, compared to English, fairly straightforward with all the letters in a word being pronounced, including final vowels. However certain letters can pose problems:

- 'B' and 'V' are pronounced almost exactly alike, with the 'v' being slightly softer and more like an English 'b' sound. So both 'Barcelona' and 'Valencia' will sound as if they start with a 'b'.
- 'C' is pronounced as the 'c' in 'cat' except when it is followed by the letters 'e' or 'i' when it is pronounced as the 'th' in 'thing', apart from in Latin America when it is pronounced with an 's-' sound.
- 'CH' is always pronounced as in 'chocolate'.
- G is pronounced as the 'g' of 'goat', except when it is followed by 'e' or 'i' when it is pronounced as the 'ch' in 'loch'.
- 'H' is never pronounced.
- The letter 'J' is always pronounced as the 'ch' in 'loch'.
- 'Qu-' is pronounced as an English 'k'.

- In words with 'gue' or 'gui', such as 'guitarra' or 'guerra', the letter 'U' is not pronounced.
- 'Z' is always pronounced as 'th' as in 'thing', apart from in Latin America when it is pronounced with an 's' sound.

Punctuation

Exclamation marks appear twice each time they are used - once (upside down) at the start of the sentence, and once at the end.

For example:

'¡Silencio, por favor!' - 'Quiet, please!'
'¡Levántate!' - 'Get up!'

Question marks behave in a similar way, but their first occurrence can actually be in the middle of a sentence, with their second at the end.

For example:

'¿Dónde vives?' - 'Where do you live?'

but

'Trabajas mucho, ¿no?' - 'You work hard, don't you?'

Other punctuation used in Spanish can include a stress mark, like a French acute. See 'Stress on Spanish words', below.

Stress on Spanish words

The rule for stress in Spanish is that if a word ends in a **vowel** or the letters **n** or **s**, the stress will fall on the second last syllable. Examples: 'trabajo', 'Barcelona'.

If a word ends in **any consonant apart from n or s**, the stress will fall on the last syllable.

For example: 'usted', 'Madrid'.

An accent (like a French acute) will be used if the word does not follow this rule.

For example: 'matemáticas', 'Málaga'.

An accent mark will also be written over interrogative words, but does not affect the way in which they are pronounced.

For example:

- ¿qué? - what?
- ¿cómo? - how?
- ¿dónde? - where?

An accent mark is used to distinguish a small number of words which have the same pronunciation but a different meaning. For example:

Word with accent	English translation	Word without accent	English translation
tú	you	tu	yours
él	he	el	the
sí	yes	si	if
mí	me (after a preposition)	mi	my

Verbs

Introduction to the Spanish verb

'Verbs are used to assert or state what is happening, or what is the case. They are sometimes called "doing words" or "action words", but they do not always show action: if we say "he is bone idle" or "he has stopped" there is not much action going on.

'Verbs also show the time when things are happening: this is called the tense of the verb.' (Language into Languages Teaching: SEED: University of Glasgow: 2001)

Subject pronouns

The subject pronouns are:

	Pronoun	English translation
1st person singular	yo	I
2nd person singular (informal)	tú	you
2nd person singular (formal)	usted	you
3rd person singular	él/ella	he/she
1st person plural	nosotros/as	we
2nd person plural (informal)	vosotros/as	you
2nd person plural (formal)	ustedes	you
3rd person plural	ellos/ellas	they

There are several differences between the use of the subject pronoun in Spanish and English.

Omitting the subject pronoun

In Spanish the subject pronoun is frequently omitted because, as in Latin, the ending of the verb will indicate the subject. However, if it is not clear who the subject is, then the pronoun has to be used, and it can also be used for emphasis.

Four versions of 'you'

There are four possible translations of the one English word 'you':

1. tú
2. vosotros
3. usted
4. ustedes

'Tú' is a second person singular and is used when speaking to one person whom you know well, eg a child, relation, friend, or animal. A good rule of thumb here is to use 'tú' if you would call a person by their first name.

'Vosotros', which has the feminine form 'vosotras' which is used for more than one feminine subject, is the plural of 'tú' and is a second person plural. It is used when talking to more than one person whom you know.

'Usted' is used when speaking formally to one person whom you might address by their title, eg Mr, Doctor, Professor, etc.

'Ustedes' is the plural form of 'usted'. 'Usted' always takes the same verb ending as 'él' and 'ella'; similarly in the plural 'ustedes' always takes the same verb ending as 'ellos' and 'ellas'.

In school

- In school, teachers would address individual pupils by 'tú', and groups of pupils by 'vosotros/as'.
- Pupils should address the teacher as 'usted'.

Words to mean 'we'

'Nosotros', the word for 'we', also has a feminine form ('nosotras') which is used if all subjects are feminine. However, as with 'vosotros', if one man and four women, for example, are the subject, the masculine would be used.

There is no word for 'it' in Spanish. Every noun, whether a person or object, is masculine or feminine.

Present tense

In Spanish there are three forms of the infinitive of the verb. They have one of the following endings:

- -ar
- -er
- -ir

The infinitive form of a verb is that which appears in a dictionary, and which is indicated in English by the use of the word 'to' in front. Thus, 'to look' is an infinitive in English. The infinitive is the starting point from which all tenses are formed.

To form the present tense of a Spanish regular verb ending in '-ar-', for example 'hablar' (to speak), take away the '-ar', (the ending), and to what is left (the stem), add, '-o', '-as', '-a', '-amos', '-áis', '-an'. So for the present tense of hablar, we have:

hablar: to speak

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	hablo	I have
tú	hablas	You (singular, informal) have
usted	habla	You (singular, formal) have
él/ella	habla	He/she/it has
nosotros/as	hablamos	We have
vosotros/as	habláis	You (plural, informal) have
ustedes	hablan	You (plural, formal) have
ellos/ellas	hablan	They have

The endings of a verb ending in '-er', such as 'beber', are '-o', '-es', '-e', '-emos', '-éis', '-en'.

For a verb ending in '-ir', such as 'vivir', the endings are '-o', '-es', '-e', '-imos', '-ís', '-en'.

beber: to drink

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	bebo	I drink
tú	bebes	You (singular, informal) drink
usted	bebe	You (singular, formal) drink
él/ella	bebe	He/she/it drinks
nosotros/as	bebemos	We drink

vosotros/as	bebéis	You (plural, informal) drink
ustedes	beben	You (plural, formal) drink
ellos/ellas	beben	They drink

vivir: to live

Pronoun (singular) Verb form English translation

yo	vivo	I live
tú	vives	You (singular, informal) live
usted	vive	You (singular, formal) live
él/ella	vive	He/she/it lives
nosotros/as	vivimos	We live
vosotros/as	vivís	You (plural, informal) live
ustedes	viven	You (plural, formal) live
ellos/ellas	viven	They live

Because the subject pronoun is not always used, the ending of the verb is very important; otherwise the subject of the sentence could be unclear.

Affirmative

As it is not always necessary to use subject pronouns, to say 'I speak...' (a language), 'hablo' could be sufficient. However, in the third person it is not always clear who the subject is, so it might be necessary for clarity to say 'él habla', or 'ustedes hablan', for example.

Negative

If you want to say 'I don't speak', simply put 'no' in front of the verb. For example: 'No hablo español' - 'I don't speak Spanish'.

Interrogative

To ask a question you can change the order of the subject and verb, eg '¿hablas tú?' However, since the subject pronoun is not always used, you could simply say '¿hablas?' and the rising intonation would indicate a question. Note the inverted question mark at the beginning; this warns you that a question is coming. See Interrogative verbs (p.14) and Spanish alphabet (p.2) for more information.

Irregular verbs

Unfortunately, a number of verbs are irregular. Equally unfortunately, they tend to be ones which are commonly used. This is not a case of Spanish being awkward; it's the same in all languages. Think of the present tense of the verb 'to be' in English, for example.

In fact, the verb 'to be' presents a particular problem in Spanish, which uses two possible verbs to translate the one English verb. These two verbs are 'ser' and 'estar'.

ser: to be

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	soy	I am
tú	eres	You (singular, informal) are
usted	es	You (singular, formal) are
él/ella	es	He/she/it is
nosotros/as	somos	We are
vosotros/as	sois	You (plural, informal) are
ustedes	son	You (plural, formal) are
ellos/ellas	son	They are

estar: to be

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	estoy	I am
tú	estás	You (singular, informal) are
usted	está	You (singular, formal) are
él/ella	está	He/she/it is
nosotros/as	estamos	We are
vosotros/as	estáis	You (plural, informal) are
ustedes	están	You (plural, formal) are
ellos/ellas	están	They are

Which 'to be' should I use?

It can be difficult for non-native Spanish speakers to decide which verb to use.

A simple rule:

If you want to say **who** or **what** someone or something is, use the appropriate person of 'ser'. This generally refers to a more permanent state.

If you want to say **where** or **how** someone or something is, use 'estar'. This generally refers to a more temporary state.

For example:

'**Soy** escocesa y **soy** estudiante.' - 'I'm Scottish and I'm a student.'

Ella **es** mi hermana y **es** bonita.' - 'She's my sister and is very pretty.'

These describe **what** or **who** someone is.

But:

'¿Dónde **estás**? **Estoy** en Escocia.' - 'Where are you? I'm in Scotland.'

'¿Cómo **estás**? **Estoy** muy bien, gracias.' - 'How are you. I'm very well, thanks.'

These describe **where** or **how** someone is.

Commonly used irregular verbs

Below is the full present tense of commonly used irregular verbs. In all cases, teachers will not actually be using the full present tense, but they are included for reference.

dar: to give

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	doy	I give
tú	das	You (singular, informal) give
usted	da	You (singular, formal) give
él/ella	da	He/she/it gives
nosotros/as	damos	We give
vosotros/as	dais	You (plural, informal) give
ustedes	dan	You (plural, formal) give
ellos/ellas	dan	They give

decir: to say

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	digo	I say
tú	dices	You (singular, informal) say
usted	dice	You (singular, formal) say
él/ella	dice	He/she/it says
nosotros/as	decimos	We say

vosotros/as	decís	You (plural, informal) say
ustedes	dicen	You (plural, formal) say
ellos/ellas	dicen	They say

hacer: to do, to make

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	hago	I do, make
tú	haces	You (singular, informal) do, make
usted	hace	You (singular, formal) do, make
él/ella	hace	He/she/it do, make
nosotros/as	hacemos	We do, make
vosotros/as	hacéis	You (plural, informal) do, make
ustedes	hacen	You (plural, formal) do, make
ellos/ellas	hacen	They do, make

Note: 'Hacer' is also used in the third person singular for some weather expressions (see Time, date, numbers and weather).

ir: to go

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	voy	I go
tú	vas	You (singular, informal) go
usted	va	You (singular, formal) go
él/ella	va	He/she/it goes
nosotros/as	vamos	We go
vosotros/as	vais	You (plural, informal) go
ustedes	van	You (plural, formal) go
ellos/ellas	van	They go

saber: to know (a fact/how to do something)

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	sé	I know
tú	sabes	You (singular, informal) know
usted	sabe	You (singular, formal) know
él/ella	sabe	He/she/it knows
nosotros/as	sabemos	We know
vosotros/as	sabéis	You (plural, informal) know
ustedes	saben	You (plural, formal) know
ellos/ellas	saben	They know

tener: to have

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	tengo	I have
tú	tienes	You (singular, informal) have
usted	tiene	You (singular, formal) have
él/ella	tiene	He/she/it has
nosotros/as	tenemos	We have
vosotros/as	tenéis	You (plural, informal) have
ustedes	tienen	You (plural, formal) have
ellos/ellas	tienen	They have

Note: 'tener' + 'que' + infinitive means 'to have to'. **For example:** 'Tengo que estudiar' - 'I have to study.'

venir: to come

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	vengo	I come
tú	vienes	You (singular, informal) come
usted	viene	You (singular, formal) come
él/ella	viene	He/she/it comes
nosotros/as	venimos	We come
vosotros/as	venís	You (plural, informal) come
ustedes	vienen	You (plural, formal) come
ellos/ellas	vienen	They come

hay: there is or there are

This verb is an irregular form of the verb 'haber' and is invariable, ie it is the same whether the subject is singular or plural. This verb is very useful.

For example:

¿Hay un banco por aquí? - Is there a bank near here?

¿Hay plátanos? - Are there any bananas?

No, no hay. - No, there isn't/aren't.

Stem-changing verbs

There is another group of verbs in Spanish which are affected in the present tense. They are called **stem-changing** or **radical-changing verbs** and in the present tense the endings of the verb follow the regular pattern, but the stem changes.

One of these common verbs is 'querer' and you would find the infinitive written as 'querer(ie)'. The '-ie' indicates that the 'e' of the stem will change to 'ie' except when used with 'nosotros' and 'vosotros'.

Querer(ie): to like or to want

Pronoun (singular) Verb form English translation

yo	quiero	I like, want
tú	quieres	You (singular, informal) like, want
usted	quiere	You (singular, formal) like, want
él/ella	quiere	He/she/it wants
nosotros/as	queremos	We want
vosotros/as	queréis	You (plural, informal) like, want
ustedes	quieren	You (plural, formal) like, want
ellos/ellas	quieren	They want

poder(ue): to be able to

Poder(ue) is another common stem-changing verb. In this case, the **o** will change to **ue**, except for with 'nosotros/as' or 'vosotros/as'.

Pronoun Verb form English translation

yo	puedo	I can, am able to
tú	puedes	You (singular, informal) can, are able to
usted	puede	You (singular, formal) can, are able to
él/ella	puede	He/she/it can, is able to
nosotros/as	podemos	We can, are able to
vosotros/as	podéis	You (plural, informal) can, are able to
ustedes	pueden	You (plural, formal) can, are able to
ellos/ellas	pueden	They can, are able to

Here are some other common stem-changing verbs.

preferir(ie): to prefer

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	prefiero	I prefer
tú	prefieres	You (singular, informal) prefer
usted	prefiere	You (singular, formal) prefer
él/ella	prefiere	He/she/it prefers
nosotros/as	preferimos	We prefer
vosotros/as	preferís	You (plural, informal) prefer
ustedes	prefieren	You (plural, formal) prefer
ellos/ellas	prefieren	They prefer

empezar(ie): to begin

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	empiezo	I begin
tú	empiezas	You (singular, informal) begin
usted	empieza	You (singular, formal) begin
él/ella	empieza	He/she/it begins
nosotros/as	empezamos	We begin
vosotros/as	empezáis	You (plural, informal) begin
ustedes	empiezan	You (plural, formal) begin
ellos/ellas	empiezan	They begin

volver(ue): to return

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	vuelvo	I return
tú	vuelves	You (singular, informal) return
usted	vuelve	You (singular, formal) return
él/ella	vuelve	He/she/it returns
nosotros/as	volvemos	We return
vosotros/as	volvéis	You (plural, informal) return
ustedes	vuelven	You (plural, formal) return
ellos/ellas	vuelven	They return

jugar(ue): to play

This is the only stem-changing verb in which the 'u' changes to 'ue'.

Pronoun	Verb form	English translation
yo	juego	I play
tú	juegas	You (singular, informal) play
usted	juega	You (singular, formal) play
él/ella	juega	He/she/it plays
nosotros/as	jugamos	We play
vosotros/as	jugáis	You (plural, informal) play
ustedes	juegan	You (plural, formal) play
ellos/ellas	juegan	They play

Note: Use 'jugar' + 'a' to play a sport, but 'tocar' to play a musical instrument.
Examples: 'jugar al fútbol' (to play football); 'tocar la guitarra' (to play the guitar).

Interrogative

You can ask a question in Spanish by using one of the following methods.

Use common question words

qué what **quién** who
cómo how **dónde** where
por qué why **cuándo** when

These words all have accents when asking a question. Remember to use an inverted question mark at the beginning of the **question** as well as the end.

NB - This does not always mean the first question mark comes at the beginning of the **sentence**.

For example:

'¿Dónde vives?' - 'Where do you live?'

but

'Trabajas mucho, ¿no?' - 'You work hard, don't you?'

(Read more about punctuation in Spanish on p.2)

Use intonation

Or you can use intonation to form a question. This simply means that a normal statement is turned into a question by raising the voice at the end. Note that raising the voice does not mean increasing the volume; it is an upturn in the stress pattern of the sentence which turns the statement into a question.

For example:

'¿Trabajas?' - 'Do you work?'

Use the word 'verdad'

The word 'verdad' (literally 'truth') can be added to a phrase to turn it into a question. It is similar to 'n'est-ce pas?' in French.

For example:

'No eres española, ¿verdad?' - 'You're not Spanish, are you?'

(Note again the use of the upside-down question mark in the middle of the sentence. It shows where the **actual question** - '¿verdad?' - starts.)

Forming the negative

To form a negative simply put 'no' immediately in front of the verb. So the answer to the question above is simply:

'No, no trabajo.' - 'No, I don't work.'

There are other negative words in Spanish which usually go **after** the verb but 'no' must still come **before** as well.

'Negative' word English translation

nada	nothing
nadie	no one
nunca	never
tampoco	neither
ninguno/a	none

Examples:

'Yo no voy nunca al supermercado.' - 'I never go to the supermarket.'

'No quiero nada más, gracias.' - 'I don't want anything else, thanks.'

The future tense

To imply the future, you don't have to use the future tense with younger pupils. You can use the **immediate future** instead.

The immediate future is so called because it describes something that you are just about to do, and it's a simple way of forming the future tense.

In English, the immediate future would be 'I'm going to wash the dishes' rather than 'I will wash the dishes'.

How do you form the immediate future in Spanish?

In Spanish, as in English, the immediate future is formed by using the present tense of the verb 'to go' - 'ir'. This is followed immediately by 'a' then an infinitive.

For example:

'Voy a mirar la tele.' - I'm going to watch television.'

'Vamos a ir a España.' - 'We're going to go to Spain.'

Points to note

The use of the immediate future at the later stages of learning the language opens up the opportunity for greater flexibility in speech and in pupils' conceptual awareness when using Spanish, and is a very important part of the work.

The present tense can be used to express futurity if it is accompanied by an appropriate adverb or adverbial expression.

For example:

If you are travelling by train, it is five pm, and you say 'llegamos a las seis' ('We will arrive at six'), you are expressing futurity though strictly speaking you are using the present tense.

The imperative mood

Because Spanish has four forms of 'you', there are four forms of the imperative:

1. **informal singular** - used with 'tú'
2. **informal plural** - used with vosotros
3. **formal singular** - used with usted
4. **formal plural** - used with ustedes

There is also the first person plural, although it is not strictly a command. In English, it is usually expressed with 'Let's...'. In Spanish, it is formed by either 'Vamos a...'. or the present subjunctive of the first person plural.

For example:

'Vamos a ver.' - 'Let's see.'

'Comamos.' - 'Let's eat'.

Forming the imperative

To form the imperative in Spanish is quite complicated as there are also the four equivalent negative commands. As a teacher you will mainly be using the 'tú' and 'vosotros' commands.

Positive 'tú' commands are formed by using the **third person singular** of the verb. To make the command **negative**, use the **second person singular** of the **present subjunctive** of the verb.

Positive 'vosotros' commands are formed by **changing the final r** of the infinitive to a **d**. To make the command **negative**, use the **second person plural** of the **present subjunctive**.

Reflexive pronouns, or **object pronouns**, are attached to the **end** of the positive command, but immediately **precede** the verb when the command is **negative**.

For example:

- 'Levántate.' - 'Get up.' (singular, informal)
- 'Levantaos.' - 'Get up.' (plural, informal)
- 'No te levantes.' - 'Don't get up.' (singular, informal)
- 'No os levantéis.' - 'Don't get up.' (plural, informal)

Here are some imperative forms - singular and plural, positive and negative.

Singular (tú) positive and negative	Plural (vosotros) positive and negative	English translation
cierra	cerrad	close
no cierres	no cerréis	don't close
colorea	coloread	colour in
no colorees	no coloréis	don't colour in
dibuja	dibujad	draw
no dibujes	no dibujéis	don't draw

dame	dadme	give me
no me des escucha	no me deis escuchad	don't give me listen
no escuches mira	no escuchéis mirad	don't listen look at
no mires abre	no miréis abrid	don't look at open
no abras ponte*	no abráis poneos	don't open put on (clothes)
no te pongas pon*	no os pongáis poned	don't put on put, place
no pongas enseña	no pongáis enseñad	don't put, place show
no enseñes enséñame	no enseñéis enseñadme	don't show show me
no me enseñes siéntate	no me enseñáis sentaos	don't show me sit down
no te sientes levántate	no os sentáis levantaos	don't sit down stand up
no te levantes quítate	no os levantáis quitaos	don't stand up take off (articles, such as outdoor clothes)
no te quites dime*	no os quitáis decidme	don't take off tell me
no me digas escribe	no me digáis escribid	don't tell me write
no escribas	no escribáis	don't write

*This is an irregular form of the **tú** command.

Some other useful classroom commands

In the classroom, you might also say:

'¡Vamonos!' - 'Let's go.'

'¡Silencio, por favor!' - 'Quiet, please!'

Nouns, articles, adjectives, adverbs

Nouns

'Nouns are the types of words which give the names of things, people, places, happenings and ideas... Nouns can be **singular** (referring to one thing) or **plural** (referring to many).' (LILT 2001)

All nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine, even those referring to objects or things.

In Spanish, nouns which end in 'o' or refer to a male human or animal are almost always masculine.

Nouns which end in 'a' or refer to a female human or animal are almost always feminine.

However, there are exceptions, such as:

- 'el dentista' - the dentist ('the female dentist' would be 'la dentista')
- 'el mapa' - the map
- 'el día' - the day
- 'la mano' - the hand
- 'la foto' - the photo

Nouns ending in '-ión', '-dad', '-tad' and '-tud' are almost always feminine. Examples include 'la canción' (the song) and 'la ciudad' (the city). Common exceptions to this are 'el avión' ('the aeroplane') and 'el camión' ('the lorry').

However not all nouns indicate their gender by their ending or meaning, so it is important to learn the gender along with the noun. For example, 'la flor' ('the flower') is feminine; 'el guante' ('the glove') is masculine; 'la clase' ('the class') is feminine.

Plurals

In Spanish if a noun ends in an unstressed vowel, add an 's' to make it plural. If a noun ends in a consonant or a stressed vowel, add '-es'. This '-es' is always pronounced as a separate syllable.

Examples:

- 'cafés' - cafés or coffees
- 'tes' - teas

Articles

' "The" and "a" are ... called the **definite article** (the) and the **indefinite article** (a, an). In modern grammar, both are called **determiners**.' (LILT 2001)

The definite article

The definite article is the word 'the' in English. In Spanish, the definite article is 'el' if the noun is masculine and 'la' if the noun is feminine. In the plural they become 'los' and 'las'.

Uses of the definite article

Sometimes the definite article is used in Spanish when not in English.

For example, 'I like coffee' is 'me gusta el café'.

Also, if you talk about Mr Garcia, he is 'el señor García', but if you talk to him he is 'Señor García'. This is true of all titles when used with proper names.

The indefinite article

The indefinite article in English is 'a', 'an' or 'some'.

In Spanish, the indefinite article is 'un' if the noun is masculine and 'una' if the noun is feminine.

To translate 'some', use 'unos' before a masculine plural noun and 'unas' before a feminine plural noun. However, as in English, the indefinite article can be omitted when 'some' is implied. For example:

'Tengo amigos.' - 'I have (some) friends.'

Examples of definite and indefinite articles

Here are some examples of definite and indefinite articles - masculine and feminine, singular and plural.

Masculine singular	Masculine plural	English translation	Feminine singular	Feminine plural	English translation
el libro	los libros	the book/the books	la mesa	las mesas	the table/the tables
el mes	los meses	the month/the months	la ciudad	las ciudades	the town/the towns
un hijo	(unos) hijos	a son/(some) sons	una hija	(unas) hijas	a daughter/some daughters

Contracted forms of articles

In Spanish, you cannot use 'a' together with the definite article 'el'. Instead, the two words contract to form 'al' (a + el) meaning 'to the'.

For example:

'Voy al banco.' - 'I go to the bank.'

Similarly, you cannot use 'de' together with the definite article 'el'. Instead, the two words contract to form 'del' (de + el) meaning 'of the'.

For example:

'El libro del chico.' - 'The boy's book.'

There are **no apostrophes** in Spanish. If you wrote 'la aldea' ('the village'), you would not change **la** to **l'**. When it is spoken, the two letter 'a's run into each other and it sounds like one word.

If you want to indicate **possession** - for example 'John's book' - you have to say 'el libro de Juan'.

Adjectives

Adjectives qualify nouns, that is give us more detail about them. A noun such as 'man' is nondescript, but if we add words (to) the noun, a transformation occurs. (LILT 2001)

Adjectives are used to **describe**, or in grammatical terms to **qualify**, nouns and other expressions.

In English, adjectives **precede** the noun unless for special effects.

In Spanish, the general rule is that most adjectives when used literally to define a noun **follow the noun**. Adjectives must agree in number and gender with the noun they are qualifying.

A few adjectives **always** precede the noun:

Adjective	English translation
mucho	much/many
tanto	so much/so many
varios (always plural)	several
otro*	(an)other
poco	little/few
demasiado	too much/many
cada (invariable)	each

***Note:** In Spanish 'un(a)' ('one', 'a', 'an') cannot precede 'otro/a'. So, for example, 'another book' is simply 'otro libro' with no 'un' in front. **The** other book', however, is 'el otro libro'.

Dropping the 'o' in adjectives

A few common adjectives drop the final 'o' when used immediately in front of a masculine singular noun. This is called apocopation.

Adjective	English translation	Example dropping the 'o'	English translation
uno*	a/one	Tengo un hijo.	I have a son.
ninguno	none	de ningún interés	of no interest
malo	bad	Está de mal humor	He's in a bad mood.
tercero	third	el tercer piso	the third floor
alguno	some	algún día	some day
bueno	good	un buen libro	a good book
primero	first	el primer hijo	the first child

***Note:** Spanish makes no distinction between 'a' and 'one'. So 'Tengo un hermano' can mean 'I have a brother' or 'I have one brother'.

In answer to the question '¿Cuántos hermanos tienes?' (How many brothers do you have?) the answer could be 'Tengo un hermano' or 'Tengo uno'. In the latter case, 'uno' is used as there is no noun following.

Behaviour of some other adjectives

'Grande' is shortened to 'gran' when used **before** both masculine and feminine singular nouns, usually with the meaning of 'great'. For example: 'un gran hombre' is 'a great man'. Compare 'el río grande' - 'the big river'.

In addition, all of the possessive adjectives such as 'mi', 'tu', 'su' naturally precede the noun. (see below)

Adjective agreement

Adjectives agree with the noun which they qualify.

That is, if a noun is feminine singular, the adjective which qualifies it must be made feminine singular. If a noun is masculine plural, any adjective in agreement must also be masculine plural.

The form of the adjective which appears in a dictionary is the masculine singular form. If the adjective ends in an 'o', change the 'o' to an 'a' to make it feminine. If the adjective ends in an 'e' or a consonant, there is no change. However, adjectives of nationality ending in a consonant do add an 'a'. For example:

- 'escocés' (Scottish, masculine)
- 'escocesa' (Scottish, feminine)

To make adjectives **plural**, add 's' to the singular if it ends in a vowel, or 'es' if it ends in a consonant. For example:

- Un hombre rico - hombres ricos (a rich man/rich men)
- Un libro interesante - libros interesantes (an interesting book/interesting books)
- Un coche azul - coches azules (a blue car/blue cars)
- Una casa blanca - casas blancas (a white house/white houses)
- Una chica inteligente - chicas inteligentes (a clever girl/clever girls)
- Una lección difícil - lecciones difíciles (a difficult lesson/difficult lessons)

Possessive adjectives

Possessive adjectives are the words 'my', 'your', 'his'/'her' etc in English. In Spanish, they too have to agree with the noun which follows them, as they are adjectives.

They are arranged here as first, second and third persons, singular and plural. In this form they always precede the noun.

Masculine singular	Feminine singular	Masculine plural	Feminine singular	English translation
mi	mi	mis	mis	my
tu	tu	tus	tus	your (informal singular)
su	su	sus	sus	his, her, your (formal singular)
nuestro	nuestra	nuestros	nuestras	ours
vuestro	vuestra	vuestros	vuestras	your (informal plural)
su	su	sus	sus	their, your (formal plural)

Note: only 'nuestro' and 'vuestro' have feminine forms.

Examples:

'Mi libro'/'mis libros' - 'my book'/'my books'

'Nuestra casa'/'nuestras casas' - 'our house'/'our houses'

'Su casa', out of context, could have various meanings - for example:

- his house
- her house
- your (formal singular) house
- their house
- your (formal plural) house

It may be necessary to clarify the possessor by saying, for example:

- 'la casa de usted' - 'your [formal singular] house' **or**
- 'la casa de ellos' - 'their house'.

A note about pronouns

The 'usted' and 'ellos' used in the phrases above are pronouns, which are not used frequently in Spanish (see Subject pronouns in the Verbs section).

After a preposition, the 'yo' and 'tu' pronouns become 'mí' and 'tí'.

How subject pronouns change after prepositions

Subject pronoun	After preposition	English translation
yo	mí	I/me
tú	tí	you/you
usted/él/ella	usted/él/ella	you
nosotros/as	nosotros/as	we/us
vosotros/as	vosotros/as	you/you
ustedes/ellos/ellas	ustedes/ellos/ellas	they/them

Examples:

- para mí - for me
- pienso an tí - I think about you
- sin nosotros - without us

Adverbs

Adverbs are used to modify verbs, or to say **how** actions are performed.

In English, adverbs can generally be recognised by the ending of '-ly'. The most common way of forming an adverb in Spanish is to add '-mente' to the feminine singular form of an adjective.

Unlike adjectives, the endings of adverbs **never** change.

For example:

Adjective/adverb	English translation
lento	slow
lentamente	slowly
rápido	quick
rápidamente	quickly
normal	normal
normalmente	normally
general	general
generalmente	generally

However, as in English, there are some exceptions.

Adverbs which do not end in '-mente'

Some common adverbs which do not end in '-mente' are:

Adverb English translation

bien well

mal badly

despacio slowly (more common than 'lentamente')

'Much' and 'too much'

Both 'mucho' ('much', 'many') and 'demasiado' ('too much', 'too many') can be used either as adjectives or as adverbs. When used as adjectives, they must agree with the nouns they describe; when used as adverbs the ending never changes.

For example:

Example of adjective/adverb English translation

Tengo muchos libros. I have many books. (adjective)

La mujer trabaja mucho. The woman works hard. (adverb)

Tengo demasiados libros. I have too many books. (adjective)

La mujer trabaja demasiado. The woman works too much. (adverb)

Time, date, numbers and weather

Time

To say 'What time is it?' you would say '¿Qué hora es?'

To say the time, use:

- 'es la' followed by the number for one o'clock
- 'son las' for followed by the number for any time from 2 o'clock to 12 o'clock.

For example:

- 'es la una' - 'it's one o'clock'
- 'son las dos' - 'it's two o'clock'
- 'son las ocho' - 'it's eight o'clock'

Note - It is always 'la' or 'las' because 'la hora' is feminine.

Expressions of time

For 'quarter past', use the hour plus 'y cuarto' (literally 'and a quarter').

For example: 'Son las cinco y cuarto.' - 'It's quarter past five.'

For 'half past', use the hour plus 'y media' (literally 'and a half').

For example: 'Es la una y media.' - 'It's half past one.'

For 'quarter to', use the hour plus 'menos cuarto' (literally 'minus a quarter').

For example: 'Son las nueve menos cuarto.' - 'It's quarter to nine.'

To indicate **am** and **pm**, use 'de la mañana', 'de la tarde'/'de la noche'.

Here are some common expressions relating to time.

Spanish expression	English translation
¿A qué hora?	At what time?
¿A qué hora vas a la escuela?	When do you go to school?
A las nueve de la mañana.	At 9 am.
¿A qué hora tomas la cena?	When do you have dinner?
A las seis de la tarde.	At 6 pm.

Examples of times in Spanish

Spanish time	English translation
Son las dos y cinco	Five past two
Son las dos y diez	Ten past two
Son las dos y veinte	Twenty past two
Son las dos y veinticinco	Twenty-five past two
Son las dos menos veinticinco	Twenty-five to two
Son las dos menos veinte	Twenty to two
Son las dos menos diez	Ten to two
Son las dos menos cinco	Five to two

Days of the week

The days of the week are all masculine.

lunes	Monday
martes	Tuesday
miércoles	Wednesday
jueves	Thursday
viernes	Friday
sábado	Saturday
domingo	Sunday

Points to note

The days of the week are written without capital letters unless they appear at the beginning of a sentence.

The only days of the week which have a plural are 'sábado' ('los sábados') and 'domingo' ('los domingos'). Otherwise the definite article changes to 'los' and the day stays the same.

The English 'on' is not translated. If you want to say 'on Sunday' in Spanish it is 'el domingo'; 'on Sundays' is 'los domingos'. 'On Monday' is 'el lunes'; 'on Mondays' is 'los lunes'.

Months and seasons

The months of the year are all masculine.

Months of the year

enero	January
febrero	February
marzo	March
abril	April
mayo	May
junio	June
julio	July
agosto	August
septiembre	September
octubre	October
noviembre	November
diciembre	December

Points to note

The months are written without capital letters unless they appear at the beginning of a sentence.

To say 'in' with a month, you use 'en'. So 'in January' is 'en enero'.

Seasons

The four seasons in Spanish are as follows.

Season	English translation
la primavera	spring
el verano	summer
el otoño	autumn
el invierno	winter

Points to note

The seasons are also written without capital letters unless they appear at the beginning of a sentence.

To say 'in' with a season, you use 'en'. So 'in summer' is 'en verano'.

The date

Apart from the first, which is normally 'el primero' (although 'uno' is possible), cardinal numbers instead of ordinals are used with dates. The date is always given in the masculine as 'el día' is masculine.

For example:

- el primero de marzo - the first of March
- el dos de mayo - the second of May
- el quince de agosto - the 15th of August
- el treinta de noviembre - the 30th of November

Expressions of date

To say 'on' with a date, simply use the forms given above. Spanish does not use a word for 'on' in expressions which give the date. Thus, 'el primero de abril' can also mean 'on the first of April' as well as simply 'the first of April'.

Spanish expression English translation

¿Qué día es hoy? What is today's date?

Es el ocho de octubre. It is the 8th of October.

Numbers

Numbers are of two kinds:

1. **cardinal** - the most basic number (one, two, three etc.)
2. **ordinal** - numbers which give the place of each article in numerical order (first, second, third etc.)

Cardinal numbers

The cardinal numbers from zero to 19 are given below.

cero - 0	diez - 10
uno/una - 1	once - 11
dos - 2	doce - 12
tres - 3	trece - 13
cuatro - 4	catorce - 14
cinco - 5	quince - 15
seis - 6	dieciséis - 16
siete - 7	diecisiete - 17
ocho - 8	dieciocho - 18
nueve - 9	diecinueve - 19

Some common cardinal numbers between 20 and one million are given below.

veinte - 20	setenta - 70
vientiuno/ún/una - 21	ochenta - 80
veintidós - 22	noventa - 90
veintitrés - 23	ciento - 100
veinticuatro - 24	ciento uno/a - 101
veinticinco - 25	ciento dos - 102
veintiséis - 26	doscientos/as - 200
veintisiete - 27	trescientos/as - 300
veintiocho - 28	cuatrocientos/as - 400
veintinueve - 29	quincientos/as - 500
treinta - 30	seiscientos/as - 600
treinta y uno - 31	setecientos/as - 700
treinta y dos - 32	ochocientos/as - 800
cuarenta etc - 40	novecientos/as - 900
cuarenta y uno - 41	mil - 1000
cincuenta - 50	dos mil - 2000
sesenta - 60	un millón - 1,000,000

Points to note about cardinal numbers

- 20s are written as one word; 30s, 40s etc as three words - eg 'venticuatro' (24); 'sesenta y dos' (62).
- Be careful with 60 and 70: 'sesenta' and 'setenta' can sound very similar.
- When immediately preceding a noun, 'ciento' (100) is shortened to 'cien', eg 'cien euros'.
- 'Uno' and numbers ending in 'uno' can be masculine or feminine - eg 'un hombre' ('one man'); 'cuarenta y **una** mujeres' ('41 women').
- All the 'hundred' endings have a feminine form, eg 'doscientas casas' ('200 houses') .
- Note from the list above that 500, 700 and 900 have irregular spellings - they do not just add 'cientos/as' to the single number as the others do.
- 'Mil' meaning 'thousand' never has an 's'. For example: 'dos mil'.

Ordinal numbers

The ordinal numbers from 'first' to 'tenth' are given below.

primero/primer/primera - first (see 'Points to note about ordinal numbers', below)

segundo/a - second

tercero/tercer/tercera - third (see 'Points to note about ordinal numbers', below)

cuarto/a - fourth

quinto/a - fifth

sexto/a - sixth

séptimo/a - seventh

octavo/a - eighth

noveno/a - ninth

décimo/a - tenth

Points to note about ordinal numbers

- They agree in gender with the noun which they usually precede, eg 'la primera vez' ('the first time').
- The ordinal number most likely to be needed is 'first', which is 'primero/a'. It is used in dates.
- 'Primero' and 'tercero' drop the 'o' before a masculine noun, eg 'el primer piso' ('the first floor'); 'el tercer día' ('the third day').

Weather

The verb used with general weather statements is 'hacer' ('to make') in the third person singular.

Here are some examples of weather expressions.

¿Qué tiempo hace hoy? What's the weather like today?

Hace buen tiempo	It's fine weather, it's lovely weather
Hace mal tiempo	It's bad weather
Hace calor	It's hot
Hace mucho calor	It's very hot
Hace frío	It's cold
Hace mucho frío	It's very cold
Hace fresco	It's cool
Hace sol	It's sunny
Hace viento	It's windy
Hace mucho viento	It's blowing a gale

Here are some weather statements are used with hay (there is).

Hay niebla	It's foggy
Hay neblina	It's misty
Hay una tormenta	It's a thunderstorm

Some verbs are used in their own right:

hiela	It's freezing
nieva	It's snowing
llueve	It's raining