

SPANISH IDIOMS

& ADVANCED VOCABULARY

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS CHART

This chart covers Spanish words and phrases that English speakers often find tricky or difficult to remember, including idiomatic expressions, verb expressions, and false cognates. It is meant for students who already know basic Spanish. For intro-level vocabulary and pronunciation, see the *Spanish Vocabulary SparkChart*. For more in-depth grammar, see the *Spanish Grammar* and *Spanish Verbs SparkCharts*.

TIPS FOR SPEAKING AND WRITING

When speaking or writing in Spanish, try to use words and grammatical structures that you're already familiar with. If you're talking and get stuck and don't know a word, explain what you want to say using other words that you do know.

USING A BILINGUAL DICTIONARY

When using a Spanish-English dictionary, keep the following suggestions in mind.

- To start with, use a dependable dictionary.
- Know what part of speech you're looking for. For instance, looking up the word *well* could cause a lot of confusion if you don't know whether you need an adjective, adverb, noun, verb, or interjection.
- There may be several choices, even for the same part of speech. In such cases, it helps to do a reverse lookup and look up each of the choices in the Spanish-to-English section.
- Don't try to translate idiomatic expressions word for word. In most cases this will result in misunderstanding. If you can't find the correct "translation" for an idiomatic expression, avoid using it.
- Note any regional variations mentioned in the dictionary. Sometimes this is crucial, as with the verb *coger*, which is used commonly in Spain and other countries to mean "to get" or "to catch" but has an obscene meaning in Mexico and other parts of Latin America.
- Make sure you know the correct spelling of the English word you're looking up. For example, the results will be very different for *stationary* as opposed to *stationery*, or *principle* as opposed to *principal*.

VERBS LIKE "GUSTAR" / VERBOS COMO «GUSTAR»

The following verbs follow the same pattern as the verb *gustar* (the equivalent of the English "to like," but literally "to be pleasing"). As with *gustar*, the person who would be the *subject* of the verb in English is the *indirect object* in Spanish (expressed with *me, te, le, nos, os, or les*).

Examples:

Nos gustan las películas clásicas. We like classic movies. (Literally, "Classic movies please us.")

A Lázaro, le interesa la música jazz. Lázaro is interested in jazz music. (Literally, "Jazz music interests Lázaro.")

agradar	to like
caer bien	to make a good impression
caer mal	to make a bad impression
convenir	to suit, to be suitable
costar trabajo	to be difficult
dar asco	to disgust, to revolt
disgustar	to upset

doler	to hurt
encantar	to love, to adore
enfadar	to make angry
extrañar	to surprise
faltar	to lack, to be missing
fascinar	to fascinate
hacer falta	to need
importar	to matter
impresionar	to impress
interesar	to interest
molestar	to bother
parecer	to seem, to appear
preocupar	to worry
quedar	to have left
sobrar	to have in excess
sorprender	to surprise

EXPRESSIONS WITH "A" and "DE" / EXPRESIONES CON «A» y «DE»

Many idiomatic expressions in Spanish involve the prepositions *a* or *de*.

a causa de	because of
a fin de que	so that, in order that
a lo lejos	off in the distance, far away
a más tardar	at the latest
a medida que	while, at the same time as
a menos que	unless
a menudo	often
a mí parecer	in my opinion, to me it seems that
a partir de + point in time	from ___ on, starting ___, effective ___
a pesar de	in spite of, despite
a pie	on foot
a propósito	by the way
a solas	on one's own, alone
a tiempo	on time
a través de	through
a veces	sometimes

de acuerdo	in agreement
de aquí en adelante	from now on
de buena gana	willingly
de este modo	in this way, in this manner
de golpe	suddenly
de hoy en adelante	from now on
de mala gana	unwillingly
de moda	in style, fashionable
de ningún modo	by no means, no way
de nuevo	again
de otro modo	otherwise
de pie	on one's feet, standing
de prisa	in a hurry
de repente	suddenly
de rodillas	kneeling, on one's knees
de súbito	suddenly
de todos modos	anyway, anyhow
de vacaciones	on vacation
de veras	really, truly
de vez en cuando	from time to time

EXPRESSIONS WITH "POR" and "PARA" / EXPRESIONES CON «POR» y «PARA»

Many idiomatic expressions in Spanish involve the prepositions *por* and *para*.

día por día	day by day
en un dos por tres	in a flash
estar por + infinitive	to be about to [do something]
palabra por palabra	word for word
por adelantado	in advance
por ahora	for now, at the moment
por allí	around there, that way
por amor de Dios	for the love of God
por aquel entonces	at that time
por aquí	around here, this way
por casualidad	by chance
por ciento	percent
por cierto	certainly
por completo	completely
por consecuencia	consequently
por consiguiente	consequently

por ejemplo	for example
por escrito	in writing
por eso	therefore, that's why
por favor	please
por fin	finally
por fuera	outside
por la mañana	in the morning
por la noche	at night
por la tarde	in the afternoon
por las buenas o por las malas	whether you like it or not
por lo demás	furthermore
por lo general	generally
por lo menos	at least
por lo que a mí me toca	as far as I'm concerned
por lo que dicen	from what they say
por lo tanto	therefore, as a result

por ningún lado	nowhere
por otra parte	on the other hand
por otro lado	on the other hand
por poco	almost
por primera vez	for the first time
por si acaso	just in case
por suerte	fortunately
por supuesto	of course
por todas partes	everywhere
por todos lados	on all sides
por último	finally
por un lado	on one hand
por una parte	on one hand
estar para + infinitive	to be about to [do something]
para entonces	by that time
para otra vez	for another occasion
para que	so that, in order that

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IDIOMATIC VERB EXPRESSIONS / MODISMOS VERBALES

Many common expressions in Spanish use verbs in a manner different from their literal meanings. English has numerous idiomatic expressions of the same kind: "to kill time," "to make do," "to hang out," and so on. The tables below list many common idiomatic expressions in Spanish, grouped by verb. The verb's literal meaning is listed in red at the beginning of each entry.

caer (to fall)	
caerle bien	to make a good impression
caerle mal	to make a bad impression
dejar caer	to drop
hacer caer	to knock over

dar (to give)	
dar a	to face, to be facing
dar a conocer	to make known
dar a luz	to give birth
dar asco	to disgust
dar con	to meet, to run into, to hit on
dar contra	to hit, to knock against
darse cuenta de	to realize
dar de beber	to give a drink to
dar de comer	to feed
dar en	to hit, strike
dar la bienvenida	to welcome
dar la espalda	to turn one's back
dar la hora	to strike the hour
dar las gracias a	to thank [someone]
darse la mano	to shake hands
dar lo mismo	to make no difference
dar pena a	to aggrrieve
dar por	to consider, to regard, to assume
darse por vencido	to give up, to acknowledge defeat
dar un paseo	to take a walk, to take a ride
dar un paso	to take a step
dar una mano	to lend a hand
dar una vuelta	to take a walk, to take a ride
dar voces	to shout
dar vueltas a	to think [something] over

decir (to say, to tell)	
¿Cómo se dice...?	How do you say...?
dicho de otra manera	in other words
¡Diga! or ¡Dígame!	Hello? (on the phone)
el qué dirán	public opinion
es decir	that is to say, I mean
mejor dicho	rather, I mean
no hay más que decir	there's nothing more to say
¡No me digas!	You don't say!
querer decir	to mean

echar (to throw, to put in, to add, to emit)	
echar a + infinitive	to start/begin to [do something]
echar a perder	to ruin, to spoil
echar abajo	to demolish, to overthrow
echar de menos	to miss
echar la culpa (a)	to blame

estar (to be)	
estar + gerund	to be [doing something]
estar a	to be priced at, to cost
estar al corriente de	to be up to date on
estar como el pez en el agua	to be right at home
estar conforme con	to be in agreement with
estar de + profession	to be working as a [profession]
estar de acuerdo	to agree
estar de buen humor	to be in a good mood
estar de mal humor	to be in a bad mood

estar de vacaciones	to be on vacation
estar de viaje	to be traveling
estar de vuelta	to be back, to have returned
estar en buenas condiciones	to be in good shape
estar en malas condiciones	to be in bad shape
estar en las nubes	to daydream
estar fuera de sí	to be beside oneself
estar hecho polvo	to be worn out
estar hecho una sopa	to be soaked
estar listo	to be ready
estar por + infinitive	to be about to, to be on the verge of

haber (to have [helping verb])	
haber de + infinitive	to be supposed to, to have to
hay que + infinitive	it is necessary to, one must

hacer (to do, to make)	
desde hace + amount of time	since [amount of time]
hace + amount of time + que	[amount of time] ago
hacerse	to become
hacer buen tiempo	to be good weather (out)
hacer caer	to knock over
hacer calor	to be hot (out)
hacer caso de	to pay attention to
hacer cola	to stand in line
hacer daño a	to harm [someone/something]
hacer de nuevo	to do over
hacer el papel de	to play the role of
hacer falta	to be in need of
hacer frío	to be cold (out)
hacer juego	to match
hacer la(s) maleta(s)	to pack one's suitcase(s)
hacer las paces (con)	to make peace (with)
hacer mal tiempo	to be bad weather (out)
hacer sol	to be sunny (out)
hacer un viaje	to take a trip
hacer una pregunta	to ask a question
hacer viento	to be windy (out)

ir (to go)	
ir a pie	to walk, to go on foot
ir de compras	to go shopping
ir de juerga	to go out partying
ir de mal en peor	to go from bad to worse
irse	to go away

llevar (to take, to carry)	
llevar + amount of time	to take (amount of time)
llevarse	to carry off, to take away
llevar a	to lead to
llevarse bien con	to get along well with
llevarse mal con	to get along badly with
llevar una vida buena	to live a good life

oír (to hear, to listen to)	
oír decir que	to hear (it said) that
oír hablar de	to hear about, to hear of
¡Oye! or ¡Oiga!	Hey!, Listen!

poner (to put, to place, to add)	
ponerse + adjective	to become [adjective]
ponerse	to put on [article of clothing]
ponerse a + infinitive	to begin to do [something]
poner al corriente	to inform
poner al día	to bring [someone] up to date
ponerse de pie	to stand up

poner en apuros	to put in a jam
poner en duda	to call into question
poner en marcha	to start
poner en movimiento	to set in motion
poner la mesa	to set the table
poner las cosas en claro	to clear things up
poner manos a la obra	to get to work

quedar (to stay, to remain, to be left)	
quedar + adjective	to be [adjective]
quedarle bien	to fit well
quedarse ciego	to go blind
quedarse cojo	to go lame
quedar con	to make a date with [someone]
quedarse con	to keep
quedar de pie	to remain standing
quedar en	to agree on, to arrange to
quedarle mal	to fit badly
quedar sin hacer	to remain undone

salir (to leave, to go out)	
salir bien	to succeed
salir con	to go out with, to date
salir con la suya	to fail one's way
salir mal	to fail

tener (to have, to possess, to hold, to contain)	
tener años	to be years old
tener calor	to be hot
tener celos (de)	to be jealous (of)
tener cuidado	to be careful
tener dolor de + [body part]	to have a [head]ache, [back]ache, etc.
tener en cuenta	to have in mind
tener éxito	to be successful
tener frío	to be cold
tener ganas de	to feel like, to be in the mood for
tener gracia	to be funny
tener hambre	to be hungry
tener los nervios de punta	to be on edge

tener lugar	to take place
tener mala cara	to look bad
tener miedo (de)	to be afraid (of)
tener por	to consider to be, to take [someone] for
tener presente	to bear in mind
tener prisa	to be in a hurry
tener que + infinitive	to have to [do something]
tener que ver con	to have to do with
tener razón	to be right, to be correct
tener sueño	to be sleepy
tener suerte	to be lucky
tener vergüenza (de)	to be ashamed (of)

tomar (to take, to drink, to eat)	
tomar a pecho	to take to heart
tomar al pie de la letra	to take literally
tomarle el pelo	to pull someone's leg
tomar en serio	to take seriously

venir (to come)	
el mes que viene	next month
la semana que viene	next week
¡Venga!	Come on!, Let's go!, Okay!
venga lo que venga	come what may
venir + present participle	to have been [doing something]
venir a	to come to



COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS / PALABRAS QUE SE CONFUNDEN FRECUENTEMENTE

to ask

cuestionar	to question (philosophically)
hacer una pregunta	to ask a question
pedir	to ask for, to request
preguntar	to ask a question
preguntar por	to ask about (person/thing)

to become

convertirse en + noun	indicates that one object changes into another:
transformarse en + noun	<i>El agua se convirtió en hielo.</i> (The water turned into ice.)
hacerse + noun or adjective	indicates a gradual change brought about by someone's effort; also expresses what has happened or will happen to someone: <i>Me pregunto qué se hizo de Juan.</i> (I wonder what became of Juan.)
llegar a ser + noun or adjective	indicates a gradual change over time: <i>Ana llegará a ser rica si sigue trabajando tanto.</i> (Ana will become rich if she keeps working so much.)
meterse a + noun	indicates a change in profession or activity, usually in a derogatory sense: <i>Mi tía fue a Hollywood para meterse a actriz aunque no tiene talento.</i> (My aunt went to Hollywood to become an actress even though she has no talent.)
ponerse + adjective	indicates an involuntary change of state: <i>Al oír la noticia, Marta se puso emocionada.</i> (Upon hearing the news, Marta became excited.)
quedarse + adjective	indicates that a person or object has been left in a certain state, often by some sort of loss: <i>Aunque se quedó sordo, Beethoven siguió componiendo música hasta su muerte.</i> (Although he became deaf, Beethoven continued to compose music until his death.)
volverse + adjective	indicates a sudden, often irreversible change: <i>José se volvió loco y dejó su trabajo.</i> (José went crazy and quit his job.)

Many Spanish verbs can be used with the pronoun *se* to indicate a process of change. This is often expressed in English as "to become ___," "to get ___," or with the suffix *-en*:

cansarse	to get tired
casarse	to get married
emocionarse	to get excited
enfadarse	to get angry
enfermarse	to get sick
enfriarse	to get cold
enojarse	to get angry
enrojarse	to turn red, to blush
mojarse	to get wet
secarse	to become dry, to dry out

For several other common Spanish verbs, the meaning "to become ___" is inherent:

adelgazar	to become thin, to lose weight
engordar	to get fat, to gain weight
ensordecer	to go deaf
envejecer	to grow old, to age

to care

cuidar	to take care of someone or something
importar	to matter: <i>No me importa.</i> (I don't care.)

close

cerca (adverb)	refers to physical proximity
cercano (adjective)	refers to physical proximity or degree of separation of blood relatives
íntimo (adjective)	refers to relationships other than family; friendship, emotional ties, etc.
unido (adjective)	refers to closeness of family members, but with no reference to blood ties

(to) date

cita (noun)	an appointment
fecha (noun)	the calendar date
salir con (verb)	to date someone socially

fact

dato	a specific piece of information
hecho	a known reality

funny

cómica	comical
curioso, extraño	odd, strange
divertido	entertaining

to look

buscar	to look for
mirar	to look at [something]
parecer	to appear, to seem
parecerse a	to look like [someone]

to meet

conocer	to meet [someone] for the first time
dar con, encontrarse con	to meet [someone] by chance
encontrar	to meet [someone] either intentionally or by chance
reunirse	to meet [someone] in an official capacity
verse con	to meet [someone] by appointment

memory

recuerdo	a specific recollection
memoria	the capacity to remember

to miss

echar de menos, extrañar	to miss (someone/something)
evitar	to avoid
faltar a	to fail to attend an event or appointment
perder	to miss (a chance/bus/plane/etc.)

to play

jugar (a)	to play a game or sport
tocar	to play a musical instrument

quality

calidad	a measure of value
cualidad	a characteristic or trait

to raise

augmentar	to increase (amount of)
criar	to care for (person/animal)
cultivar	to raise, to cultivate (crops)
educar	to rear, to bring up
levantar	to raise (physically), to lift
subir	to take something up, to make higher

to save

ahorrar	to save (money)
guardar	to set something aside, to put something away
salvar	to rescue from danger

to stop

dejar de + infinitive	to stop doing something
detener	to detain [someone]
detenerse	to pause, to come to a stop
impedir	to stop [someone] from doing something
parar(se)	to stop (to come to a stop)

to support

apoyar	to back, to support emotionally
mantener	to support financially
soportar	to bear, to tolerate
sostener	to sustain, to hold up physically

to take

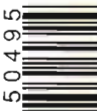
dar un paseo/paso	to take a walk/step
hacer un viaje	to take a trip
llevar	to carry from one place to another
quitar	to take something away
quitarse	to take off [article of clothing]
tardar en + infinitive	to take time to do something
tener lugar	to take place
tomar	to take (most general meaning, for most other cases)

time

hora	a specific time (of day/night)
rato	a brief amount of time, a while
tiempo	time in an abstract sense, a duration or period of time
vez	an instance or occurrence

to try

intentar + infinitive	to try to do [something]
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FALSE COGNATES / COGNADOS FALSOS

The following words are often mistaken because they appear to be cognates but are not. For example, *actual* in Spanish means "current"; the real Spanish word for the English "actual" is *efectivo* or *verdadero*. All Spanish words in the table are in bold.

SPANISH-ENGLISH		ENGLISH-SPANISH	
actual	current, present	actual	efectivo, verdadero
aplicar	to apply, to attach	to apply (for a job)	solicitar
apología	eulogy	apology	disculpa, excusa
asistir	to attend	to assist	ayudar
atender	to take care of	to attend	asistir
bachiller	secondary-school graduate	bachelor	soltero
billón	trillion	billion	mil millones
carbón	coal	carbon	carbón
campo	country, field	camp	campamento
cargo	duty, responsibility	cargo	carga
carpeta	folder, file	carpet	alfombra
chocar	to crash, to shock	to choke	asfixiarse
collar	necklace	collar	cuello
compleción	constitution, temperament	complexion	tez
compromiso	obligation	compromise	acuerdo mutuo, arreglo
constipación	cold, illness	constipation	estreñimiento
contestar	to answer, to reply	to contest	refutar
convenir	to agree, to fit, to suit	to convene	convocar
decepción	disappointment	deception	engaño
delito	crime	delight	deleite
desgracia	misfortune	disgrace	vergüenza
desmayo	faint	dismay	consternación
disgustar	to upset, to displease	to disgust	dar asco, repugnar
educado	polite, well-mannered	educated	culto
embarazada	pregnant	embarrassed	avergonzado
enviar	to send	to envy	envidiar
éxito	success	exit	salida
fábrica	factory	fabric	tela, tejido
fútbol	soccer	football	fútbol americano
fútil	trivial	futile	vano, inútil
gracioso	funny	gracious	cortés

SPANISH-ENGLISH		ENGLISH-SPANISH	
honesto	decent, honorable	honest	honrado, recto
idioma	language	idiom	modismo
ignorar	to be unaware of	to ignore	no hacer caso de
intoxicar	to poison	to intoxicate	emborrachar
introducir	to introduce (a topic)	to introduce (a person)	presentar
largo	long	large	grande
lectura	reading	lecture	conferencia
librería	bookstore	library	biblioteca
mayor	greater, older	mayor	alcalde
medura	moderation	measure	medida
molestar	to annoy, to bother	to molest	abusar sexualmente
nombre	noun, name	number	número
parientes	relatives	parents	padres
pinchar	to puncture	to pinch	pellizcar
preservativo	condom	preservative	conservante
pretender	to try to, to aspire to	to pretend	 fingir
quitar	to take away, to remove	to quit	dejar
real	royal	real	verdadero
realizar	to carry out	to realize	 darse cuenta de
red	net	red	rojo
recordar	to remind, to remember	to record	grabar, registrar
ropa	clothes	rope	cuerda
sano	healthy	sane	cuerto, sensato
sensible	sensitive	sensible	sensato, prudente
sentencia	court verdict	sentence	frase
sopa	soup	soap	jabón
soportar	to hold up, to tolerate	to support	mantener, apoyar, sostener
suceder	to happen, to follow	to succeed	tener éxito
suceso	event	success	éxito
tabla	board	table	mesa
trampa	cheat	tramp	vagabundo
tuna	prickly pear cactus, student musical group	tuna	atún
vaso	glass	vase	florero, jarrón

REGIONAL VARIATIONS and COLLOQUIALISMS / VARIACIONES REGIONALES y EXPRESIONES COLOQUIALES

This table highlights some of the many regional variations in vocabulary and slang across Spanish-speaking countries. The most common or universal word (if there is one) is listed first, and the regional variations that follow are marked with flags.

- LA Latin America (entire)
- CA Central America
- SA South America
- Argentina
- Chile
- Colombia
- Cuba
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Puerto Rico
- Spain
- Uruguay
- United States
- Venezuela

apartment	el apartamento el departamento (LA)
banana	el plátano la banana (CA, SA) el banano (CA) el cambur (SA)
bathroom	el baño (LA) el servicio (SA) el váter (SA)
bean	la alubia (SA) la caraota (SA) el frijol (LA) la habichuela (SA) la judía (SA) el poroto (CA, SA)

block (street)	la cuadra (LA) la manzana (SA)
buddy	amigo che (CA) compinche (CA) cuate (CA) gallo (CA) güey (CA) jefe (LA) macho (SA) maje (CA) mano (LA) tío (SA) viejo (LA)
bus	el autobús el autocar (SA) el camión (CA, SA) la camioneta (CA) el colectivo (CA) la guagua (CA, SA) el ómnibus (CA, SA)
car	el automóvil el auto (CA, SA) el carro (LA) el coche (SA) chévere (LA) chulo (SA) guay (SA) legal (CA, SA) padre (CA)
cool/great/ neat	

computer	la computadora (LA) el ordenador (SA)
eyeglasses	los anteojos (LA) los espejuelos (SA) las gafas (SA) los lentes (CA, SA)
father/mother	el padre/la madre el viejo/la vieja (SA)
kid (young boy/girl)	el/la niño (-a), el/la chico (-a) el/la chamaco (-a) (CA) el/la chavalito (-a) (CA, SA) el guámbito (CA) el/la nene (-a) (CA, SA) el/la pibe (-a) (CA, SA)
lunch	el almuerzo (LA) la comida (SA) el lonche (SA)
man (slang)	che (CA) gallo (CA) tipo (CA, SA) tío (SA)
money	el dinero el bolo (SA) el chavo (SA) el chele (CA) el cuarto (CA) la lana (CA) la pela (SA) la plata (SA) el quilo (CA, SA)

mushroom	el champiñón la callampa (CA) el hongo (LA) la seta (SA)
peanut	el cacahuete (CA) el cacahuete (SA) el maní (LA)
pineapple	la piña el ananá (CA)
potato	la papa (LA) la patata (SA)
pretty	bonito (SA) lindo (LA)
shrimp	el camarón (LA) la gamba (SA) el langostino (CA, SA)
sidewalk	la acera el andén (CA) la banqueta (CA) la vereda (CA, SA)
to stand up	levantarse pararse (LA)
swimming pool	la piscina la alberca (CA) la pileta (CA)
to throw out/ away	botar (LA) tirar (SA)

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