

TOP TEN TIPS FOR SPANISH

1. **Vocabulary** The best way to learn vocabulary is to use note cards. Put English on one side and Spanish on the other. Try to study new words daily for short rather than long periods of time. This will improve your retention. When studying vocabulary, try to form phrases with the new words. Relate this vocabulary to your own language (English) by using a cognate dictionary or a thesaurus. When convenient, relate vocabulary to your personal life. One example would be labeling parts of your kitchen and items in it with Spanish names and corresponding verbs.
2. **Gender** In Spanish, all nouns are classified as either masculine or feminine. You can determine gender by looking at the article of the noun or the adjective that corresponds to that noun. (It is a good idea to include articles with the nouns on your note cards.) Masculine nouns with a definite article ("the" in English) use *el* if singular and *los* if plural. Examples are *el gato* (the cat) and *los gatos* (the cats). Masculine nouns with an indefinite article ("a," "an," or "some") use *un* if singular and *unos* if plural. Examples are *un gato* (a cat) and *unos gatos* (some cats). Feminine nouns with a definite article use *la* if singular and *las* if plural. Examples are *la pluma* (the pen) and *las plumas* (the pens). Feminine nouns with an indefinite article use *una pluma* (a pen) and *unas plumas* (some pens). While nouns usually end with an "o" if they are masculine or with an "a" if they are feminine, not all of them do, such as *la mano* (the hand) and *el mapa* (the map).
3. **Adjectives** There are two facts about adjectives that you must always keep in mind. The first fact is that adjectives in Spanish usually come **after** the noun they modify, and the second fact is that adjectives must agree with the nouns they modify in **both gender** (masculine or feminine) **and number** (singular or plural). Examples are *el perro negro* (the black dog) and *las camisas rojas* (the red shirts).
4. **Pronunciation** In Spanish, each vowel and consonant is always pronounced the same way. The Spanish *a* is pronounced like the *o* in *Bob*, *on*, and *otter*. The Spanish *e* is pronounced like the *a* in *day*, *made*, and *cake*. The Spanish *i* is pronounced like the *e* in *be*, *me*, and *he*. The Spanish *o* is pronounced like the *o* in *Joe*, *wrote*, and *boat*. The Spanish *u* is pronounced like the double *o* in *pool*, *spoon*, and *cool*. When you have two vowels together, they form a diphthong (two vowels pronounced as one vowel) as in the word *ciudad* (city). If one of these vowels is accented, then it is stressed as in the words *día* (day) and *María*.

The Spanish alphabet has some additional letters not found in English. These letters are the following: *ch*, *ll*, *ñ*, and *rr*. The *ch* is pronounced the same way as in English, as in the word *cheese*. The *ll* is pronounced in the same way as the *y* in the word *year*. The *ñ* is pronounced the same way as you would pronounce the *ny* in the word *canyon*. The *rr* is a rolled *r* sound.

Another difference in the Spanish alphabet is the pronunciation of the letters *r*, *v*, and *z*. When saying the letter *r* in the English words *are*, *car*, and *run*, notice where your tongue is. Now to correctly pronounce the Spanish *r*, say the English phrase "pot o' tea." Say this phrase quickly over and over, and you will be pronouncing the Spanish phrase "*para ti*" (for you). Note that when pronouncing the Spanish *r*, your tongue touches the roof of your mouth. Other commonly mispronounced Spanish consonants are the *v* and *z*. The Spanish *v*

is pronounced like the English *b*, and the Spanish *z* is pronounced like the English *ss*.

5. **Accentuation** In Spanish, there are two types of accents, the implied or spoken accent and the written accent. Both types must be spoken to pronounce a word correctly. The following rules apply to **all** words that do not have a written accent. If the word ends in *a n, s, or a* vowel, then the spoken accent is on the next to the last syllable. (No matter how many syllables the word has.) Examples are **gato**, **camisas**, and **enchilada**.

If the word ends in a consonant other than *n* or *s*, then the spoken accent is on the last syllable. Examples are **papel** (paper), **profesor** (professor), and **ciudad**.

All other words will have a written accent, which simply means that the word does not follow the above rules. Examples are **México**, **lápiz** (pencil), and **Héctor**.

You should learn the placement of written accents when you study vocabulary. Reinforce the sound of where the accent goes by saying the word out loud and over-accenting the accent when you say it.

Other important accent rules:

All interrogatives (words that ask questions) have written accents. Examples are *qué* (what), *cuándo* (when), and *dónde* (where). Each of the interrogatives will have a different meaning if the accent is not written.

All words ending with *-ción* have an accent over the *o* as in *conversación* (conversation). These words ending with *-ción* lose the accent when pluralized as in *conversaciones*.

Many English words that have been absorbed into the Spanish language retain the English accent pattern. Examples are *béisbol* (baseball), and *básquetbol* (basketball).

6. **Conjugations** When you learn a new verb, it is usually in the infinitive form (unconjugated), such as *hablar* (to speak), *comer* (to eat), and *escribir* (to write). The infinitive form of Spanish verbs will end either in *-ar, -er, and -ir*. The infinitive form of the verb lacks person and time (who is speaking and when). The conjugated form of the verb possesses both person and time.

To illustrate this point in English, take the infinitive form of the verb *to eat*. The first person present tense form of this verb is *I eat*, and its first person past tense form is *I ate*. The corresponding Spanish verb of *to eat* is *comer*. To say "I eat" in Spanish, you must conjugate the verb ending for present tense by changing *comer* to "(Yo) como." To say "I ate" in Spanish, you must conjugate the verb ending for the past tense by changing *comer* to "(Yo) comí."

7. **Irregular verbs** In Spanish, the most commonly used verbs are irregular verbs. To learn these verbs, you should use them in sentences or expressions. This is the most effective way to learn these verbs. Also, try to group irregular verbs by likeness of conjugation patterns. An example is that the verbs *tener* and *estar* have similar conjugation patterns in the preterite

(past) tense as shown in the following:

yo estuve *yo tuve*
tú estuviste *tú tuviste*

Another example would be a group of verbs that follow a similar pattern in the first person conjugation in the present tense, such as *poner*, *venir*, *tener*, *traer*, and *decir* becoming (*yo*) *pongo*, *vengo*, *tengo*, *traigo*, and *digo*. For tenses using accents in their conjugations (preterite or past, imperfect, conditional, and future), reinforce the sound of the accent in your ear by practicing these verbs out loud. Your ear "learns" the correct sound of the conjugated verb and can check your written and spoken work.

8. **Grammar** Spanish grammar and sentence structure are essentially the same as English; however, there are some exceptions. To make it easier, associate new Spanish rules with their English counterparts, and focus most of your energy on the unfamiliar constructions.

If you need further assistance, consult books like *English Grammar for Students of Spanish* by Spinelli. Also, ask your professor or a Spanish tutor in SLAC for resources she or he prefers.

9. **Personal "a"** Many students in beginning Spanish get hung up on the little things. Try not to worry too much about little things. For example, when reading in Spanish, you will not know every word, so try to read in context. (Try to figure out what the sentence is basically saying.) If the direct object (receiver of the action) is a person or identified in a person-like manner (like a pet), then a personal "a" must be used before it. The personal "a" has no English equivalent, which is why it is so easily forgotten by students.

Examples: *Visito a mis padres.* (I visit my parents.)
 Visito a Fluffy. (I visit Fluffy.)
 Visito el museo. (I visit the museum.)

10. **Uses of *ser* and *estar*** *Ser* is used to express identification, origin, and possession.

Identification

José es alumno. (José is a student.)

Note how *ser* is used to indicate that a noun or pronoun is equal to another noun or pronoun.

Origin

Yo soy de Francia. (I am from France.)

Note when *ser* is used to tell where a person or thing is from, it is followed by the preposition *de*.

Possession

El libro es de María. (The book is María's.)

Note that a form of *ser* is used with the preposition *de* to express possession.

The verb *estar* (often followed by the preposition *en*) is used to express location, as in the following example:

Eduardo está en la calle. (Eduardo is in the street.)

***Ser* and *estar* used with adjectives**

Ser is used with adjectives to describe a characteristic that is usually applicable to the person or thing mentioned (usual traits or characteristics).

Examples: *La casa es grande.* (The house is big.)
 Las camisas son blancas. (The shirts are white.)

Estar is used with adjectives to describe traits or characteristics that may change. *Estar* may also be used to describe or express unexpected sensations (to feel, to taste, to look, and so on), such as when you eat soup that burns your tongue—"*¡Está caliente!*" ("It's hot!")

Examples: *la sopa está caliente.* (The soup is hot.)
 El cielo está gris. (The sky is gray.)

Notice that the soup's hotness and the sky's grayness are **temporary** conditions that will probably change given time.

Be aware that meanings can change when using the same adjective with *ser* and *estar*.

For example:

Tu amigo es aburrido. (Your friend is boring.)
Indicating that your friend is always boring.

Tu amigo está aburrido. (Your friend is bored.)
Indicating that your friend is bored now, but he won't be later.

Remember, if you need help, don't wait. Talk to your professor during his or her office hours. If you need tutoring, SLAC offers tutoring on the fourth floor of the library and has a referral list for private tutors.