Quick Guide to English Grammar

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QuickGuide to English Grammar

For more detailed explanations of these grammar points, consult the Index to find the pages where they are explained fully in the body of the textbook.

ACTIVE VOICE (La voz activa) A sentence written in the active voice identifies a subject that performs the action of the verb.

\[
\begin{align*}
Juan & \text{ cantó la canción.} \\
Juan & \text{ sang the song.} \\
\text{subject verb} & \text{ direct object}
\end{align*}
\]

In the sentence above Juan is the performer of the verb cantar. (See also Passive voice.)

ADJECTIVES (Los adjetivos) are words that modify or describe nouns or pronouns and agree in number and generally in gender with the nouns they modify.

Las casas azules son bonitas.
The blue houses are pretty.

Esas mujeres mexicanas son mis amigas nuevas.
Those Mexican women are my new friends.

Plazas es un libro interesante y divertido.
Plazas is an interesting and fun book.

- **Demonstrative adjectives (Los adjetivos demostrativos)** point out persons, places or things relative to the position of the speaker. They always agree in number and gender with the noun they modify. The forms are: este, esta, estos, estas / ese, esa, esos, esas / aquel, aquella, aquellos, aquellas. There are also neuter forms that refer to generic ideas or things, and hence have no gender: esto, eso, aquello.

\[
\begin{align*}
Este libro & \text{ es fácil.} \\
This book & \text{ is easy.} \\
Esos libros & \text{ son difíciles.} \\
Those books & \text{ are hard.} \\
Aquellos libros & \text{ son pesados.} \\
Those books (over there) & \text{ are boring.}
\end{align*}
\]

Demonstratives may also function as pronouns, replacing the noun but still agreeing with it in number and gender. **Demonstrative pronouns** carry an accent mark over the syllable that would be naturally stressed anyway:

Me gustan esas blusas verdes.
I like those green blouses.

¿Cuáles, éstas?
Which ones, these?

No. Me gustan éstas.
No. I like those.

- **Stressed possessive adjectives (Los adjetivos posesivos acentuados)** are used for emphasis and follow the noun that they modify. These adjectives may also function as pronouns and always agree in number and gender. The forms are: mío, tuyo, suyo, nuestro, vuestra, suyo. Unless they are directly preceded by the verb ser, stressed possessives must be preceded by the definite article.

Ese perro pequeño es mío.
That little dog is mine.

Dame el tuyo; el nuestro no funciona.
Give me yours; ours doesn’t work.

- **Unstressed possessive adjectives (Los adjetivos posesivos no acentuados)** demonstrate ownership and always precede the noun that they modify.

La señora Elman es mi profesora.
Mrs. Elman is my professor.

Debemos llevar nuestros libros a clase.
We should take our books to class.

ADVERBS (Los adverbios) are words that modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs and, unlike adjectives, do not have gender or number. Here are examples of different classes of adverbs:
Practicamos diariamente.  
Ellos van a salir pronto.  
Jennifer está afuera.  
No quiero ir tampoco.  
Paco habla demasiado.

We practice daily.  (adverb of manner)  
They will leave soon.  (adverb of time)  
Jennifer is outside.  (adverb of place)  
I don't want to go either.  (adverb of negation)  
Paco talks too much.  (adverb of quantity)

**AGREEMENT (La concordancia)** refers to the correspondence between parts of speech in terms of number, gender, and person. Subjects agree with their verbs; articles and adjectives agree with the nouns they modify, etc.

Todas las lenguas son interesantes.  
Ella es bonita.  
Nosotros somos de España.

All languages are interesting.  (number)  
She is pretty.  (gender)  
We are from Spain.  (person)

**ARTICLES (Los artículos)** precede nouns and indicate whether they are definite or indefinite persons, places or things.

- **Definite articles (Los artículos definidos)** refer to particular members of a group and are the equivalent of the in English. The definite articles are: el, la, los, las.
  
  El hombre guapo es mi padre.  
  Las mujeres de esta clase son inteligentes.

  The handsome man is my father.  
  The women in this class are intelligent.

- **Indefinite articles (Los artículos indefinidos)** refer to any unspecified member(s) of a group and are the equivalent of a(n) and some. The indefinite articles are: un, una, unos, unas.
  
  Un hombre vino a nuestra casa anoche.  
  Unas niñas jugaban en el parque.

  A man came to our house last night.  
  Some girls were playing in the park.

**CLAUSES (Las cláusulas)** are subject and verb combinations; for a sentence to be complete it must have at least one main clause.

- **Main clauses (Independent clauses) (Las cláusulas principales)** communicate a complete idea or thought.
  
  Mi hermana va al hospital.  
  My sister goes to the hospital.

- **Subordinate clauses (Dependent clauses) (las cláusulas subordinadas)** depend upon a main clause for their meaning to be complete.
  
  Mi hermana va al hospital  
  My sister goes to the hospital

  con tal que no llueva.  
  provided that it's not raining.

  subordinate clause

In the sentence above, provided that it's not raining is not a complete idea without the information supplied by the main clause.

**COMMANDS (Los mandatos) (See Imperatives.)**

**COMPARISONS (Las formas comparativas)** are statements that describe one person, place or thing relative to another in terms of quantity, quality, or manner.

- **Comparisons of equality (Las formas comparativas de igualdad)** demonstrate an equal share of a quantity or degree of a particular characteristic. These statements use a form of tan(to)(ta)(ta)s and como.
  
  Ella tiene tanto dinero como Elena.  
  Fernando trabaja tanto como Felipe.  
  Jim baila tan bien como Anne.

  She has as much money as Elena.  
  Fernando works as much as Felipe.  
  Jim dances as well as Anne.

- **Comparisons of inequality (Las formas comparativas de desigualdad)** indicate a difference in quantity, quality or manner between the compared subjects. These statements use más/menos… que or comparative adjectives such as mejor/peor, mayor/menor.
  
  España tiene más playas que México.  
  Tú hablas español mejor que yo.

  Spain has more beaches than Mexico.  
  You speak Spanish better than I.

(See also Superlatives.)

**CONJUGATIONS (Las conjugaciones)** represent the inflected form of the verb as it is used with a particular subject or person.
IMPERFECT (el imperfecto) The imperfect tense is used to make statements about the past when the speaker wants to convey the idea of 1) habitual or repeated action, 2) two actions in progress simultaneously, or 3) an event that was in progress when another action interrupted. The imperfect tense is also used to emphasize the ongoing nature of the middle of the event, as opposed to its beginning or end. Age and clock time are always expressed using the imperfect.

Cuando María era joven, ella cantaba en el coro.
_When María was young, she used to sing in the choir._

Aquel día llovía mucho y el cielo estaba oscuro.
_That day it was raining a lot and the sky was dark._

Juan dormía cuando sonó el teléfono.
_Juan was sleeping when the phone rang._

(See also Preterite.)

IMPERSONAL EXPRESSIONS (Las expresiones impersonales) are statements that contain the impersonal subjects of it or one.

Es necesario estudiar.
It is necessary to study.

Se necesita estudiar.
One needs to study.

(See also Passive.)

INDEFINITE WORDS (Las palabras indefinidas) are articles, adjectives, nouns or pronouns that refer to unspecified members of a group.

Un hombre vino.
A man came. (indefinite article)

Alguien vino.
Someone came. (indefinite noun)

Algunas personas vinieron.
Some people came. (indefinite adjective)

Algunas vinieron.
Some came. (indefinite pronoun)

(See also Articles.)

INDICATIVE (El indicativo) The indicative is a mood, rather than a tense. The indicative is used to express ideas that are considered factual or certain and, therefore, not subject to speculation, doubt, or negation.

Josefina es española.
Josefina is Spanish.

(present indicative)

(See also Mood.)

INDIRECT OBJECTS (Los objetos indirectos) are the indirect recipients of an action in a sentence and answer the questions To whom? or For whom? In Spanish it is common to include an indirect object pronoun along with the indirect object.

Yo le di el libro a Sofía.
I gave the book to Sofía.

Sofía les guardó el libro para sus padres.
Sofía kept the book for her parents.

(See also Direct objects and pronouns.)

INFINITIVES (Los infinitivos) are verb forms that are uninflected or not conjugated according to a specific person. In English, infinitives are preceded by to: to talk, to eat, to live. Infinitives in Spanish end in _-ar_ (hablar), _-er_ (comer), and _-ir_ (vivir).

INTERROGATIVES (Las formas interrogativas) are used to pose questions and carry accent marks to distinguish them from other uses. Basic interrogative words include: quién(es), qué, cómo, cuánto(a)(s), cuándo, por qué, dónde.

¿Qué quieres?
What do you want?

¿Cuándo llegaría ella?
When did she arrive?

¿De dónde eres?
Where are you from?

(See also Exclamatives.)

MOOD (El modo) is like the word mode, meaning manner or way. It indicates the way in which the speaker views an action, or his/her attitude toward the action. Besides the imperative mood, which is simply giving commands, you learn two basic moods in Spanish: the subjunctive and the indicative. Basically, the subjunctive mood commu-
Yo bailo los sábados.  
Tú bailas los sábados.  
Ella baila los sábados.  
Nosotros bailamos los sábados.  
Vosotros bailáis los sábados.  
Ellos bailan los sábados.  

**I dance on Saturdays.** (1st-person singular)  
**You dance on Saturdays.** (2nd-person singular)  
**She dances on Saturdays.** (3rd-person singular)  
**We dance on Saturdays.** (1st-person plural)  
**You dance on Saturdays.** (2nd-person plural)  
**They dance on Saturdays.** (3rd-person plural)

**CONJUNCTIONS (Las conjunciones)** are linking words that join two independent **clauses** together.

Fuimos al centro y mis amigos compraron muchas cosas.

*We went downtown and my friends bought a lot of things.*

Yo quiero ir a la fiesta, pero tengo que estudiar.

*I want to go to the party, but I have to study.*

**CONTRACTIONS (Las contracciones)** in Spanish are limited to preposition/article combinations, such as de + el = del and a + el = al, or preposition/pronoun combinations such as con + mi = conmigo and con + ti = contigo.

**DIRECT OBJECTS (Los objetos directos)** in sentences are the direct recipients of the action of the verb. Direct objects answer the questions **What?** or **Whom?**

- ¿Qué hizo?  
- Ella hizo la tarea.  
- Y luego llamó a su amiga.

*What did she do?*  
*She did her homework.*  
*And then called her friend.*

(See also Pronoun, Indirect object, Personal a.)

**EXCLAMATIVE WORDS (Las palabras exclamativas)** communicate surprise or strong emotion. Like interrogative words, exclamatives also carry accents.

- ¡Qué sorpresa!  
- ¡Cómo canta Miguel!

*What a surprise!*  
*How well Miguel sings!*

(See also Interrogatives.)

**GENDER (El género)** is a grammatical feature of Romance languages that classifies words as either masculine or feminine. The gender of the word is sometimes used to distinguish meaning (la papa = *the potato*, but el Papa = *the Pope*; la policía = *the police force*, but el policía = *the policeman*). It is important to memorize the gender of nouns when you learn the nouns.

**GERUNDS (Los gerundios)** are the Spanish equivalent of the -ing verb form in English. Regular gerunds are created by replacing the **infinitive** endings (-ar, -er/-ir) with -ando or -iendo. Gerunds are often used with the verb **estar** to form the present progressive tense. The present progressive tense places emphasis on the continuing or progressive nature of an action.

- Miguel está cantando en la ducha.

*Miguel is singing in the shower.*

(See also Present participle.)

**IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS (Las frases idiomáticas)** are phrases in Spanish that do not have a literal English equivalent.

- Hace mucho frío.

*It is very cold.* (Literally, *It makes a lot of cold.*)

**IMPERATIVES (Los imperativos)** represent the mood used to express requests or commands. It is more direct than the subjunctive mood. Imperatives are commonly called commands and fall into two categories: affirmative and negative. Spanish speakers must also choose between using formal commands and informal commands based upon whether one is addressed as **usted** (formal) or tú (informal).

- Habla conmigo.  
- No me hablas.  
- Habla con la policía.  
- No hable con la policía.  
- Hablen con la policía.  
- No hablen con la policía

*Talk to me.* (informal, affirmative)  
*Don’t talk to me.* (informal, negative)  
*Talk to the police.* (formal, singular, affirmative)  
*Don’t talk to the police.* (formal, singular, negative)  
*Talk to the police.* (formal, plural, affirmative)  
*Don’t talk to the police.* (formal, plural, negative)

(See also Mood.)
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icates an attitude of uncertainty or negation toward the action, while the indicative indicates that the action is certain or factual. Within each of these moods there are many tenses. Hence you have the present indicative and the present subjunctive, the present perfect indicative and the present perfect subjunctive, etc.

- **Indicative mood (El indicativo)** implies that what is stated or questioned is regarded as true.
  
  Yo quiero ir a la fiesta.  
  Quieres ir conmigo?  
  I want to go to the party.  
  Do you want to go with me?

- **Subjunctive mood (El subjuntivo)** indicates a recommendation, a statement of doubt or negation, or a hypothetical situation.
  
  Yo recomiendo que tú vayas a la fiesta.  
  Dudo que vayas a la fiesta.  
  No creo que vayas a la fiesta.  
  Si fueras a la fiesta, te divertirías.  
  I recommend that you go to the party.  
  I doubt that you'll go to the party.  
  I don't believe that you'll go to the party.  
  If you were to go to the party, you would have a good time.

- **Imperative mood (El imperativo)** is used to make a command or request.
  
  ¡Ven conmigo a la fiesta!  
  Come with me to the party!

(See also Indicative, Imperative, and Subjunctive.)

**NEGATION (La negación)** takes place when a negative word, such as no, is placed before an affirmative sentence. In Spanish, double negatives are common.

Yolando va a cantar esta noche.  
Yolando no va a cantar esta noche.  
Ramón quiere algo.  
Ramón no quiere nada.  
Yolando will sing tonight. (affirmative)  
Yolanda will not sing tonight. (negative)  
Ramón wants something. (affirmative)  
Ramón doesn't want anything. (negative)

**NOUNS (Los sustantivos)** are persons, places, things or ideas. Names of people, countries, and cities are proper nouns and are capitalized.

Alberto  
el pueblo  
Albert (person)  
town (place)  

diccionario  
dictionary (thing)

**ORTHOGRAPHY (La ortografía)** refers to the spelling of a word or anything related to spelling such as accentuation.

**PASSIVE VOICE (La voz pasiva),** as compared to active voice (la voz activa), places emphasis on the action itself rather than the agent of the action (the person or thing that is indirectly responsible for committing the action). The passive se is used when there is no apparent agent of the action.

Luis vende los coches.  
Los coches son vendidos por Luis.  
Se venden los coches.  
Luis sells the cars. (active voice)  
The cars are sold by Luis. (passive voice)  
The cars are sold. (passive voice)

(See also Active voice.)

**PAST PARTICIPLES (El participio pasado)** are verb forms used in compound tenses such as the present perfect. Regular past participles are formed by dropping the -ar or -er/-ir from the infinitive and adding -ado or -ido. Past participles are the equivalent of verbs ending in -ed in English. They may also be used as adjectives, in which case they agree in number and gender with their nouns. Irregular past participles include: escrito, roto, dicho, hecho, puesto, vuelto, muerto, cubierto.

Marta ha subido la montaña.  
Hemos hablado mucho por teléfono.  
La novela publicada en 1995 es su mejor novela.  
Marta has climbed the mountain.  
We have talked a lot on the phone.  
The novel published in 1995 is her best novel.

**PERFECT TENSES (Los tiempos perfectos)** communicate the idea that an action has taken place before now (present perfect) or before a moment in the past (past perfect). The perfect tenses are compound tenses consisting of the verb haber plus the past participle of a second verb.

Yo he comido.  
Antes de la fiesta, yo había comido.  
Yo espero que hayas comido.  
I have eaten. (present perfect indicative)  
Before the party I had eaten. (past perfect indicative)  
I hope that you have eaten. (present perfect subjunctive)  

Yo esperaba que hubieras comido.  
I hoped that you had eaten. (past perfect subjunctive)
PERSON (La persona) refers to changes in the subject pronouns that indicate if one is speaking (first person), if one is spoken to (second person), or if one is spoken about (third person).

- Yo hablo. I speak. (1st-person singular)
- Tú hablas. You speak. (2nd-person singular)
- Uds./él/Ella habla. You/He/She speak. (3rd-person singular)
- Nosotros(as) hablamos. We speak. (1st-person plural)
- Vosotros(as) habláis. You speak. (2nd-person plural)
- Uds./Ellos/Ellas hablan. They speak. (3rd-person plural)

PREPOSITIONS (Las preposiciones) are linking words indicating spatial or temporal relations between two words.

- Ella nadaba en la piscina. She was swimming in the pool.
- Yo llamé antes de las nueve. I called before nine o'clock.
- El libro es para ti. The book is for you.
- Voy a la oficina. I'm going to the office.
- Jorge es de Paraguay. Jorge is from Paraguay.

PRESENT PARTICIPLE (See Gerunds.)

PRETERITE (El pretérito) The preterite tense, as compared to the imperfect tense, is used to talk about past events with specific emphasis on the beginning or the end of the action, or emphasis on the completed nature of the action as a whole.

- Anoche yo empecé a estudiar a las once y terminé a la una. Last night I began to study at eleven o'clock and finished at one o'clock.
- Esta mañana me desperté a las siete, desayuné, me Duché y vine al campus para las ocho. This morning I woke up at seven. I ate breakfast, I showered, and I came to campus by eight.

PERSONAL A (La a personal) The personal a refers to the placement of the preposition a before the name of a person when that person is the direct object of the sentence.

- Voy a llamar a María. I'm going to call María.

PRONOUNS (Los pronombres) are words that substitute for nouns in a sentence.

- Yo quiero éste. I want this one. (demonstrative—points out a specific person, place or thing)
- ¿Quién es tu amigo? Who is your friend? (Interrogative—used to ask questions)
- Yo voy a llamarla. I'm going to call her. (direct object—replaces the direct object of the sentence)
- Ella va a darle el reloj. She is going to give him the watch. (indirect object—replaces the indirect object of the sentence)
- Juan se baña por la mañana. Juan bathes himself in the morning. (reflexive—used with reflexive verbs to show that the agent of the action is also the recipient)
- Es la mujer que conozco. She is the woman that I know. (relative—used to introduce a clause that describes a noun)
- Nosotros somos listos. We are clever. (subject—replaces the noun that performs the action or state of a verb)

SUBJECTS (Los sujetos) are the persons, places or things that perform the action or state of being of a verb. The conjugated verb always agrees with its subject.

- Carlos siempre baila solo. Carlos always dances alone.
- Colorado y California son mis estados preferidos. Colorado and California are my favorite states.
- La cafetera produce el café. The coffee pot makes the coffee.

(See also Active voice.)

SUBJUNCTIVE (El subjuntivo) The subjunctive mood is used to express speculative, doubtful, or hypothetical situations. It also communicates a degree of subjectivity or influence of the main clause over the subordinate clause.
No creo que tengas razón.
Si yo fuera el jefe, pagaría más a mis empleados.
Quiero que estudies más.

(See also Mood, Indicative.)

SUPERLATIVE STATEMENTS (Las frases superlativas) are formed by adjectives or adverbs to make comparisons among three or more members of a group. To form superlatives, add a definite article (el, la, los, las) before the comparative form.

Juan es el más alto de los tres.
Este coche es el más rápido de todos.

(See also Comparisons.)

TENSES (Los tiempos) refer to the manner in which time is expressed through the verb of a sentence.

Yo estudio.
Yo estoy estudiando.
Yo he estudiado.
Yo había estudiado.
Yo estudié.
Yo estudiaba.
Yo estudiaré

I study. (present tense)
I am studying. (present progressive)
I have studied. (present perfect)
I had studied. (past perfect)
I studied. (preterite tense)
I was studying. (imperfect tense)
I will study. (future tense)

VERBS (Los verbos) are the words in a sentence that communicate an action or state of being.

Helen es mi amiga y ella lee muchas novelas.

Helen is my friend and she reads a lot of novels.

Auxiliary verbs (Los verbos auxiliares) or helping verbs are verbs such as estar and haber used to form the present progressive and the present perfect, respectively.

Estamos estudiando mucho para el examen mañana.

We are studying a lot for the exam tomorrow.

Helen ha trabajado mucho en este proyecto.

Helen has worked a lot on this project.

Reflexive verbs (Los verbos reflexivos) use reflexive pronouns to indicate that the person initiating the action is also the recipient of the action.

Yo me afeito por la mañana.

I shave (myself) in the morning.

Stem-changing verbs (Los verbos con cambios de raíz) undergo a change in the main part of the verb when conjugated. To find the stem, drop the -ar, -er, or -ir from the infinitive: dorm-, empez-, ped-. There are three types of stem-changing verbs: o to ue, e to ie and e to i.

dormir: Yo duermo en el parque.
empezar: Ella siempre empieza su trabajo temprano.
pedir: ¿Por qué no pides ayuda?

I sleep in the park. (o to ue)
She always starts her work early. (e to ie)
Why don’t you ask for help? (e to i)