

# Spanish A1

## — What to Study

Level: **A1 (Breakthrough)** · Language: **Spanish** · Audience: **Learners**

A1 is the point where Spanish stops being a foreign noise and becomes a language you can survive in. You are not aiming for fluency or correctness under pressure. You are aiming to handle predictable, concrete situations — introducing yourself, ordering food, asking where something is — with a patient speaker who is willing to slow down.

The Common European Framework describes A1 as being able to understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfying concrete needs; to introduce yourself and others; to ask and answer questions about personal details such as where you live, people you know and things you have; and to interact simply provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Everything below serves that description. If a grammar point does not help you do one of those things, it is not an A1 problem yet.

## Grammar to master

**Nouns and agreement.** Every Spanish noun has a gender, and articles and adjectives must agree with it. This is the single most pervasive habit to build, because it touches every sentence you will ever say. Learn nouns with their article — *el problema*, *la mano* — rather than learning the word and guessing later.

- Definite and indefinite articles: *el / la / los / las*, *un / una / unos / unas*
- Plural formation, including nouns ending in a consonant or -z
- Adjective agreement in gender and number, and adjective position after the noun

**The present indicative.** At A1 the present tense is doing almost all the work, including talking about the near future.

- Regular *-ar*, *-er* and *-ir* verbs
- The high-frequency irregulars you cannot avoid: *ser*, *estar*, *ir*, *tener*, *hacer*, *poder*, *querer*, *saber*
- Common stem-changing patterns: *e → ie* (*querer*), *o → ue* (*poder*), *e → i* (*pedir*)
- Basic reflexives for daily routine: *levantarse*,  *ducharse*, *llamarse*

**Ser, estar and hay.** Three verbs that all become "to be" or "there is" in English, and the first real conceptual split of the language. Learn them as three separate tools with different jobs, not as competing translations.

- *ser* for identity, origin, profession, permanent characteristics, time

- *estar* for location, temporary states, moods
- *hay* for existence — *hay un banco cerca* — always invariable

### Pronouns and possession.

- Subject pronouns, and the fact that Spanish normally drops them
- Possessive adjectives: *mi, tu, su, nuestro*
- Demonstratives: *este, ese, aquel*

### Sentence building.

- Negation by placing *no* before the verb
- Question words: *qué, quién, dónde, cuándo, cómo, cuánto, por qué*
- Yes/no questions by intonation, without an auxiliary verb
- *gustar* and its inverted structure: *me gusta el café, me gustan los libros*
- Frequent prepositions: *a, de, en, con, por, para* in their most basic uses
- *muy* with adjectives versus *mucho* with nouns and verbs

## Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 500 to 800 words you can actually retrieve, not recognise. Depth in these areas beats breadth across topics you will not use.

- Greetings, farewells and courtesy formulas
- Personal information: name, age, origin, nationality, languages, phone, email
- Family and relationships
- Professions and workplaces
- Physical description and basic personality adjectives
- The home: rooms, furniture, everyday objects
- Food and drink, meals, ordering in a café or restaurant
- Numbers 0 to 100, prices, telling the time, days, months, dates
- Colours and clothing
- The city: shops, public buildings, directions, transport
- Daily routine and free-time activities
- Weather and seasons

# What you should be able to do

Treat this as the real exit test for the level. Grammar you cannot deploy in these situations is not yet learned.

- Introduce yourself and give your personal details, and ask someone else for theirs
- Spell your name aloud and understand a spelled name
- Describe your family and where you live
- Say what you do for work or study
- Order food and drink and ask what something costs
- Ask for and follow simple directions
- Talk about your daily routine and what you like and dislike
- Fill in a form with your personal data
- Write a short postcard, message or simple personal introduction
- Understand slow, clearly articulated speech on these familiar topics

## Common difficulties

**Ser versus estar.** Expect this to stay uncomfortable for months. It is not a rule you memorise once; it is a distinction you gradually stop translating.

**Gustar feels backwards.** *Me gusta la música* is literally "the music is pleasing to me". The thing liked is the subject, so it controls the verb. Practise it as a fixed pattern before trying to analyse it.

**Gender agreement in speech.** Most learners can produce correct agreement in writing long before they can do it in real time. Speaking practice is the only fix.

**Dropping subject pronouns.** Saying *yo* in every sentence is grammatical but marks you immediately as a beginner. Let the verb ending carry the person.

**False friends.** *Embarazada* is pregnant, not embarrassed. *Éxito* is success, not exit. *Actualmente* means currently, not actually.

## How to know you are ready for A2

You are ready when you can hold a slow, simple conversation about yourself and your immediate surroundings without rehearsing it first, and when the present tense feels automatic rather than assembled. Persistent hesitation over verb endings means more time at A1, not a harder book.

A1 is commonly estimated at around 80 to 100 hours of guided study, but that figure varies widely with prior language experience and how much speaking practice you get. Treat it as a rough scale, not a target.

## Next step

Move on to the Spanish A2 guide, which opens up the past tenses and lets you finally talk about things that already happened.

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*Written by LinguaXchange. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1 descriptors. For the official Spanish A1 examination syllabus, see UNED's published prueba libre syllabus.*