How Spanish verbs work Los verbos

Every verb has a dictionary form. It ends in -ar, -er or -ir. Drop that ending and you have the stem. Then add a new ending that says who is doing it.

-ar verbs the biggest family

hablar speak

habl + o = hablo I speak

trabajar work	estudiar study
mirar look, watch	escuchar listen
llamar call	necesitar need

-er verbs the second family

comer eat

com + o = como I eat

beber drink	leer read
aprender learn	correr run
vender sell	creer believe

-ir verbs the smallest family

vivir live

viv + o = vivo I live

escribir write	abrir open
subir go up	recibir get, receive
decidir decide	compartir share

The ending tells you who

-o	-s	-a, -e	-mos	-is	-n
I yo	**you** tú	**he, she, you (polite)** él, ella, usted	**we** nosotros	**you all, Spain** vosotros	**they, you all** ellos, ustedes
hablo	hablas	habla	hablamos	habláis	hablan

So you can drop the I, the you and the we

Hablo español. I speak Spanish.	¿Vives aquí? Do you live here?	Comemos a las dos. We eat at two.	No trabajan hoy. They aren't working today.

When to say yo: only for weight or contrast. Yo no, ¡él! means not me, him! Saying yo hablo every time sounds stiff, like I, I speak.

Four ways to say you

tú
one person, casual

friends, family, kids, people your age. Used everywhere.

¿Cómo estás?

usted
one person, polite

strangers, older people, shops. Takes the él, ella form.

¿Cómo está usted?

vosotros
you all, casual

Spain only. Latin America says ustedes instead.

¿Cómo estáis?

ustedes
you all

polite in Spain, and for everyone in Latin America. Takes the ellos form.

¿Cómo están?

vos: in Argentina, Uruguay and parts of Central America you'll hear vos for tú, with its own forms: vos hablás, vos tenés. Same meaning. This guide uses tú, which everyone understands.

Meet a verb you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in Spanish subtitles to see what it means. Then come back here and work out the form.

The present tense El presente

2 · the stem stays · the pink part changes

The three regular patterns

	hablar speak	comer eat	vivir live
yo I	habl**o**	com**o**	viv**o**
tú you	habl**as**	com**es**	viv**es**
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	habl**a**	com**e**	viv**e**
nosotros we	habl**amos**	com**emos**	viv**imos**
vosotros you all · Spain only	habl**áis**	com**éis**	viv**ís**
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	habl**an**	com**en**	viv**en**

Same ending, two families: -er and -ir share every ending except we and you all: comemos but vivimos, coméis but vivís. The present also covers I'm eating and I'll eat soon: Como a las dos, I'm eating at two.

The eight verbs you hear most: pink is what breaks the pattern

	ser be (what, who)	estar be (where, how)	tener have	ir go
yo I	**soy**	est**oy**	teng**o**	**voy**
tú you	**eres**	estás	t**ie**nes	**vas**
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	**es**	está	t**ie**ne	**va**
nosotros we	**somos**	estamos	tenemos	**vamos**
vosotros you all · Spain only	**sois**	estáis	tenéis	**vais**
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	**son**	están	t**ie**nen	**van**

	hacer do, make	poder can	querer want, love	decir say, tell
yo I	hag**o**	p**ue**do	qu**ie**ro	dig**o**
tú you	haces	p**ue**des	qu**ie**res	d**i**ces
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	hace	p**ue**de	qu**ie**re	d**i**ce
nosotros we	hacemos	podemos	queremos	decimos
vosotros you all · Spain only	hacéis	podéis	queréis	decís
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	hacen	p**ue**den	qu**ie**ren	d**i**cen

ser or estar: ser is what something is: Soy Ana, es mi hermano. estar is where it is and how it is right now: Estoy en casa, está cansada.

Spot the pattern: tener, hacer and decir add a g in the yo form. poder and querer change their stem in every form except we and you all, and so do tener and decir after yo. Page 3 shows why.

Stem changers Verbos que cambian

The boot: some verbs change the vowel in their stem, but only when the stress falls on it. Write the six forms in two columns and the changed ones make the shape of a boot. nosotros and vosotros stay outside it, with the stem from the dictionary form.

querer want, love — e → ie

yo **quiero**	nosotros queremos
tú **quieres**	vosotros queréis
él **quiere**	ellos **quieren**

Like it: empezar, entender, preferir, sentir, cerrar, perder

pensar think — e → ie

yo **piens**o	nosotros pensamos
tú **piens**as	vosotros pensáis
él **piens**a	ellos **piens**an

poder can — o → ue

yo **pue**do	nosotros podemos
tú **pue**des	vosotros podéis
él **pue**de	ellos **pue**den

Like it: volver, encontrar, contar, costar, recordar, and jugar (u → ue)

dormir sleep — o → ue

yo d**ue**rmo	nosotros dormimos
tú d**ue**rmes	vosotros dormís
él d**ue**rme	ellos d**ue**rmen

pedir ask for, order — e → i

yo p**i**do	nosotros pedimos
tú p**i**des	vosotros pedís
él p**i**de	ellos p**i**den

Like it: repetir, servir, seguir (sigo), vestirse

How to read it

Left column: one person. Right column: more than one. The **shaded** cells are inside the boot.

The endings stay regular. Only the stem vowel moves.

A dictionary shows it in brackets: dormir (ue), pedir (i).

Odd only in the yo form

tener have
tengo I have
and t**ie**nes: a stem changer too

hacer do, make
hago I do, I make
then haces, hace: regular

decir say
digo I say
and d**i**ces: e → i too

salir go out, leave
salgo I go out
then sales, sale: regular

poner put
pongo I put
then pones, pone: regular

conocer know (people, places)
conozco I know
same for most -ecer, -ucir: traduzco

A few more: venir → vengo, traer → traigo, saber → **sé**, ver → **veo**, dar → **doy**. Their other forms are close to regular. One catch: venir also changes its stem, vienes, viene, just like tener.

Past and future Pasado y futuro

The past you hear most: what happened, done and finished

	hablar spoke	comer ate	vivir lived
yo I	hablé	comí	viví
tú you	hablaste	comiste	viviste
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	habló	comió	vivió
nosotros we	hablamos	comimos	vivimos
vosotros you all · Spain only	hablasteis	comisteis	vivisteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	hablaron	comieron	vivieron

Watch the accent: hablo is I speak, habló is he spoke. And hablamos is both we speak and we spoke: the rest of the sentence tells you which.

Five irregular pasts: new stem, no accent marks

	ser, ir was, went	tener had	hacer did, made	decir said	poder could
yo I	fui	tuve	hice	dije	pude
tú you	fuiste	tuviste	hiciste	dijiste	pudiste
él, ella, usted he, she, you (polite)	fue	tuvo	hizo	dijo	pudo
nosotros we	fuimos	tuvimos	hicimos	dijimos	pudimos
vosotros you all · Spain only	fuisteis	tuvisteis	hicisteis	dijisteis	pudisteis
ellos, ellas, ustedes they, you all	fueron	tuvieron	hicieron	dijeron	pudieron

fui does two jobs: it's the past of ser and of ir. Fui a Madrid, I went to Madrid. Fue increíble, it was amazing.

The future: ir a + verb

A form of ir, then a, then the dictionary form. It's how people talk about plans.

Voy a llamar a mi madre.
I'm going to call my mother.

¿Qué vas a hacer?
What are you going to do?

Va a llover.
It's going to rain.

Vamos a ver.
We'll see. / Let's see.

There is also a one-word future, hablaré, I will speak. You'll meet it later.

The other past: was, used to

For background and habits: how things were, what was going on, what you used to do. One form covers I and he, she, usted.

ser	estar	tener	ir
era it was, I was	estaba it was, I was	tenía I had, it had	iba I was going, I used to go

Cuando era niño, iba a la playa.
When I was a kid, I used to go to the beach.

Estaba en casa cuando llamó Ana.
I was at home when Ana called.

Spain and Latin America: for something that happened today, Spain often says he comido, I've eaten, where Latin America says comí. Both are correct, and you'll understand both.

Practice Práctica

5 · ten lines straight from shows · cover the right side

How: cover the right side with a strip of paper. Read the line out loud, say what it means and which form the pink verb is, then slide the strip down to check.

1	¿Qué **haces**?	**What are you doing?** hacer, present, tú
2	**Vámonos**.	**Let's go. / Let's get out of here.** irse, let's: vamos + nos
3	No **puedo**.	**I can't.** poder, present, yo: o → ue
4	Te **quiero**.	**I love you.** querer, present, yo: e → ie
5	¿Dónde **estás**?	**Where are you?** estar, present, tú
6	Lo **siento**.	**I'm sorry.** sentir, present, yo: e → ie, literally I feel it
7	Ya **voy**.	**Coming! / On my way!** ir, present, yo
8	¿Qué **pasó**?	**What happened?** pasar, past, él. Spain also says ¿Qué ha pasado?
9	**Tengo que** irme.	**I have to go.** tener que + verb: have to
10	No **sé**.	**I don't know.** saber, present, yo: odd yo form

Your turn: make the form

1	tener yo	tengo	2	poder tú	puedes
3	vivir nosotros	vivimos	4	querer ellos	quieren
5	hacer yo	hago	6	dormir ella	duerme
7	pedir usted	pide	8	ir yo, past	fui
9	hablar tú, past	hablaste	10	comer ellos, past	comieron

Next: listen for these in a show you like. Once you've heard ¿Qué pasó? and No puedo a few times, the endings start to sound familiar on their own.