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# Spanish

3rd Edition

**by Cecie Kraynak, MA**

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## Spanish For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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# Contents at a Glance

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Part 1: Getting Started</b> .....	7
CHAPTER 1: Spanish in a Nutshell .....	9
CHAPTER 2: Warming Up with Spanish Grammar Basics .....	21
CHAPTER 3: Getting Started with Basic Expressions .....	39
CHAPTER 4: Getting Your Numbers, Times, and Measurements Straight .....	59
CHAPTER 5: Speaking Spanish at Home .....	77
<b>Part 2: Spanish in Action</b> .....	101
CHAPTER 6: Getting to Know You: Making Small Talk .....	103
CHAPTER 7: Asking for Directions .....	115
CHAPTER 8: Dining Out and Going to the Market .....	127
CHAPTER 9: Shopping Made Easy .....	147
CHAPTER 10: Going Out on the Town .....	165
CHAPTER 11: Taking Care of Business and Telecommunications .....	177
CHAPTER 12: Recreation and the Great Outdoors .....	195
<b>Part 3: Spanish on the Go</b> .....	211
CHAPTER 13: Planning a Trip .....	213
CHAPTER 14: Dealing with Money in a Foreign Land .....	223
CHAPTER 15: Getting Around: Planes, Trains, Taxis, and More .....	233
CHAPTER 16: Finding a Place to Stay .....	253
CHAPTER 17: Handling Emergencies .....	265
<b>Part 4: The Part of Tens</b> .....	283
CHAPTER 18: Ten Ways to Pick Up Spanish Quickly .....	285
CHAPTER 19: Ten Things Never to Say in Spanish .....	289
CHAPTER 20: Ten (or So) Common Spanish Expressions .....	293
CHAPTER 21: Ten Phrases That Make You Sound Fluent in Spanish .....	297
<b>Part 5: Appendixes</b> .....	303
APPENDIX A: Mini-Dictionaries .....	305
APPENDIX B: Verb Tables .....	335
APPENDIX C: Answer Keys .....	351
<b>Index</b> .....	357



# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
About This Book	2
Conventions Used in This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	4
Icons Used in This Book	4
Beyond the Book	5
Where to Go from Here	5
<b>PART 1: GETTING STARTED</b>	7
<b>CHAPTER 1: Spanish in a Nutshell</b>	9
Tackling Basic Grammar	9
Easing Into Common Expressions	11
Expressing Numbers, Times, and Days	11
Speaking Spanish around the House	12
Putting Spanish into Action	13
Making small talk	13
Asking for directions	14
Eating out and buying food	14
Going shopping	15
Heading out on the town	15
Doing business	15
Enjoying the great outdoors and more	16
Taking Spanish on the Go	16
Preparing for a trip	16
Making sense of money	17
Getting around with local transportation	17
Securing a place to stay	18
Taking action during emergencies	18
<b>CHAPTER 2: Warming Up with Spanish Grammar Basics</b>	21
Breaking Down Simple Sentence Structure	22
Forming Questions: The Basics	22
Meeting Subject Pronouns Face to Face	23
A few words about yo	25
Nosotros and nosotras	25
It's you, you know: The tú/usted issue	25
Ellos versus ellas	27
Introducing Regular and Irregular Verbs	27
Regular verbs	28
Irregular verbs	30

Understanding That Whole Gender Thing. . . . .	34
Getting particular with articles . . . . .	34
Adding more description with adjectives. . . . .	37
<b>CHAPTER 3: Getting Started with Basic Expressions . . . . .</b>	<b>39</b>
Reciting Your ABCs . . . . .	40
Understanding Pronunciation and Stress . . . . .	40
Looking for stress in the usual places . . . . .	41
Scouting out accented syllables . . . . .	41
Pronouncing diphthongs . . . . .	42
Retooling Punctuation Rules . . . . .	43
Reflecting on Reflexive Verbs and Pronouns. . . . .	44
Turning the subject into the object with reflexive verbs . . . . .	44
Accompanying reflexive verbs with reflexive pronouns . . . . .	46
Greetings and Introductions: Formal or Informal . . . . .	47
Introducing yourself with the verb llamarse in any situation . . . . .	48
Meeting on formal terms . . . . .	49
Making more-solemn introductions . . . . .	50
Getting chummy: Informal greetings . . . . .	50
Deconstructing Spanish Names . . . . .	50
Asking and Answering “How Are You?” with the Verbs	
Ser and Estar . . . . .	51
Being in a permanent way with the verb ser. . . . .	52
Being right now with the verb estar . . . . .	52
Asking how people are with other phrases. . . . .	54
Saying “Please,” “Thank You,” “Good-bye,” and Other	
Pleasantries . . . . .	55
Speaking about Speaking: The Verb Hablar . . . . .	56
<b>CHAPTER 4: Getting Your Numbers, Times, and</b>	
<b>Measurements Straight . . . . .</b>	<b>59</b>
Counting to 100 and Beyond. . . . .	59
Using cardinal numbers . . . . .	60
Getting sequential with ordinal numbers . . . . .	62
Telling Time . . . . .	64
Asking for (and responding about) the time . . . . .	64
Exploring common expressions of time . . . . .	65
Using the Calendar and Dates. . . . .	66
Discussing the days of the week . . . . .	66
Naming the months and seasons. . . . .	67
Expressing dates in the proper format . . . . .	69
Familiarizing Yourself with the Metric System . . . . .	72
Units of weight and volume. . . . .	72
Linear measurements. . . . .	74



<b>CHAPTER 5: Speaking Spanish at Home</b>	77
Taking a Tour of Your Home	77
The kitchen	78
The dining room	79
The living room	80
The bedroom	80
The bathroom	81
The laundry room	81
The office	82
Discussing Your Daily Plans	85
Going with the verb <i>ir</i>	85
Describing what you like with the verb <i>gustar</i>	86
Heading off to work	87
Leaving for school	88
Eating at Home	90
Cooking with the verb <i>cocinar</i>	91
Setting the table	91
Giving and receiving food and drinks at meals	92
Using three verbs at the table	93
Engaging in Common Household Activities	94
Doing anything with the verb <i>hacer</i>	94
Keeping up with household chores	95
Being Possessive: Yours, Mine, and Ours	96
Possessive adjectives	97
Possessive pronouns	97
 <b>PART 2: SPANISH IN ACTION</b>	 101
<b>CHAPTER 6: Getting to Know You: Making Small Talk</b>	103
Asking Nine Key Questions	103
Chatting about the Weather	104
Describing Family Members	105
Talking about Where You Live with the Verb <i>Vivir</i>	108
Discussing Work with the Verbs <i>Trabajar</i> and <i>Entender</i>	108
Engaging in “Small” Talk with Diminutives	112
 <b>CHAPTER 7: Asking for Directions</b>	 115
Asking “Where Is . . . ?” and “Where Are . . . ?”	115
Describing Position Relative to Yourself	116
Understanding Directions: It’s a Prepositional Thing	117
Navigating with Maps	118
Talking about cardinal directions and other helpful terms	119
Understanding some basic phrases	120

Dealing with Normal Ups and Downs: The Verbs	
Subir and Bajar . . . . .	122
Heading up with the verb subir. . . . .	123
Heading down with the verb bajar . . . . .	123
Going Here, There, and Everywhere. . . . .	124
Cerca and Lejos: How Far Should You Go? . . . . .	125
<b>CHAPTER 8: Dining Out and Going to the Market</b> . . . . .	127
Eating Out. . . . .	128
Getting what you want with the verb querer . . . . .	128
Recognizing and asking for foods on the menu . . . . .	129
Sampling the sauces: Hot, cold, and spicy! . . . . .	135
Ordering beverages. . . . .	136
Paying the bill. . . . .	138
Going to Market. . . . .	139
Shopping with the verb comprar . . . . .	140
Buying fruit. . . . .	141
Buying vegetables . . . . .	142
Shopping for fish . . . . .	143
Shopping at the Supermercado . . . . .	143
<b>CHAPTER 9: Shopping Made Easy</b> . . . . .	147
Buying Essentials at the Pharmacy and Perfumery . . . . .	147
Shopping at the Department Store. . . . .	149
Looking for something with the verb buscar . . . . .	150
Asking for store hours and receiving help . . . . .	151
Shopping for clothes. . . . .	151
Trying on anything with the verb probarse . . . . .	152
Creating a colorful you . . . . .	153
Wearing and Taking with the Verb Llevar . . . . .	155
Making Comparisons: Good, Better, Best . . . . .	156
Knowing When Superlatives Fail: Exaggerations . . . . .	157
Looking for Specialty Stores. . . . .	157
Shopping in Traditional Markets. . . . .	159
Bargaining at a typical market. . . . .	159
Finding handcrafted goods . . . . .	162
<b>CHAPTER 10: Going Out on the Town</b> . . . . .	165
Going Out with the Verb Salir . . . . .	166
Inviting People with the Verb Invitar . . . . .	166
Dancing with the Verb Bailar . . . . .	168
Enjoying Shows and Events . . . . .	169
At the cinema . . . . .	170
At the theater . . . . .	171

	At art galleries and museums . . . . .	172
	At concerts . . . . .	173
	Singing with the Verb Cantar . . . . .	175
<b>CHAPTER 11:</b>	<b>Taking Care of Business and Telecommunications</b> . . . . .	177
	Getting around at the Office . . . . .	177
	Mastering your office space . . . . .	178
	Looking elsewhere in the building . . . . .	179
	Conducting Business Made Simple . . . . .	182
	Checking out phone-y verbs . . . . .	182
	Leaving a message . . . . .	183
	Forming the Preterit Tense . . . . .	184
	The past tense of regular -ar verbs . . . . .	184
	The past tense of regular -er and -ir verbs . . . . .	185
	Getting into the Action at the Office . . . . .	185
	Sending a letter or package . . . . .	185
	Making copies . . . . .	186
	Using a computer . . . . .	187
	Sending and receiving e-mail . . . . .	188
	Scheduling a meeting . . . . .	188
	Delegating Tasks . . . . .	191
	Forming the imperative with regular verbs . . . . .	191
	Dealing with the imperative of irregular verbs . . . . .	192
<b>CHAPTER 12:</b>	<b>Recreation and the Great Outdoors</b> . . . . .	195
	Playing Chess in Spain . . . . .	195
	Reading with the Verb Leer . . . . .	197
	Writing with the Verb Escribir . . . . .	198
	Taking It Outside (For Good or Bad) . . . . .	199
	Strolling Along with the Verb Pasear . . . . .	200
	Checking Out the Animals . . . . .	200
	Playing with the Verb Jugar . . . . .	203
	Playing Ball Games . . . . .	203
	The most popular ball game: El Fútbol . . . . .	204
	Baseball is number two . . . . .	206
	Swimming with the Verb Nadar . . . . .	206
	<b>PART 3: SPANISH ON THE GO</b> . . . . .	211
<b>CHAPTER 13:</b>	<b>Planning a Trip</b> . . . . .	213
	Making Travel Plans . . . . .	213
	Mastering Visas and Passports . . . . .	216
	Traveling into the Future with Ir . . . . .	219

	Packing: Less Is More .....	220
	Taking Along Your Computer.....	220
<b>CHAPTER 14:</b>	<b>Dealing with Money in a Foreign Land.....</b>	<b>223</b>
	Picking Up Common Money Terms .....	224
	Using an ATM.....	225
	Charging Ahead with Your Credit Card .....	227
	Exchanging Your Dollars.....	229
	Changing money with the verb <i>cambiar</i> .....	230
	Currency wise: Naming Latin American currencies .....	231
<b>CHAPTER 15:</b>	<b>Getting Around: Planes, Trains, Taxis, and More .....</b>	<b>233</b>
	Purchasing Tickets.....	233
	Bringing Things with the Verb <i>Traer</i> .....	234
	Making Your Way through the Airport.....	235
	Getting around on the Train .....	236
	Finding the train station .....	236
	Checking your documents on the train .....	236
	Dealing with the Customs Office.....	238
	Handling declarations and duties.....	238
	Registering electrical equipment.....	240
	Getting around on Public Transit .....	242
	Hailing a Taxi .....	243
	Driving in a Foreign Land .....	243
	Getting a valid driver's license .....	243
	Deciphering road signs.....	244
	Renting a car .....	244
	Scheduling Issues: Running Late, Early, or On Time.....	247
	Waiting with the Verb <i>Esperar</i> .....	250
<b>CHAPTER 16:</b>	<b>Finding a Place to Stay .....</b>	<b>253</b>
	Making Lodging Reservations .....	253
	Checking Out the Hotel before Checking In .....	256
	Registering at Your Hotel .....	258
	Sleeping with the Verb <i>Dormir</i> .....	260
	Waking Up with the Verb <i>Despertarse</i> .....	261
	Asking for Towels and Other Essentials.....	262
<b>CHAPTER 17:</b>	<b>Handling Emergencies .....</b>	<b>265</b>
	Shouting for Help .....	266
	Handling Health Problems.....	267
	Helping out with the verb <i>ayudar</i> .....	268
	Expressing the presence of pain with indirect object pronouns .....	269

Talking about bleeding . . . . .	270
Telling where it hurts with words for body parts . . . . .	270
Describing symptoms . . . . .	272
Braving the dentist . . . . .	274
Getting reimbursed: Insurance stuff . . . . .	275
Getting Help with Legal Problems . . . . .	276
Reporting a robbery . . . . .	279
Describing an incident to the police . . . . .	279
Refusing Help When You Don't Really Want It . . . . .	280
<b>PART 4: THE PART OF TENS</b> . . . . .	283
<b>CHAPTER 18: Ten Ways to Pick Up Spanish Quickly</b> . . . . .	285
Go to Spanish-Speaking Places . . . . .	285
Investigate Your Neighborhood . . . . .	286
Listen to Radio and TV . . . . .	286
Watch a Movie . . . . .	286
Check Out Your Library . . . . .	287
Translate Using Apps . . . . .	287
Make Flashcards . . . . .	287
Create a Game . . . . .	288
Label Everything with Sticky Notes . . . . .	288
Say It Again, Sam . . . . .	288
<b>CHAPTER 19: Ten Things Never to Say in Spanish</b> . . . . .	289
Soy americano . . . . .	289
Yo no hablo mexicano . . . . .	290
Así no es como lo hacemos en los Estados Unidos . . . . .	290
Tu madre lleva botas militares . . . . .	290
Papas versus Papás . . . . .	291
Yo iré un poco más temprano . . . . .	291
¡Muy mucho! . . . . .	291
Me siento tan embarazada . . . . .	291
Necesito algo de ropa para atar el paquete . . . . .	292
¿Tiene hombre? and Other Accidental Letter Changes . . . . .	292
<b>CHAPTER 20: Ten (or So) Common Spanish Expressions</b> . . . . .	293
¿Qué tal? . . . . .	293
¿Quiubo? . . . . .	293
¿Qué pasó? . . . . .	294
¿Cómo van las cosas? . . . . .	294
¡Del uno! . . . . .	294
¿Cuánto cuesta? . . . . .	295
¿A cuánto? . . . . .	295

¡Un asalto! . . . . .	295
¡Una ganga! . . . . .	295
¡Buen provecho! . . . . .	296
¡Salud! . . . . .	296
¡Buen viaje! . . . . .	296
<b>CHAPTER 21: Ten Phrases That Make You Sound Fluent in Spanish</b> . . . . .	297
¡Esta es la mía! . . . . .	297
¡Voy a ir de farra! . . . . .	298
¡La cosa va viento en popa! . . . . .	298
Nos divertimos en grande . . . . .	299
¿Y eso con qué se come? . . . . .	299
¡Así a secas! . . . . .	299
Caer fatal. . . . .	300
Ver negras para . . . . .	300
¡Ojo! . . . . .	301
Pasó sin pena ni gloria . . . . .	301
<b>PART 5: APPENDIXES</b> . . . . .	303
<b>APPENDIX A: Mini-Dictionaries</b> . . . . .	305
<b>APPENDIX B: Verb Tables</b> . . . . .	335
<b>APPENDIX C: Answer Keys</b> . . . . .	351
<b>INDEX</b> . . . . .	357

# Introduction

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**A**s society becomes more international in nature, knowing how to say at least a few words and phrases in other languages becomes increasingly useful. Global business environments often necessitate overseas travel or at least the ability to communicate via e-mail and over the phone. You just may have friends and neighbors who speak other languages, or you may want to get in touch with your heritage by learning a little bit of the language that your ancestors spoke.

Whatever your reason for wanting to acquire some Spanish, *Spanish For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, can help you with the skills you need for basic conversational communication in Spanish. I'm not promising fluency here, but if you want to greet someone, purchase a ticket, or order off a menu in Spanish, you need look no further than *Spanish For Dummies*!

Spanish is one of the great European languages, rich in heritage from its more than nine centuries of existence. This is the language that comes from the region of Spain that English-speakers call Castile. As Christopher Columbus and other Spanish explorers came to the New World, Spanish became the language of the majority of the peoples from Florida to Tierra del Fuego. When you go to places like Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, or Venezuela, you speak in or are spoken to in Spanish. If you visit cities like Asuncion, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Lima, Mexico City, Montevideo, Quito, San Juan, or Santiago de Chile, and many, many others, the people predominantly speak Spanish. And when you speak their language or even attempt to communicate with them in their native tongue, you add a richer dimension to your experience. Some folks say that language can be a barrier. And I believe that by removing this barrier, you open a world of possibilities.

So you have several good reasons to embrace this beautiful language. You may want to understand the culture and the people. You may also want your Spanish-speaking friends and neighbors at home to understand you, in their own language. So even if your Spanish isn't perfect, you'll be appreciated and encouraged in your attempts to immerse yourself in the Spanish-speaking world.

# About This Book

*Spanish For Dummies* can help you reach moments of true understanding in a different language. Use the text as a language and cultural guide for those moments when you really need to know how and why things are done. **Note:** This book concentrates on Latin American Spanish, meaning the Spanish spoken in Mexico, Central America, and South America.

This book also isn't a class that you have to drag yourself to twice a week for a specified period of time. You can use the book however you want to, whether your goal is to know some words and phrases to help you get around when you visit Mexico and the countries of Central or South America, travel to Spain, or simply want to be able to say, "Hello, how are you?" to your Spanish-speaking neighbor. Go through this book at your own pace, reading as much or as little at a time as you like. You don't have to trudge through the chapters in order, either; just read the sections that interest you.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book easy for you to navigate, I've set some conventions:

- » Spanish terms are set in **boldface** to make them stand out. They're accompanied by pronunciations, set in normal type with stressed syllables in *italics* (see the following bullet), and English translations, also set in *italics*. (Exception: The "Words to Know" tables underline stressed syllables and don't specially format Spanish words or the translations.)
- » Within the pronunciation brackets, I separate all the words that have more than one syllable with a hyphen, like this: (*kah-sah*).
- » Verb conjugations (in charts that show you the forms of a verb) are given in tables in this order: the *I* form, the *you* (singular, familiar) form, the *he/she/you* (singular, formal) form, the *we* form, and the *they/you* (plural, formal) form. Pronunciations follow in the second column. Here's an example:

Conjugation	Pronunciation
yo llevo	yoh <i>yeh</i> -bvoh
tú llevas	tooh <i>yeh</i> -bvahs
él, ella, usted lleva	ehl, <i>eh</i> -yah, ooohs- <i>tehd yeh</i> -bvah



Conjugation	Pronunciation
nosotros, nosotros llevamos	noh-soh-trohs, noh-soh-trahs yeh-bvah-mohs
ellos, ellas, ustedes llevan	eh-yohs, eh-yahs, ooohs-teh- dehs yeh-bvahn

Language learning is a peculiar beast, so this book includes a few elements that other *For Dummies* books don't. Following are the new elements you encounter:

- » **Talkin' the Talk dialogues:** The best way to pick up a language is to see and hear how it's used in conversation, so I include dialogues throughout the book. The dialogues come under the heading "Talkin' the Talk" and show you the Spanish words, the pronunciation, and the English translation.
- » **Words to Know tables:** Memorizing key words and phrases is also important in language learning, so I collect the important words that appear in a Talkin' the Talk dialogue and write them on a chalkboard with the heading "Words to Know."
- » **Fun & Games practice activities:** If you don't have actual Spanish-speakers to practice your new language skills on (and even if you do), you can use the Fun & Games activities to reinforce what you learn. These word games are fun ways to challenge yourself and gauge your progress. You can find the answers to each exercise in Appendix C.
- » **Mini-dictionaries:** Because words are the building blocks of any language I provide Spanish-to English and English-to Spanish mini dictionaries in Appendix A in the back of the book. These mini-dictionaries provide many common vocabulary words that you may want to use in your conversations or that you have a question about.
- » **Verb tables:** In every language you use different forms of a verb to show who or what is doing the action and when they are doing it. I cover this briefly in Chapter 2 and include additional verb tables with the present, past, and future tenses in Appendix B.

Although the English translations that I provide for the Spanish terms may not be exactly literal, I want you to know the gist of what's being said, not just the words that are being said. For example, you can translate the Spanish phrase **de nada** (deh nah-dah) literally as *of nothing*, but the phrase really means *you're welcome* (as in, *think nothing of it*). This book gives the *you're welcome* translation.

# Foolish Assumptions

To write this book, I had to make some assumptions about who you are and what you want from a book called *Spanish For Dummies*. Here are the assumptions that I've made about you:

- » You know no Spanish — or if you took Spanish back in school, you don't remember a word of it.
- » You're primarily interested in communicating verbally in Spanish, not in reading or writing Spanish, though this book can help with that, too.
- » You're not looking for a book that will make you fluent in Spanish; you just want to know some words, phrases, and sentence constructions so that you can communicate basic information in Spanish.
- » You don't want to have to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or a bunch of boring grammar rules, but you do want some guidance on grammar to deepen your understanding and use of the language.
- » You want to have fun and learn a little bit of Spanish at the same time.

If these statements apply to you, you've found the right book!

## Icons Used in This Book

You may be looking for particular information while reading this book. To make certain types of information easier for you to find, I've placed the following icons in the left-hand margins throughout the book:



REMEMBER



TIP



GRAMMATICALLY  
SPEAKING

Pay close attention to the information marked with this icon; it's something so important that you should commit it to memory.

This icon highlights tips that can make learning Spanish easier.

Languages are full of quirks that may trip you up if you're not prepared for them. This icon points to discussions of these weird grammar rules.



CULTURAL  
WISDOM

If you're looking for information and advice about culture and travel, look for these icons. They draw your attention to interesting tidbits about the countries in which Spanish is spoken.



PLAY THIS

The audio tracks included with this book give you the opportunity to listen to real Spanish speakers so that you can get a better understanding of what Spanish sounds like. This icon marks the Talkin' the Talk dialogues that you can find available as audio tracks online.

I like to think that you'll read every word in this book, but I also know that you're eager to start immersing yourself in Spanish. So feel free to skip the sidebars (those gray-shaded boxes sprinkled throughout the chapters); they're full of interesting information but not essential to your study of Spanish.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the information in this book, you also have access to other free resources. I created a *Spanish For Dummies* Cheat Sheet as a quick reference to help you navigate some everyday conversations. The Cheat Sheet includes some essential words and phrases, basic questions, words and phrases that you might need in an emergency, and more. You can find it, along with other Spanish language information, by going to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and entering "Spanish For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the search bar.

You can find the audio files for some of "Talkin' the Talk" dialogues at [www.dummies.com/go/spanishfd3e](http://www.dummies.com/go/spanishfd3e). Download the tracks for help in pronunciation and inflection. The only way to really know and love a language is to speak it. Throughout the book, I give you lots of words, phrases, and dialogues complete with pronunciations. Although the audio tracks are only a sampling of the dialogues in this book, I've provided a broad selection that should serve most of your basic needs.

## Where to Go from Here

The best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself in it. Listen to the way Spanish sounds, concentrate on the pronunciation, and look at how it's written. By listening and repeating, you enter a new world of ideas and peoples. Acquiring Spanish through immersion really does feel like a sort of magic.

If you've never taken Spanish lessons before, you may want to read the chapters in Part 1 before tackling the later chapters. Part 1 gives you some of the basics you need to know about the language.

Discovering a language is all about jumping in and giving it a try (no matter how bad your pronunciation is at first). So make the leap! Start at the beginning, pick a chapter that interests you, or listen to a few dialogues in the audio tracks. Just be sure to speak as well as listen and have fun along the way!

# 1

## Getting Started

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Get your feet wet with the Spanish basics.

Brush up on everything you need to know about Spanish grammar to start speaking it.

Exchange pleasantries with other Spanish speakers using common expressions.

Discover how to count in Spanish, tell time, talk about the days of the week, make dates, and convert your favorite measurements into metric equivalents.

Start speaking Spanish at home, where you can pick up all sorts of useful words and phrases.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Transitioning from English to Spanish grammar
- » Getting a handle on common expressions
- » Counting to ten, telling time, and making dates
- » Picking up Spanish words and phrases to use at home
- » Speaking Spanish in a public settings

# Chapter **1**

## Spanish in a Nutshell

**E**veryone wants to know Spanish, but learning it takes considerable time and effort. That's okay. Rome wasn't built in a day, and I didn't learn Spanish overnight.

However, you can wrap your brain around basic Spanish grammar and get up to speed on Spanish words and phrases in a matter of minutes. That's what this chapter is all about. Here I provide the short 'n' sweet version of the rest of this book, so you can start speaking and understanding Spanish immediately.

## Tackling Basic Grammar

Studying grammar (language rules) is kind of a buzz killer. You want to start speaking Spanish *now*. But grammar is an essential component and actually provides a shortcut to learning and understanding a second language:

Vocabulary + Grammar + Practice = Fluency

Know the vocabulary and the grammar, and you're ready not only to state your business but also to ask questions and understand the answers.

Chapter 2 is chock full of basic Spanish grammar, but you don't need to know everything all at once. Start with the most basic phrase — a simple sentence, a noun followed by a verb, a person or thing performing an action.



REMEMBER

When constructing bare-bones sentences, follow a few basic rules of Spanish grammar:

- » The subject noun performs the action (the verb).
- » If you use an article, such as **el** or **la** (meaning *the*), it must agree with the noun in *gender* — masculine nouns use **el**, whereas feminine nouns use **la**.
- » The verb must agree with the subject noun in person (I, we, you, he, she, they) and number. In English, for example, *I walk to the store* but *He walks to the store*. The process of converting verbs into the different forms is called *conjugation*.

Conjugating a verb in Spanish is a process of changing the ending of the verb to match the subject pronoun or its equivalent in a sentence. Here's a sample with the Spanish verb **hablar** (*to speak*):

Subject Pronoun	Verb	English
<b>yo</b> ( <i>I</i> )	<b>hablo</b>	<i>I speak</i>
<b>tú</b> ( <i>you</i> [informal, singular])	<b>hablas</b>	<i>you speak</i>
<b>Usted</b> ( <i>you</i> [formal, singular])	<b>habla</b>	<i>you speak</i>
<b>él/ella</b> ( <i>he/she</i> )	<b>habla</b>	<i>he/she speaks</i>
<b>nosotros/nosotras</b> ( <i>we</i> )	<b>hablamos</b>	<i>we speak</i>
<b>Ustedes</b> ( <i>you</i> [formal, plural])	<b>hablan</b>	<i>you speak</i>
<b>ellos/ellas</b> ( <i>they</i> )	<b>hablan</b>	<i>they speak</i>

Yeah, it gets more complicated than that. Spanish has irregular verbs that don't follow the rules (see Appendix B for examples). And like most languages, its verbs conjugate differently to reflect tense — as in past, present, and future tense. For now, however, knowing what this conjugation stuff is all about is a big step.



# Easing Into Common Expressions



REMEMBER

In Chapter 3, I present numerous common Spanish expressions (as well as the scoop on pronunciations, greetings, introductions, and more) that enable you to speak Spanish pronto. Until then, here are a few essential and very common expressions:

**¡Hola!** (*joh-lah!*) (*Hello!*)

**¿Qué pasa?** (*¿keh-pah-sah?*) (*Hello, what's happening?*)

**Adiós.** (*ah-deeohs.*) (*Good-bye.*)

**Por favor.** (*pohr fah-bvohr.*) (*Please.*)

**Gracias.** (*grah-seeahs.*) (*Thank you.*)

**Lo siento.** (*loh seeehn-toh.*) (*I'm sorry.*)

**¿Habla usted inglés?** (*¿ah-bvlah oohs-tehd een-glehs?*) (*Do you speak English?*)

**No hablo mucho español.** (*no ah-bvlooh moooh-choh eh-spah-nyohl.*) (*I don't speak much Spanish.*)

**Claro.** (*clah-roh.*) (*I understand. [Literally: Clear.]*)

The following phrases can get you through a number of awkward pauses as you think of the right word during a conversation:

**Genial. Sigue así.** (*Heh-nee-ahl. See-geh ah-see*) (*Great! Superb! Keep going!*)

**¿De veras?** (*¿deh bveh-rahs?*) (*Really?*) This phrase signals slight disbelief.

**¡No me digas!** (*¡noh meh dee-gahs!*) (*You don't say!*) This phrase also indicates disbelief.

## Expressing Numbers, Times, and Days

Navigating any country requires a knowledge of numbers, dates, times, and measurements. Without such knowledge, you can't possibly show up for dinner at the right time (let alone the right day of the week), and you can't ask for a specific number or amount of whatever it is you want. Chapter 4 brings you up to speed on all these topics in a hurry. Until then, the following can get you to your first date or meeting:

» **Ask *What day?*:** **¿Qué día?** (*¿keh dee-ah?*)

» **Ask *What time?*:** **¿A qué hora?** (*¿ah keh oh-rah?*)

- » **Name the days of the week starting with Monday:** **lunes** (*looh-nehs*), **martes** (*mahr-tehs*), **miércoles** (*meeehr-koh-lehs*), **jueves** (*Hooheh-bvehs*), **viernes** (*bveehr-nehs*), **sábado** (*sah-bvah-doh*), **domingo** (*doh-meen-goh*).
- » **Count to 12 in Spanish:** **uno** (*ooh-noh*), **dos** (*dohs*), **tres** (*trehs*), **cuatro** (*kooah-troh*), **cinco** (*seen-koh*), **seis** (*sehees*), **siete** (*seeeh-teh*), **ocho** (*oh-choh*), **nueve** (*nooheh-bveh*), **diez** (*deeehs*), **once** (*ohn-seh*), **doce** (*doh-seh*).
- » **Tell what hour of the day it is:** To say *It's 1:00*, use **Es la una** (*ehs la ooh-nah*). *It's noon* is **Es el mediodía** (*ehs ehl meh-deeoh-dee-ah*), and *It's midnight* is **Es la medianoche** (*ehs lah meh-deeah-noh-cheh*). For all other times of the day after 1:00, use **Son las** + the number; for example **Son las dos** (*sohn lahs dohs*) (*It's 2:00*).

## Speaking Spanish around the House

Most people start learning Spanish on their own or by taking classes before venturing into Spanish-speaking territory. Either way, your house or apartment is a great place to pick up lots of useful Spanish vocabulary and phrases. Naming most of the rooms in your home is the first step:

- » **la cocina** (*lah koh-see-nah*) (*the kitchen*)
- » **el comedor** (*ehl koh-meh-dohr*) (*the dining room*)
- » **la sala** (*lah sah-lah*) (*the living room*)
- » **el baño** (*ehl bvah-nyoh*) (*the bathroom*)
- » **el dormitorio** (*ehl dohr-mee-toh-reeoh*) (*the bedroom*)

Your home is packed with all sorts of stuff, but only a few are bare essentials:

- » **la nevera** (*lah neh-bveh-rah*) (*the refrigerator*)
- » **el horno microondas** (*ehl ohr-noh mee-kroh-ohn-dahs*) (*the microwave*)
- » **el mando a distancia** (*ehl mahn-doh ah dees-tahn-seeah*) (*the TV remote control*)

Chapter 5 introduces you to Spanish words for most other household items and can even help talk you through numerous household activities.

# Putting Spanish into Action

Eventually, you want to take your Spanish outside the safe confines of your home or classroom and start using it in your day-to-day conversations. The chapters in Part 2 provide you with words, phrases, dialogues, and more for common scenarios, including making small talk, asking for directions, and going shopping. The following sections provide a preview of what to expect.



REMEMBER

Use it or lose it. Actively pursue opportunities to speak Spanish. You may feel a little uncomfortable speaking it at first, but the more you practice and learn from your mistakes, the more fluent you become.

## Making small talk

Much of the chatter you hear on a daily basis is small talk that typically commences with a question:

**¿Cómo te llamas?** (*¿koh-moh teh yah-mahs?*) (*What's your name?*)

**¿Dónde vives?** (*¿dohn-deh bvee-bvehs?*) (*Where do you live?*)

**¿Qué hace usted?** (*¿keh ah-seh ooohs-tehd?*) (*What do you do?*)

**¿Cómo está usted?** (*¿koh-moh ehs-tah ooohs-tehd?*) (*How are you [formal]?*)

**¿Cuántos años tienes?** (*¿kooahahn-tohs ahn-yohs teeehn-ehs?*) (*How old are you [informal]?* [Literally: *How many years do you have?*])

To answer these questions, start with the following:

**Me llamo . . .** (*meh yah-moh . . .*) (*My name is . . .*)

**Vivo en . . .** (*bvee-bvoh ehn . . .*) (*I live in . . .*)

**Yo soy un estudiante.** (*yoh sohy ooohn ehs-tooh-deeahn-teh.*) (*I'm a [male] student.*)

**Estoy muy bien.** (*ehs-tohy moohee beeehn.*) (*I'm very well.*) or **Estoy así así.** (*ehs-tohy ah-see ah-see.*) (*I'm so-so.*)

**Yo tengo veinticinco años.** (*yoh tehn-go bveheen-tee-seen-koh ahn-yohs.*) (*I am 25 years old.*)

This small sample of small talk phrases are great ice breakers, but they can't get you through an entire conversation. Check out Chapter 6 for more Spanish small talk questions, words, and phrases.

## Asking for directions

Asking for directions in Spanish isn't all that difficult. The tough part is understanding the answer to your question. The most effective way to overcome this challenge is to bring up a map of the area on your cellphone and ask people to show you on the map:

**Hola. ¿Por favor, puede Ud. decirme como llegar a . . . ?** (*oh-lah. ¿pohr fah-bvohr, pooheh-deh oohs-tehd deh-seer-meh koh-moh yeh-gahr ah . . . ?*) (*Hello. Can you please tell me how to get to . . . ?*)

**Por favor, enséñeme en este mapa.** (*pohr fah-bvohr, ehn-seh-nyeh-meh ehn ehs-teh mah-pah.*) (*Please show me on this map.*)

**¿Dónde estamos ahora?** (*¿dohn-deh ehs-tah-mohs ah-oh-rah?*) (*Where are we now?*)

**¿A cuánto estamos de . . . ?** (*¿ah koohahn-toh ehs-tah-mohs deh . . . ?*) (*How far is it to . . . ?*)

Asking for and giving directions is ultimately more complex than the previous phrases. You need to know directional words for here and there, above, below, to the left, to the right, inside, outside, north, south, and so on. See Chapter 7 for details.

## Eating out and buying food

Wrestling with a foreign language can really work up an appetite, so kill two birds with one stone — head to the market or a local Spanish or Mexican restaurant and rustle up some grub.



TIP

Whether you're at the market or a restaurant, pointing can help you get through your early experiences in ordering food and beverages. Accompany your pointing gesture with the following:

**Yo quiero éste.** (*yoh keeeh-roh ehs-teh.*) (*I want this one.*)

Eventually, you want to do more than the caveman ordering technique. In Chapter 8, I give you all the Spanish you need to know to make reservations at a **restaurante** (*rreh-s-tah-oh-rah-n-teh*), order your meal and a beverage, and purchase groceries and fresh produce at the local **mercado** (*mehr-kah-doh*) (*market*) or **supermercado** (*sooh-pehr-mehr-kah-doh*) (*supermarket*).

## Going shopping

Regardless of where you happen to be (either in your hometown or in a new locale), you need to buy stuff, and that's not as easy as it sounds when you're shopping in an area where Spanish is the official language. Knowing words for the bare necessities can help:

- » **la camisa** (lah kah-mee-sah) (*the shirt*)
- » **el champú** (ehl chahm-pooh) (*the shampoo*)
- » **la falda** (lah fahl-dah) (*the skirt*)
- » **el jabón** (ehl Hah-bvohn) (*the soap*)
- » **los pantalones** (lohs pahn-tah-loh-nehs) (*the pants*)
- » **el papel higiénico** (ehl pah-pehl ee-Heeeh-nee-koh) (*the toilet paper*)
- » **la pasta de dientes** (lah pahs-tah deh deeehn-tehs) (*the toothpaste*)
- » **los zapatos** (lohs sah-pah-tohs) (*the shoes*)

If you need more stuff than that or help with finding what you're looking for, head to Chapter 9, which features much more vocabulary along with verbs and phrases for getting help, trying on clothes, asking for specific colors and fabrics, and making comparisons.

## Heading out on the town

Half the fun of traveling consists of exploring what activities and entertainment various areas have to offer. You don't want to sit around your room all day counting the geckos, so you need to know how to conjugate and use the verb **salir** (sah-leer) (*to go out, to leave*). And be sure to invite some of your new friends along with the verb **invitar** (een-bvee-tahr) (*to invite*).

Chapter 10 offers several ideas to use these verbs for making dates, going out on the town, having fun, and talking all about the good times you've had — in Spanish, of course!

## Doing business

Speaking Spanish at work offers new opportunities for picking up additional vocabulary, phrases, and grammar. You're likely to be working in **la oficina** (lah oh-fee-see-nah) (*the office*); using **la computadora** (lah kohm-pooh-tah-doh-rah) (*the computer*), **el teléfono** (ehl teh-leh-foh-noh) (*the telephone*), and **el copiador** (ehl koh-peeah-dohr) (*the copier*); talking with your colleagues around

**el enfriador de agua** (ehl ehn-freeah-dohr deh ah-goohah) (*the water cooler*); and using all sorts of **material de oficina** (mah-teh-reeahl deh oh-fee-see-nah) (*office supplies*).

You also need to be able to find your way around the different buildings, rooms, and departments, such as **la sala de descanso** (lah sah-lah deh dehs-kahn-soh) (*the break room*), **el cuarto de almacenamiento** (ehl koohahr-toh deh ahl-mah-seh-nah-meeehn-toh) (*the storage room*), and **la salida** (lah sah-lee-dah) (*the exit*). And you want to know how to talk about various office activities, including making copies and using a computer.

Chapter 11 covers all this info and more, including introducing you to the imperative mood, so that you can delegate tasks with the command form of verbs. And speaking in the preterit tense is how you can talk about things that happened in the past.

## Enjoying the great outdoors and more

All work and no play can be boring in any language, so in Chapter 12, I focus on Spanish words, phrases, and dialogue dealing with indoor and outdoor recreational activities. Here are a few examples to get you started:

¿Te gusta caminar? (¿teh goohs-tah kah-mee-nahr?) (*Do you like to walk (hike)?*)

¿Qué te gusta jugar? (¿keh teh goohs-tah Hoooh-gahr?) (*What do you like to play?*)

¿Juega al ajedrez? (¿Hooheh-gah ahl ah-Heh-drehs?) (*Do you play chess?*)

¿Te gusta leer? (¿teh goohs-tah leh-ehr?) (*Do you like to read?*)

# Taking Spanish on the Go

Immersing yourself in a country where Spanish is the official language is perhaps the most effective way to become comfortable with conversational Spanish. That's why several chapters in this book are devoted to traveling with Spanish. The following sections bring you up to speed on the bare basics of what to expect in Part 3.

## Preparing for a trip

The most enjoyable and hassle-free trips begin with proper preparation. You need to decide where you want to go with the verb **ir** (eer) (*to go*), secure **el pasaporte**