

el barrio.

the road to fluency.

a1 to c1. everything you actually have to own.

the grammar. the mistakes. the things textbooks leave out.

mexican spanish only. no vosotros, no filler.

by @professordeggy 

this is not a course and it is not a worksheet. it is a map of what has to be true at each level before the next one will hold.

start at the level you think you are, and read the mistakes page first. if more than three of them are yours, you are not at that level yet, and that is useful information rather than bad news. **almost everyone who feels stuck is leaking at a level below where they think they are.** the leak is nearly always something small that never got fully closed, and it is nearly always faster to fix than it feels.

the checkbox gates at the end of each section are the point of the document. they are deliberately strict. clearing five of six is the bar.

THE FIVE LEVELS

a1	the foundation	60 to 100 hours
a2	the everyday	90 to 150 hours
b1	the crossing	120 to 200 hours
b2	the unlock	150 to 250 hours
c1	the ceiling	180 to 400 hours

the hours are guided study hours, benchmarked against instituto cervantes course lengths. they assume you are producing spanish, not recognizing it. hours spent reading and tapping through an app do not convert at the same rate as hours spent speaking and being corrected.

TWO THINGS THIS DOCUMENT WILL NOT DO

it will not give you vocabulary lists. vocabulary comes from immersion and from use, not from a pdf, and a list you memorize in isolation will not survive a real conversation.

it will not teach you vosotros. this is mexican spanish. ustedes covers every "you all" you will ever need on this side of the atlantic.

a1

the foundation

a1 is not knowing a little spanish. a1 is the level where you stop guessing. every sentence you will ever say in spanish sits on top of what's on these pages: gender, agreement, the present tense, and seven verbs that do most of the work. **most people who feel stuck at b1 are actually leaking at a1.** they never fully closed ser vs estar, they never stopped saying yo before every verb, and it follows them for years.

read this section even if you think you're past it. especially if you think you're past it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN A1 IS ACTUALLY CLOSED

- ☐ introduce yourself and ask someone about themselves without rehearsing it first
- ☐ describe a person, a place, or an object using the correct form of ser or estar
- ☐ talk about what you do on a normal day in the present tense
- ☐ say what you have, what you want, what you can do, and where you're going
- ☐ ask a real question instead of repeating one you memorized
- ☐ understand someone speaking slowly about a familiar subject

HONEST EXPECTATION

roughly **60 to 100 hours** of real study. not app streaks. hours where you were producing spanish, not recognizing it. one hour of speaking is worth about four hours of flashcards at this level.

01 every noun has a gender

not a rule you apply later. it's attached to the word itself. learn the article with the noun, always.

el libro **la** mesa **el** problema (masculine despite the a) **la** mano (feminine despite the o)

learn "la mesa," never "mesa." if you learn the noun naked you will guess forever.

02 articles

definite: el, la, los, las. indefinite: un, una, unos, unas. spanish uses articles in places where english drops them.

me gusta **la** música (not "me gusta música") **los** lunes trabajo

03 adjectives agree, and they follow

the adjective matches the noun in gender and number, and sits after it.

un coche **rojo** una casa **roja** unos coches **rojos** unas casas **rojas**

04 dropping subject pronouns

yo, tú, él, ella, usted, nosotros, ellos, ellas, ustedes. the verb ending already tells you who. saying yo every time is the loudest beginner tell there is.

hablo español (natural) **yo hablo** español (only for emphasis or contrast)

no vosotros. in mexico and all of latin america it's **ustedes** for every "you all," formal or not. don't waste a single hour on vosotros conjugations.

05 present tense, regular verbs

three endings. this is the spine of the language.

hablar	hablo · hablas · habla · hablamos · hablan
comer	como · comes · come · comemos · comen
vivir	vivo · vives · vive · vivimos · viven

06 the seven verbs that carry everything

all irregular. all unavoidable. know these cold before you learn anything else.

ser (identity)	soy · eres · es · somos · son
estar (state, place)	estoy · estás · está · estamos · están
tener (to have)	tengo · tienes · tiene · tenemos · tienen
ir (to go)	voy · vas · va · vamos · van
hacer (to do, to make)	hago · haces · hace · hacemos · hacen
querer (to want)	quiero · quieres · quiere · queremos · quieren
poder (to be able)	puedo · puedes · puede · podemos · pueden

07 ser vs estar

the single biggest a1 leak. ser is what something is. estar is how or where something is right now.

ser: identity, origin, profession, time, permanent traits. soy mexicano · es abogado · son las tres

estar: location, mood, temporary condition, ongoing action. estoy en casa · está cansado · estamos comiendo

same adjective, different verb, different meaning. **es aburrido** means he's boring. **está aburrido** means he's bored. **es listo** means he's smart. **está listo** means he's ready.

08 tener does the jobs english gives to "to be"

age, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, fear, obligation. all tener.

tengo 25 años · **tengo** hambre · **tengo** frío · **tengo** miedo · **tengo que** trabajar

09 hay

there is, there are. one word, never changes, no plural form.

hay un libro · **hay** muchos libros · no **hay** nada

10 negation

put no before the verb. that's the whole rule. double negatives are correct in spanish.

no hablo francés · **no** tengo **nada** · **no** viene **nadie**

11 question words

qué, quién, dónde, cuándo, cómo, cuánto, por qué, cuál. all carry an accent inside a question.

¿**dónde** vives? · ¿**cómo** te llamas? · ¿**por qué** no vienes?

qué asks for a definition. **cuál** asks you to pick from options. "¿cuál es tu nombre?" not "¿qué es tu nombre?"

12 gustar works backwards

you don't like the thing. the thing pleases you. the thing is the subject, so it controls the verb.

me gusta el café (one thing) · **me gustan** los tacos (plural thing) · **me gusta** bailar (verb, always singular)

13 possessives

mi, tu, su, nuestro, nuestra, su. they agree with the thing owned, not the owner.

nuestra casa · **mis** hermanos · **su** coche

14 ir a plus infinitive, the future you'll actually use

forget the future tense for now. natives use this constantly.

voy a comer · **vamos a** salir · ¿**vas a** venir?

15 reflexive verbs, the basics

the action lands on you. the pronoun goes before the verb.

me llamo · **me** levanto · **te** duchas · **se** acuesta

these are not typos. these are the errors that survive into the levels above because nobody corrects them early.

estoy 25 años

tengo 25 años

age is something you have in spanish, not something you are

soy caliente

tengo calor

soy caliente means you're horny. real consequence.

estoy excitado

estoy emocionado

excitado is sexual arousal, not enthusiasm

estoy embarazada

me da pena

embarazada means pregnant

yo gusto la pizza

me gusta la pizza

gustar is backwards. the pizza does the pleasing.

me gusta música

me gusta la música

spanish keeps the article where english drops it

yo tengo, yo voy, yo quiero

tengo, voy, quiero

the ending already says who. dropping yo is the fastest way to sound less foreign.

es en la mesa

está en la mesa

location is always estar

estoy americano

soy americano

nationality is identity, so ser

¿qué es tu nombre?

¿cuál es tu nombre?

cuál picks from options. qué asks for a definition.

la problema

el problema

problema is masculine despite the a ending. same for tema, sistema, día.

es las tres

son las tres

tres is plural, so the verb goes plural

busco por mis llaves

busco mis llaves

buscar already contains the "for." adding por is an english habit.

escucho a la música

escucho música

escuchar takes the object directly. no a.

soy cinco años aquí

llevo cinco años aquí

duration uses llevar

ustedes, always. vosotros exists only in Spain. In Mexico, formal and informal plural are the same word. Cut it from your study entirely.

tú vs usted is a real decision, not a formality. Usted with elders, strangers, anyone serving you, anyone senior. Tú with friends, peers, kids. Using tú too early reads as disrespectful. Using usted with a friend reads as cold.

ahorita does not mean right now. It means anywhere from thirty seconds to never. Context and tone decide. This is the first word that teaches you Spanish is not English with different words.

¿mande? Mexicans say this instead of ¿qué? when they didn't hear you. ¿qué? on its own can land as blunt.

diminutives are everywhere. Itos and itas are not just "small." Ahorita, poquito, cafecito, solito. They soften, they warm, they make you sound like a person instead of a textbook.

the h is silent. the v sounds like a b. Hola is "ola." Vamos is closer to "bamos." Fix this at A1 or it calcifies.

qué padre, está padre. Means how cool. The first piece of Mexican slang worth owning, and it's completely safe in any company.

YOU'VE CLEARED A1 WHEN

- ☐ you choose ser or estar without pausing to think about it
- ☐ you've stopped putting yo in front of every verb
- ☐ you can conjugate the seven core verbs without recalling a chart
- ☐ gustar comes out right in both singular and plural without thinking
- ☐ you can talk about your day for two minutes without stopping
- ☐ you can ask a question you were never taught

If you checked fewer than five of these, do not move to A2. Going forward with an A1 leak is why people study for three years and still freeze. Go back and close it properly. It takes a week, not a year.

a2

the everyday

a2 is where spanish stops being a subject and starts being a tool. you can get through a day. you can say what happened yesterday and what you're doing tomorrow. the grammar that defines a2 is the past, and the past is where most learners quietly stall, because spanish has two of them and english has one.

if you can't tell a story about last weekend without stopping, you are not past a2, no matter what an app told you.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN A2 IS ACTUALLY CLOSED

- ☐ tell someone what you did yesterday, last week, or last year
- ☐ describe what you used to do as a kid without switching to english
- ☐ say how you feel physically and emotionally with the right verb
- ☐ handle a full transaction: a store, a taxi, a restaurant, a pharmacy
- ☐ describe a person's appearance and personality in more than three words
- ☐ follow two natives talking about a familiar subject, even if you miss words

HONEST EXPECTATION

roughly **90 to 150 hours** on top of a1. this is the level where hours stop being the bottleneck and speaking time becomes the bottleneck. you cannot read your way to a2 production.

01 the preterite

completed actions with a clear end. this is the tense you tell stories in.

hablar	hablé · hablaste · habló · hablamos · hablaron
comer	comí · comiste · comió · comimos · comieron
vivir	viví · viviste · vivió · vivimos · vivieron

the nosotros form of ar and ir verbs is identical to the present. hablamos and vivimos are both. context decides.

02 the irregular preterites you cannot avoid

these do not follow the pattern and they are the most common verbs in the language. memorize them as a block.

ser and ir	fui · fuiste · fue · fuimos · fueron
estar	estuve · estuviste · estuvo
tener	tuve · tuviste · tuvo
hacer	hice · hiciste · hizo
poder	pude · pudiste · pudo
decir	dije · dijiste · dijo
venir	vine · viniste · vino
dar	di · diste · dio

ser and ir share the exact same preterite. fui can mean I was or I went. nobody is confused by this in real life.

03 the imperfect

what used to happen, what was ongoing, and description in the past. only three irregular verbs exist in the entire language.

hablar	hablaba · hablabas · hablaba · hablábamos · hablaban
comer, vivir	comía · comías · comía · comíamos · comían
the only irregulars	ser (era) · ir (iba) · ver (veía)

04 preterite vs imperfect, the first pass

the deciding question is not when it happened. it's what the sentence is doing.

preterite moves the story forward. it happened, it finished, next thing.

imperfect paints the background. it was happening, it was like this, it used to be.

"veía la tele cuando sonó el teléfono." the watching is scenery. the phone ringing is the event. english hides this distinction inside was watching and rang.

05 direct object pronouns

me, te, lo, la, nos, los, las. they replace the thing receiving the action and go before the conjugated verb.

¿viste la película? sí, **la** vi. · no **lo** conozco · ¿me escuchas?

06 indirect object pronouns

me, te, le, nos, les. they replace the person the action is done to or for.

le di el libro · **me** dijo la verdad · ¿**te** mando la dirección?

spanish doubles up constantly: "le di el libro a maría." the le is not optional even though maría is already there.

07 reflexive verbs, the full set

me, te, se, nos, se. your whole daily routine runs on these.

me levanto · **me** baño · **me** visto · **me** voy · **me** acuesto

08 present progressive

estar plus the gerund. ando for ar verbs, iendo for er and ir verbs. only for what is happening at this exact moment.

estoy comiendo · **está** trabajando · **estamos** viendo la tele

do not use this for the future. english says "i'm going tomorrow." spanish says "voy mañana" or "voy a ir mañana," never "estoy yendo mañana."

09 comparisons

más que, menos que, tan como, tanto como.

es **más** alto **que** yo · **tan** caro **como** el otro · no trabajo **tanto como** tú

four comparatives are irregular and never take más: **mejor, peor, mayor, menor**. "más mejor" is not a thing.

10 duration with hace and llevar

two ways to say how long something has been going on. both are more natural than the english word order.

hace dos años **que** vivo aquí · **llevo** dos años aquí · **llevo** dos años estudiando

11 saber vs conocer

two verbs, one english word. this one never stops mattering.

saber: facts, information, how to do something. sé la respuesta · sé nadar

conocer: familiarity with people, places, and things. conozco a tu hermana · conozco oaxaca

12 por vs para, the starter version

you will not close this at a2 and that's fine. start with the core split.

para: destination, purpose, deadline, recipient. salgo **para** méxico · es **para** ti

por: cause, exchange, duration, movement through. gracias **por** todo · pagué cien **por** esto

13 commands

the affirmative tú command is just the él form of the present. eight verbs break the rule.

habla · come · escribe · espera

irregulars: ven · di · sal · haz · ten · ve · pon · sé

pronouns attach to the end of an affirmative command and usually pull an accent with them: dímelo, espérame, siéntate.

14 muy vs mucho

muy goes with adjectives and adverbs. mucho goes with nouns and verbs, and agrees when it's with a noun.

muy bueno · **muy** rápido · **mucho** dinero · **mucho** hambre · trabajo **mucho**

these are not typos. these are the errors that survive into the levels above because nobody corrects them early.

yo era a la tienda

fui a la tienda

one trip is a finished event, so preterite. and ir in the past is fui.

estuve cansado todo el día

estaba cansado todo el día

a state with no clear end takes the imperfect

tenía un accidente

tuve un accidente

a single event is preterite even though it's a state verb

sé a tu hermana

conozco a tu hermana

people always take conocer

conozco que tienes razón

sé que tienes razón

information always takes saber

vi la ayer

la vi ayer

the pronoun goes before the conjugated verb, not after

estoy trabajando aquí desde tres años

llevo tres años trabajando aquí

duration uses llevar or hace que, never desde plus a number

es muy frío hoy

hace mucho frío hoy

weather runs on hacer, and frío is a noun here

soy muy hambre

tengo mucha hambre

hunger is a noun you have, so tener plus mucha

yo he ido ayer

fui ayer

a finished day takes the preterite in mexico. the present perfect is a spain habit.

mucho bueno

muy bueno

muy goes with adjectives

más grande que mí

más grande que yo

after que you use the subject pronoun, not the object one

más mejor

mejor

mejor already means more good

salí por comprar pan

salí a comprar pan

purpose after a verb of motion takes a, not por

gracias para tu ayuda

gracias por tu ayuda

gratitude is a cause, so por

the present perfect barely exists in mexico. spain says "he comido." mexico says "comí." if you learned from a spanish textbook you are using a tense natives around you mostly skip.

chamba is work. chambear is to work. "me voy a la chamba" is how a huge number of mexicans describe their day. trabajo is correct but chamba is real.

¿me das...? is how you order. not quisiera, not deseo. "¿me das un café?" or "¿me regalas un café?" regalar here does not mean free.

no manches and no mames are the same phrase at two registers. no manches is safe almost anywhere. no mames is vulgar and only for close friends. get this wrong in front of someone's mother and you will find out immediately.

time is elastic and the diminutive marks it. un ratito, tantito, ahorita, luego luego. these are not sizes. they are social softeners.

¿cómo ves? is how mexicans ask what you think. not "¿qué piensas?" which sounds like a survey.

commands sound harsher in english heads than in spanish ears. "dame," "pásame," "espera" are normal between friends. softening every request with podrías marks you as foreign.

YOU'VE CLEARED A2 WHEN

- ☐ you pick preterite or imperfect without translating the english first
- ☐ you can tell a two minute story about last week without stopping
- ☐ object pronouns come out in the right position without effort
- ☐ saber and conocer never get swapped
- ☐ you say hace frío instead of es frío, automatically
- ☐ you can give someone directions or instructions using commands

the preterite and imperfect are the whole level. if you are still choosing between them consciously, stay here. b1 stacks the subjunctive on top of this, and stacking new grammar on an open past tense is how people end up at b1 forever.

b1

the crossing

b1 is where you stop sounding like someone learning spanish and start sounding like someone who speaks it badly. that is a real promotion. this is also where the subjunctive appears, and the subjunctive is the wall that stops most people permanently.

everything from here is about opinion, doubt, and things that have not happened yet. **the subjunctive is not advanced grammar. it is how mexicans talk to their kids.** treating it as optional is the single most expensive decision a learner makes.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN B1 IS ACTUALLY CLOSED

- ☐ hold a real conversation for thirty minutes without switching to english
- ☐ give an opinion and defend it with reasons
- ☐ describe hopes, plans, regrets, and what you would do differently
- ☐ handle an unexpected problem in a spanish speaking country
- ☐ understand most of a modern tv show with subtitles off
- ☐ write a message that sounds like a person, not a form

HONEST EXPECTATION

roughly **120 to 200 hours** on top of a2. most people take far longer, not because it's harder, but because they avoid the subjunctive and plateau for years just below it.

01 preterite vs imperfect, closed properly

at a2 you learned the split. at b1 you own it, including the verbs that change meaning depending on which one you pick.

sabía / supe	i knew / i found out
conocía / conocí	i knew someone / i met someone
quería / quise	i wanted / i tried
no quería / no quise	i didn't want / i refused
podía / pude	i was able / i managed

02 building the present subjunctive

go to the yo form of the present, drop the o, flip the vowel. ar verbs take e endings. er and ir verbs take a endings.

hablo becomes **hable** · como becomes **coma** · tengo becomes **tenga** · salgo becomes **salga**

six irregulars: dar (dé) · estar (esté) · ir (vaya) · saber (sepa) · ser (sea) · haber (haya)

because it comes from the yo form, every irregular yo form carries into the subjunctive. tengo gives tenga. conozco gives conozca. this is why the yo form matters so much at a1.

03 when the subjunctive fires

two different subjects, joined by que, and the first clause expresses something other than plain fact. the shorthand is WEIRDO.

W	wishes: quiero que, espero que
E	emotion: me alegra que, me molesta que
I	impersonal: es importante que, es raro que
R	recommendations: te recomiendo que, sugiero que
D	doubt and denial: dudo que, no creo que
O	ojalá: ojalá que

04 the same trigger, two moods

belief takes the indicative. denied belief takes the subjunctive. this one pair teaches the whole system.

creo que **viene** · no creo que **venga**

es verdad que **tiene** razón · no es verdad que **tenga** razón

05 the future simple

add the endings to the whole infinitive. no stem changes, no dropped letters, one set of endings for all three verb types.

hablaré · hablarás · hablará · hablaremos · hablarán

irregular stems: tendré · podré · haré · diré · saldré · vendré · pondré · sabré · querré

mexicans use the future tense far less for the future than you'd expect. voy a is the default. the future tense does more work expressing probability: "¿dónde estará?" means where could he be.

06 si clauses, the real ones

if the condition is realistic, no subjunctive appears anywhere.

si tengo tiempo, voy · **si** llueve, no salimos · **si** puedes, avísame

never put the present subjunctive directly after si. "si tenga tiempo" does not exist in any variety of spanish.

07 commands, the full set

the negative tú command and both usted commands are just the subjunctive. one form does three jobs.

tú affirmative	habla · come · ven · haz
tú negative	no hables · no comas · no vengas
usted	hable · coma · venga
ustedes	hablen · coman · vengán

08 verbs that work like gustar

a whole family runs backwards the same way. the thing is the subject and you are the indirect object.

me **encanta** · me **molesta** · me **importa** · me **duele** · me **falta** · me **queda** · me **interesa** · me **parece**

09 double object pronouns

indirect comes first, then direct. when both are third person, le turns into se.

¿le diste el libro? sí, **se lo** di. · **me lo** mandó ayer · **te la** presento

"le lo" is impossible in spanish. it always becomes se lo. this is a sound rule, not a grammar rule, and it has no exceptions.

10 impersonal se

used when nobody in particular does the action. this is how signs, rules, and general truths get written.

se habla español · **se** vende · **se** dice que · ¿cómo **se** dice?

11 relative pronouns

que, quien, lo que, donde, el que and la que. que covers most of it.

el libro **que** leí · la persona **con quien** hablé · **lo que** me dijiste · el lugar **donde** nos vimos

12 connectors that make you sound fluent

grammar gets you correct. connectors get you fluent. these do more for how you sound than any tense.

aunque · **sin embargo** · **por eso** · **en cambio** · **además** · **o sea** · **es decir** · **mientras que** · **de hecho**

13 cuando plus subjunctive for the future

if it hasn't happened yet, cuando takes the subjunctive. if it's a habit, it doesn't.

cuando **llego** a casa, ceno (habit) · **cuando** **llegue** a casa, te llamo (future)

14 the personal a

when the direct object is a person, spanish inserts an a that english has no equivalent for.

veo **a** mi hermano · conozco **a** tu jefe · busco **a** maría

these are not typos. these are the errors that survive into the levels above because nobody corrects them early.

espero que vienes

espero que vengas

espero que is a wish, and wishes take the subjunctive

quiero que tú vas

quiero que vayas

two subjects plus que means subjunctive, and ir gives vaya

es importante que estudias

es importante que estudies

impersonal expressions take the subjunctive

no creo que es verdad

no creo que sea verdad

denied belief flips to the subjunctive

cuando llegaré, te aviso

cuando llegue, te aviso

a future cuando takes the subjunctive, never the future tense

si tendría dinero

si tuviera dinero

the si clause never takes the conditional

no hablas as a command

no hables

negative commands are subjunctive forms

le lo di

se lo di

le becomes se in front of lo, la, los, las

pienso de que es mejor

pienso que es mejor

dequeismo. pensar takes que with nothing in between.

soy de acuerdo

estoy de acuerdo

agreement is a state, so estar

realicé que tenías razón

me di cuenta de que tenías razón

realizar means to carry out, not to notice

asistir una reunión

asistir a una reunión

asistir always takes a

la gente son amables

la gente es amable

gente is singular in spanish even though it means many people

veo mi hermano

veo a mi hermano

a person as a direct object takes the personal a

es la razón porque

es la razón por la que

porque explains. por la que connects a noun to its clause.

the subjunctive is not formal. natives use it constantly in casual speech. "que te vaya bien," "ojalá," "cuando llegues," "que descanses." if you avoid it you are not avoiding formality. you are avoiding half of spoken spanish.

güey is punctuation. between friends it carries almost no meaning and appears three times a sentence. with a stranger, an elder, or a boss it is an insult. the word did not change. the room did.

cool has a whole ladder. padre, chido, chévere, poca madre, chingón. each one sits at a different level of intensity and vulgarity. poca madre and chingón are strong.

neta means truth. "¿es neta?" is for real? "la neta" is honestly, real talk. it is one of the most useful words in mexican spanish.

mexicans rarely refuse directly. "déjame ver," "ahorita te digo," "va a estar difícil" are all no. hearing this correctly is a b1 listening skill that no textbook teaches.

ahí nos vemos beats adiós. adiós carries a finality most goodbyes don't need. ahí nos vemos, nos vemos, and ándale pues are the everyday versions.

sale means deal. "sale," "órale," and "va" all confirm a plan. órale also expresses surprise, encouragement, and disbelief. tone carries all of it.

YOU'VE CLEARED B1 WHEN

- ☐ the subjunctive fires automatically after quiero que, espero que, and ojalá
- ☐ you stopped translating before speaking, most of the time
- ☐ you can talk for thirty minutes without switching to english
- ☐ you can tell a story with a setup, a complication, and an ending, all in the past
- ☐ you understand a mexican speaking at normal speed about an everyday topic
- ☐ you can say what you would do in a situation that hasn't happened

b1 is the level people get stuck at for a decade. the reason is almost always the same: they can be understood without the subjunctive, so they never build it. being understood is not the goal. if the subjunctive still requires a pause, stay here and drill it in speech, not on paper.

b2

the unlock

b2 is where people start calling you fluent. you can argue, joke, disagree, and be understood completely. the grammar here is about distance from reality: what might have been, what you would do, what someone else said.

b2 is also where the real ceiling appears. **at b2 you can already say everything you need to say, so the pressure to improve disappears.** most people who quit spanish quit here, comfortable and permanently intermediate.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN B2 IS ACTUALLY CLOSED

- ☐ argue a position, and change your mind out loud
 - ☐ understand a movie without subtitles
 - ☐ handle a work meeting, an interview, or a difficult phone call
 - ☐ tell a joke that lands
 - ☐ read a newspaper without a dictionary
 - ☐ speak for an hour without noticeable strain
-

HONEST EXPECTATION

roughly **150 to 250 hours** on top of b1. from here the ratio inverts: study hours matter less than volume of real conversation. an hour arguing with a friend beats a week of grammar drills.

01 the imperfect subjunctive

take the ellos form of the preterite, drop *ron*, add the endings. every irregular preterite carries straight through, which means there are no new irregulars to learn.

hablaron becomes	hablara · hablaras · habláramos · hablaran
tuvieron becomes	tuviera · tuvieras · tuviéramos · tuvieran
fueron becomes	fuera · fueras · fuéramos · fueran
dijeron becomes	dijera · dijeras · dijéramos · dijeran

02 si clauses, the hypothetical

unreal present or future. *si* takes the imperfect subjunctive, the result takes the conditional. this pairing is fixed.

si tuviera dinero, **viajaría** · **si pudiera**, te **ayudaría** · **si fuera** tú, no lo **haría**

03 the conditional

same construction as the future: whole infinitive plus endings, same nine irregular stems.

hablar**ía** · hablar**ías** · hablar**ía** · hablar**íamos** · hablar**ían**

the conditional is also the politeness tool. "¿me podrías ayudar?" and "yo diría que..." soften a request or an opinion the way english uses would.

04 the subjunctive in adverbial clauses

five conjunctions always take the subjunctive because they describe something not yet real. five more take it only when the action is still in the future.

always subjunctive	antes de que · para que · sin que · a menos que · con tal de que
only for the future	cuando · en cuanto · hasta que · después de que · mientras

05 the subjunctive in adjective clauses

when the thing you're describing may not exist, the description goes subjunctive.

busco un departamento que **tenga** balcón (may not exist)

vivo en un departamento que **tiene** balcón (it exists)

06 the perfect tenses

haber plus the past participle. the participle never changes.

present perfect	he hablado · has hablado · ha hablado
pluperfect	había hablado · habías hablado
perfect subjunctive	haya hablado · hayas hablado
pluperfect subjunctive	hubiera hablado · hubieras hablado

irregular participles worth memorizing: hecho, dicho, visto, puesto, escrito, vuelto, abierto, muerto, roto.

07 accidental se

the construction that removes blame. the thing does it to itself and you are just the person it happened to. mexicans use this constantly.

se me olvidó el teléfono · **se me** cayó · **se me** perdió · **se nos** hizo tarde

"olvidé el teléfono" is correct and sounds like you're confessing. "se me olvidó" is what a native actually says.

08 por vs para, closed properly

the version you can finally trust.

para	purpose, destination, deadline, recipient, opinion, comparison
por	cause, exchange, duration, route, means, on behalf of

the test that resolves most cases: if you can substitute "in order to" or "for the benefit of," it's para. if you can substitute "because of," "through," or "in exchange for," it's por.

09 the passive and its alternatives

the true passive exists but sounds formal. spanish prefers the se construction in speech.

se construyó en 1920 (natural) · **fue construido** en 1920 (formal, written)

10 reported speech

when you report what someone said, the tense shifts backwards one step.

viene becomes	dijo que venía
vendrá becomes	dijo que vendría
vino becomes	dijo que había venido
ven becomes	dijo que viniera

11 relative clauses with prepositions

spanish cannot leave a preposition stranded at the end the way english can.

el chico **con quien** hablé · la razón **por la que** vine · el tema **del que** hablamos

12 verbal periphrases

verb combinations that carry meaning no single tense does. these are what make speech sound native.

acabar de (just did) · **volver a** (do again) · **dejar de** (stop doing) · **ponerse a** (start suddenly) · **seguir** plus gerund (keep doing) · **andar** plus gerund (going around doing)

13 ser and estar, the advanced pass

at b2 the split stops being about permanence and starts being about action versus result.

la puerta **fue** cerrada por el viento (the action) · la puerta **está** cerrada (the result)

14 lo plus adjective

turns an adjective into an abstract noun. english has no direct equivalent and learners underuse it badly.

lo importante · **lo** difícil · **lo** mejor · **lo** que me molesta

these are not typos. these are the errors that survive into the levels above because nobody corrects them early.

si tendría tiempo

si tuviera tiempo

the conditional never appears in the si clause

si tengo dinero, viajaría

si tuviera dinero, viajaría

hypothetical needs imperfect subjunctive on both sides of the pair

antes de que sales

antes de que salgas

antes de que always takes the subjunctive

busco un amigo que habla inglés

busco un amigo que hable inglés

if you haven't found him, he goes subjunctive

olvidé mi teléfono

se me olvidó el teléfono

correct but confessional. the se construction is what natives say.

estaba nacido en guadalajara

nací en guadalajara

nacer is an event, not a state

dijo que él viene mañana

dijo que venía mañana

reported speech shifts the tense back

la tienda es cerrada

la tienda está cerrada

a resulting state takes estar

hablamos sobre de eso

hablamos sobre eso

sobre already carries about

en el otro mano

por otro lado

a direct translation of on the other hand does not exist

la mayoría de la gente piensan

la mayoría de la gente piensa

la mayoría is singular

no lo he visto por un año

hace un año que no lo veo

spanish frames the duration from now backwards

es la primera vez que voy

es la primera vez que voy

correct, but note it goes subjunctive after a superlative: es lo mejor que me haya pasado

aunque es difícil, lo haré

aunque sea difícil, lo haré

aunque with indicative states a fact. with subjunctive it concedes a possibility. both exist and they mean different things.

me recuerdo de eso

me acuerdo de eso

recordar takes no pronoun. acordarse does.

swearing in mexican spanish is structural, not decorative. chingar alone generates dozens of expressions with unrelated meanings: chingón, chingadera, chinga tu madre, está cabrón, no chingues. the root is vulgar. the derivatives range from praise to a fight.

ni modo has no english equivalent. it means oh well, nothing to be done, that's how it goes, and a shrug, all at once. it is one of the most culturally loaded phrases in the language.

órale carries at least four meanings. agreement, surprise, encouragement, and disbelief. only tone separates them. learning to hear the difference is a real b2 listening skill.

me da flojera is untranslatable and essential. closest is i can't be bothered, but flojera is a noun you are given, not a state you choose. the grammar itself removes responsibility.

hacer el paro means do me a solid. "hazme el paro" is how favors get asked between friends. ¿me haces un favor? is correct and colder.

está cañón and está grueso mean it's rough. used for anything difficult, expensive, unfair, or impressive. context decides which.

albur is mexican double entendre and you will not get it for years. almost any innocent sentence can be turned sexual through wordplay. natives play this constantly and at speed. not understanding it is normal at b2. noticing it is happening is the b2 skill.

YOU'VE CLEARED B2 WHEN

- ☐ hypothetical si clauses come out without construction time
- ☐ you use the accidental se instead of confessing the mistake
- ☐ you can report what someone else said with the right tense shift
- ☐ you understand a movie without subtitles and catch most of the jokes
- ☐ you can argue a position for ten minutes and concede a point gracefully
- ☐ you notice when a native uses the subjunctive and you know why

b2 is comfortable, and comfort is the trap. you can already do everything you set out to do, which means nothing forces you forward. the only way past b2 is to deliberately put yourself in rooms where your spanish is not good enough.

c1

the ceiling

c1 is not more grammar. there is very little grammar left. c1 is precision, register, and the ability to say something in the exact shade you meant rather than the nearest available one.

this is where you stop being a foreigner who speaks spanish well and become a person who speaks spanish. **almost nobody arrives here through study.** you arrive through years of use, through being corrected by people who love you, and through enough hours in the language that it stops being a performance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO WHEN C1 IS ACTUALLY CLOSED

- ☐ switch register deliberately between an interview, a friend's kitchen, and a formal email
- ☐ follow a fast argument between four people in a loud room
- ☐ understand humor, sarcasm, and implication without the words being said
- ☐ read literature and journalism at speed
- ☐ hedge, concede, and qualify a position inside a single sentence
- ☐ get corrected rarely, and only on things natives get wrong too

HONEST EXPECTATION

roughly **180 to 400 hours** on top of b2, and most of them are not study. at this level the input has to be real: podcasts made for natives, arguments, novels, group conversations where nobody is slowing down for you.

01 the pluperfect subjunctive

hubiera plus the participle. this is the tense of regret and of things that never happened.

si **hubiera sabido**, no habría venido · ojalá **hubieras** dicho algo · no creí que **hubiera** pasado

02 the third conditional

the unreal past. si takes the pluperfect subjunctive, the result takes the conditional perfect. in mexico the hubiera form is commonly used in both halves.

si **hubiera sabido**, **habría venido**

si **hubiera sabido**, **hubiera venido** (equally natural in mexico)

03 the future perfect and conditional perfect

both express completed action relative to another point, and both double as conjecture.

habré terminado para el viernes · ya **habrá llegado** (he's probably arrived) · **habría sido** mejor

04 sequence of tenses

which subjunctive follows which main verb. getting this wrong is the last obvious tell.

present main verb	espero que venga
past main verb	esperaba que viniera
present, past result	espero que haya venido
past, earlier result	esperaba que hubiera venido

05 nominalization with lo

spanish turns adjectives and clauses into abstract nouns constantly. underusing lo is what keeps advanced speech sounding flat.

lo preocupante no es que cambie · **lo que** importa es cómo reaccionas · **el hecho de que** lo diga no significa nada

06 concession

the structures for granting a point while disagreeing. this is the core of sounding thoughtful rather than combative.

por más que lo intente · **a pesar de que** lo sabía · **si bien** es cierto que · **aun cuando** tengas razón

aunque plus indicative states a fact you accept. aunque plus subjunctive concedes a hypothetical. "aunque es difícil" means it is difficult. "aunque sea difícil" means even if it turns out to be.

07 advanced connectors

the words that structure an argument. at c1 these do more work than any tense.

dicho esto · **ahora bien** · **no obstante** · **por consiguiente** · **en definitiva** · **de ahí que** · **más bien** · **en todo caso**

08 triggers that force the subjunctive

a small set of expressions take the subjunctive regardless of certainty. these are the ones learners miss longest.

de ahí que sea tan difícil · **el hecho de que** lo sepa · **no es que** no quiera · **por mucho que** insistas

09 participles and gerunds as clauses

compressed constructions that replace a whole subordinate clause. common in writing and in careful speech.

terminada la reunión, nos fuimos · **siendo** así, prefiero esperar · **dado que** no hay tiempo

10 pronominal verbs that change meaning

adding the reflexive pronoun changes the verb entirely. mixing these up is the most common remaining error at c1.

ir / irse	to go / to leave
dormir / dormirse	to sleep / to fall asleep
quedar / quedarse	to arrange to meet / to stay
acordar / acordarse	to agree / to remember
llevar / llevarse	to carry / to take away
poner / ponerse	to put / to become

11 the se form of the imperfect subjunctive

hablase, tuviese, fuese. identical in meaning to the ra form.

recognize it in books and in spanish from spain. do not use it in mexico. it will sound like you learned spanish from a nineteenth century novel.

12 register control

the c1 skill that is not grammar at all. the same idea, delivered three ways, for three rooms.

formal: ¿sería posible que me enviara el documento? · **neutral:** ¿me puedes mandar el documento? · **casual:** pásamelo, porfa

13 discourse markers in real speech

the small words natives use to buy time, soften, and signal. using them is the difference between correct and convincing.

pues · **o sea** · **la verdad** · **digamos** · **a ver** · **fíjate** · **mira** · **este...** · **bueno**

14 idiomatic verb structures

fixed constructions carrying meaning you cannot assemble from the parts.

dar por (to consider as) · **hacerse el** (to play dumb) · **quedar en** (to agree to) · **meterse en** (to get involved) · **salirse con la suya** (to get their way) · **dar por sentado** (to take for granted)

these are not typos. these are the errors that survive into the levels above because nobody corrects them early.

si habría sabido

si hubiera sabido

the conditional never enters the si clause, at any level

el hecho de que es difícil

el hecho de que sea difícil

el hecho de que takes the subjunctive

no es que no quiero

no es que no quiera

no es que always takes the subjunctive

esperaba que venga

esperaba que viniera

a past main verb requires a past subjunctive

acordé de eso

me acordé de eso

remembering takes the pronominal form

quedé en casa

me quedé en casa

quedar is to arrange to meet. quedarse is to stay.

durante que hablaba

mientras hablaba

durante takes a noun, never a clause

en base a los datos

con base en los datos

en base a is widely used and widely considered wrong

detrás mío

detrás de mí

possessives cannot follow adverbs of place

habemos cuatro

somos cuatro

habemos does not exist in careful speech

hubieron muchos problemas

hubo muchos problemas

haber is impersonal and never pluralizes

más nunca

nunca más

the order is fixed

es por eso que vine

por eso vine

es por eso que is a calque of the english cleft

le vi ayer

lo vi ayer

léismo. mexico keeps lo and la for direct objects.

a nivel personal

personalmente

a nivel de is overused and misused. it belongs with actual levels.

the regional difference is rhythm, not vocabulary. mexico city, monterrey, guadalajara, yucatán, and the coast differ far more in cadence and intonation than in words. your ear will learn one and struggle with the others.

indirect refusal is a system, not a habit. "déjame ver," "ahorita te digo," "va a estar difícil," "si dios quiere." each one is a no delivered without the cost of saying no. reading them correctly is a c1 skill.

¿ya comiste? is not about food. it is a check on whether someone is okay. answering it literally misses the entire point.

the diminutive attaches to anything, including adverbs. ahorita, lueguito, cerquita, despacito, tantito. it softens, it hurries, it warms, and occasionally it condescends.

bronca covers problem, trouble, and beef. "no hay bronca," "qué bronca," "tengo una bronca con él." one word, three registers.

register marks class, and everyone can hear it. usted is not only polite. it also builds distance you may not want. moving to tú at the right moment is a social skill, not a grammar one.

spanish from spain will start sounding aggressive to you. that is a feature of how you acquired the language, not a fact about spain. worth knowing before you say it out loud.

YOU'VE CLEARED C1 WHEN

- ☐ you switch register deliberately and notice when others do
- ☐ the third conditional comes out without construction
- ☐ you understand implication, not just words
- ☐ you catch a joke at native speed, including the ones about you
- ☐ you can hedge, concede, and qualify a position in a single sentence
- ☐ natives forget to slow down for you

there is no page after this one, because c1 is not finished by reading. everything above this line can be studied. everything below it only comes from years of speaking to people who are not being paid to understand you.

write in spanish. do not translate from english. build the sentence in spanish even if it comes out simpler than what you would have said.

01

¿Qué hiciste ayer?

what did you do yesterday?

02

¿Cómo es tu familia?

what is your family like?

03

¿Cómo era tu vida hace cinco años?

what was your life like five years ago?

04

¿Qué quieres que cambie en tu vida?

what do you want to change in your life?

05

¿Cuál ha sido el mejor día de tu vida?

what has been the best day of your life?

06

Si tuvieras un año libre, ¿qué harías?

if you had a free year, what would you do?

07

¿Qué le dirías a alguien que quiere aprender español?

what would you say to someone who wants to learn spanish?

08

Describe un lugar que te haga feliz.

describe a place that makes you happy.

09

¿De qué te arrepientes?

what do you regret?

10

¿Quién eres en español?

who are you in spanish?
