

Basic Spanish – Introduction to Grammar

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Personal Pronouns

Spanish has six different types of pronouns.

yo	I
tú	you (singular familiar)
usted	you (singular formal)
él, ella	he, she
nosotros, nosotras	we
vosotros, vosotras	you (plural familiar)
ustedes	you (plural formal)
ellos, ellas	they(plural)

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A few things to keep in mind:

- It is normal in Spanish to omit the personal pronoun (i.e. you seldom say **yo estoy bien**, but **estoy bien**, and you ask **¿Cómo se llama?** instead of **¿Cómo se llama usted?**) because the specific conjugation of a verb usually indicates which person is the subject. However, usted, él and ella all use the same verb form so if you choose to drop the pronoun in this case it must be clear in the situational context which pronoun is being referenced.
- In most of Spain the vosotros form can be used to address a group of familiar people (e.g. friends), and ustedes is used with more formality (e.g. recent acquaintances). In all Latin American countries and parts of Spain ustedes is used also for a familiar group of people; in these countries the "vosotros" form is almost never used.
- In Argentina, parts of Uruguay, and some other countries, the *tú* form is replaced with *vos*.
- *Usted* and *ustedes* can be abbreviated as *Ud.* and *Uds.*, respectively.

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Definite articles

As in many languages, Spanish gives each noun a gender: **masculine** or **feminine**, both for singular things and plural ones.

Spanish, like English, has two articles: the definite article ("the") and the indefinite article ("a" or "an"). However, there are 4 forms, depending on the number and gender of the noun. The plural indefinite article is "some" in English.

- If the noun ends in a vowel, to make it plural, **add s** (*gato* - "cat"; *gatos* - "cats").
- If the noun ends in a consonant, to make it plural, **add es** (*papel* - "paper"; *papeles* - "papers").

Happily, the gender of Spanish nouns is usually pretty easy to work out.

Some very simple rules-of-thumb:

- If it ends in *a*, *d*, *z* or *ión*: it's likely to be feminine.
- If it ends in *o*, or a *consonant*: it's likely to be masculine

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Definite articles - El artículo definido

masculine	singular	el	el hombre	the man	el libro	the book
	plural	los	los niños	the boys	los alumnos	the students
feminine	singular	la	la mujer	the woman	la ciudad	the city
	plural	las	las niñas	the girls	las mesas	the desks

Indefinite articles - El artículo indefinido

masculine	singular	un	un hombre	a man	un gato	a cat
	plural	unos	unos niños	some boys	unos perros	some dogs
feminine	singular	una	una mujer	a woman	una taza	a cup
	plural	unas	unas niñas	some girls	unas casas	some houses

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Questions and Exclamations

You will have noticed by now that we use the funny upside-down question mark "¿". In Spanish, questions always start with that, and finish with the regular question mark. It is the same for exclamations; the funny upside-down exclamation mark "¡" precedes exclamations.

This happens because Spanish does not reverse the word order to ask a question. While English says *You are here / Are you here?*, Spanish keeps the same order: *Tú estás aquí / ¿Tú estás aquí?* Whereas the English word order alerts you since the beginning that what you are going to read is a question, Spanish offers no such initial warning. To compensate for this, Spanish adds the initial question mark, so that you'll always be able to tell a declarative statement from a question from the moment you begin reading it.

Questions in Spanish are mainly done by intonation (raising the voice at the end of the question), since questions are often identical to statements. *Te llamas Richard* means "Your name is Richard", and *¿Te llamas Richard?* means "Is your name Richard?".

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Questions

Español

¿Dónde?

¿Quién?

¿Qué?

¿Cuál?

¿Cómo?

¿Cuán?

¿Por qué?

¿Cuándo?

¿Cuánto?

¿Cuántos?

¿De quién?

¿A quién?

¿De dónde?

¿Adónde?

¿Para qué?

Inglés

Where?

Who?

What?

Which?

How? (as in *How does it work?*)

How? (as in *How long is it?*)

Why?

When?

How much?

How many?

Whose?

Whom?

Whence?

Whither?

Wherefore?

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Examples

- ¿Con quién?
With whom?
- ¿Dónde está el banco?
Where is the bank?
- ¿Cuándo es tu cumpleaños?
When's your birthday?
- ¿Qué fecha es hoy?
What is the date today?

Notes

- If you refer to a group of people, you can use the plural *quiénes*.
- *Cuánto* and *cuántos* have feminine forms *cuánta* and *cuántas*.
- The archaic *cúyo* was used in place of *de quién*. You may still find it in books from the early 20th century. Outside of questions, the corresponding pronoun *cuyo* is still used to mean **whose** in declarative statements. (Feminine *cuya*; plural *cuyos*; feminine plural *cuyas*; this pronoun's number and gender agree with that which is possessed, not the possessor.) *Cuán* is gradually becoming archaic and being replaced by *qué tan*.

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Adjectives

As we already learnt, Spanish nouns each have a gender. This doesn't just affect the article, but the adjective; it has to *agree*. Also, adjectives go after the noun, not before it.

If the adjective (in its natural form - the form found in the dictionary), ends in an "O" or an "A", then you remove that vowel and add.

- O for masculine singular nouns
- OS for masculine plural nouns
- A for feminine singular nouns
- AS for feminine plural nouns.

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Examples

- *Un hombre bueno*
A good man
- *Unos hombres buenos*
Some good men
- *Una mujer buena*
A good woman
- *Unas mujeres buenas*
Some good women

The masculine O / feminine A rule is applicable to the vast majority of Spanish nouns. There are a handful of exceptions, though, but you'll get to memorize them

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Compound Sentences (conjunctions)

Below are some little words that will make our sentences longer, and more meaningful. You use them just like you do in English.

Also, everything we've written has been positive ("I do this, I do that"). To make it negative, we just add a word in front of the verb: *no* (meaning "not") or *nunca* (meaning "never"). For example, *No juego al rugby* (I don't play rugby); *Nunca como manzanas* ("I never eat apples"). It's as simple as that.

And	Y
Or	O
Because	Porque
But	Pero
Also	También
So	Así

Note *Porque* ("because") and *Por qué* ("why") are similar and easy to mix up; make sure you don't!

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Examples

- *Me llamo Chris y mi cumpleaños es el veinte de agosto.*
My name is Chris and my birthday is on the 20th of August.
- *Me llamo Raúl, pero él se llama Roberto.*
My name is Raúl, but his name is Robert.
- *No practica judo.*
He doesn't do judo.
- *Juego al fútbol americano y practico natación también.*
I play american football and I go swimming too.
- *No vivo en una ciudad porque las ciudades son ruidosas.*
I don't live in the city because cities are noisy.

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"E" and Consonant Adjectives

In Spanish, clearly not all adjectives end in "o" or "a". The good thing about these is that they stay the same, irrespective of gender.

- Adjectives ending in "e" add an "s" when in the plural.
- Adjectives ending in a consonant add an "es" when in the plural.

Notes

When an adjective (or indeed a noun) ends in z, it changes to a c in plural, then adds the "es"
(*feliz/felices* – "happy")

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| • <i>El hombre amable</i>
The friendly man | • <i>El hombre difícil</i>
The difficult man |
| • <i>La mujer amable</i>
The friendly woman | • <i>La mujer difícil</i>
The difficult woman |
| • <i>Los niños amables</i>
The friendly boys | • <i>Los niños difíciles</i>
The difficult boys |
| • <i>Las niñas amables</i>
The friendly girls | • <i>Las niñas difíciles</i>
The difficult girls |

Examples

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Possessive adjective

Like English, the Spanish possessive adjectives differ depending on the person they are referring to. Unlike English, the possessive article also changes depending on the number of items that one possesses (for example: **mi libro** = **my book**, *mis libros* = **my books**).

It can also change depending on the gender of the item (for example: *nuestro perro* = **our dog, *nuestra casa* = **our house**).** The following table summarizes all Spanish possessive adjectives:

mi	my		su	your (formal)
mis	my		sus	your (formal)
tu	your (informal, singular)		nuestro/nuestra	our
tus	your (informal, singular)		nuestros/nuestras	our
su	his/her(/its)/their		vuestro/vuestra	your (informal, plural)
sus	his/her(/its)/their		vuestros/vuestras	your (informal, plural)