

Spanish B1

— What to Study

Level: **B1 (Threshold)** · Language: **Spanish** · Audience: **Learners**

B1 is the level at which Spanish becomes independently usable. Below it you are handling situations; at B1 you are handling conversations. You can deal with most things that come up while travelling, follow a discussion about a familiar topic, and — the real marker of the level — give reasons, opinions and explanations rather than just facts.

The Common European Framework describes B1 as being able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school and leisure; to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken; to produce simple connected text on familiar or personal-interest topics; and to describe experiences, events, dreams, hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Two things define B1 in Spanish specifically: the subjunctive, and connected discourse. One is grammatical, the other rhetorical, and they are equally important.

Grammar to master

The present subjunctive. The defining structure of the level. It is not a tense but a mood — it marks how the speaker relates to what is being said. Learn the formation quickly, then spend most of your time on the triggers.

- Formation from the *yo* form of the present indicative, plus the irregulars: *sea, vaya, haya, sepa, dé, esté*
- Influence and volition: *quiero que vengas, te recomiendo que lo hagas*
- Emotion and value judgement: *me alegra que estés aquí, es importante que lo sepas*
- Doubt and denial: *no creo que sea verdad*, and the way negation flips the mood
- Unknown or non-existent antecedents: *busco un piso que tenga balcón*
- Future time after temporal connectors: *cuando llegues, en cuanto termine*
- Purpose clauses: *para que puedas entenderlo*

The rule to internalise is that the subjunctive appears in the subordinate clause, triggered by what is in the main clause. Learners who study it as a list of memorised phrases stall; learners who study the trigger categories generalise.

Completing the verb system.

- *Pluscuamperfecto* for events prior to another past event: *cuando llegué, ya se había ido*
- The conditional, for hypotheses, politeness and future-in-the-past: *me gustaría, dijo que vendría*

- Conditional sentences: real conditions with *si* plus indicative, and unreal present conditions with *si* plus imperfect subjunctive — *si tuviera tiempo, iría*
- The imperfect subjunctive, at least in conditional sentences and in reported requests
- The full imperative system, affirmative and negative, with attached pronouns

Discourse and structure. This is what separates a B1 speaker from an A2 speaker with more vocabulary.

- Reported speech, and the tense shifts it forces
- Relative clauses: *que, quien, el que, cuyo*, and the difference restrictive and non-restrictive commas make
- The passive and impersonal *se*, and why Spanish prefers them to the English passive
- Verbal periphrases: *acabar de, volver a, ponerse a, seguir* plus gerund, *llevar* plus gerund
- Connectors that structure an argument: *sin embargo, aunque, por lo tanto, a pesar de, mientras que, en cambio*
- *Ser* and *estar* with adjectives that change meaning: *es aburrido* versus *está aburrido*

Vocabulary areas

Target roughly 3,000 to 4,000 words, and shift the way you acquire them. At B1 you need collocations and register, not just headwords: knowing *tomar una decisión* rather than the incorrect *hacer una decisión* is what makes speech sound native rather than assembled.

- Work and careers: applications, interviews, conditions, workplace conflict
- Education and academic life
- Media, news and current events
- Environment and sustainability
- Health, wellbeing, lifestyle and habits
- Technology, social media and its effects
- Culture: film, literature, music, festivals across the Spanish-speaking world
- Migration, cities and social issues, at a general level
- Nuanced emotion and personality vocabulary
- Opinion language: agreeing, disagreeing, conceding, qualifying
- Idiomatic expressions in frequent everyday use

What you should be able to do

- Give and justify an opinion on a familiar topic
- Narrate a complex sequence of events with clear ordering of time

- Speculate about the future and discuss hypothetical situations
- Make a complaint, negotiate a solution, or handle an unexpected problem while travelling
- Follow the main thread of a TV programme, podcast or lecture on a familiar topic
- Read a newspaper article and summarise its argument
- Write a structured text of several paragraphs: a letter of complaint, an opinion piece, a detailed personal account
- Report what someone else said
- Sustain a conversation with a native speaker who is not adapting their speech for you

Common difficulties

Avoiding the subjunctive. The most common B1 failure is not using it wrongly but routing around it — saying *creo que es difícil* forever and never *no creo que sea difícil*. Avoidance keeps you sounding A2 indefinitely. Force the structure into production deliberately.

Overusing connectors. Learners who discover *sin embargo* tend to deploy it in every paragraph. Connected text means logical connection, not connector density.

The past-tense system under pressure. *Indefinido* and *imperfecto* are supposedly settled at A2, but they break down again once sentences get longer and the *pluscuamperfecto* enters. Expect to revisit them.

Fossilisation. By B1 you are comprehensible, so errors stop being corrected by the people you talk to and start becoming permanent. This is the level at which structured feedback from a teacher stops being optional and starts being the main thing that moves you forward.

Register. B1 is where the gap between what you can say and how appropriately you can say it becomes visible. The same content needs different wording in a message to a friend and an email to a landlord.

How to know you are ready for B2

You are ready when the subjunctive appears in your speech without being planned, when you can disagree with someone and explain why in real time, and when you can follow a conversation between two native speakers who are not accommodating you. B2 assumes all three.

Next step

B2 is where Spanish moves from familiar topics to abstract ones, and from expressing opinions to defending them under challenge. See the Spanish B2 guide.

Written by LinguaXchange. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors. For the official Spanish B1 examination syllabus, see UNED's published prueba libre syllabus.