

The main 8 verbs and the very important things you can do with them.

There are eight verbs in Spanish that are used very often and you'll need to memorize and master them as soon as possible. As it often happens in most languages, the most used verbs are irregular (don't despair, many of the irregularities are shared with other verbs, so learning them by heart will come in handy as you learn more Spanish).

The first two you already know: “ser” and “estar”. The others are: “haber” (to have), “tener” (to have), “ir” (to go), “poder” (to be able to), “querer” (to want) and “hacer” (to do or to make).

infinitivo	haber	tener	ir	poder	querer	hacer
participio	habido	tenido	ido	podido	querido	hecho
gerundio	habiendo	teniendo	yendo	pudiendo	queriendo	haciendo
yo	he	tengo	voy	puedo	quiero	hago
tú	has	tienes	vas	puedes	quieres	haces
él/ella	ha	tiene	va	puede	quiere	hace
nosotros/nosotras	hemos	tenemos	vamos	podemos	queremos	hacemos
vosotros/vosotras	habéis	tenéis	vais	podéis	queréis	hacéis
ellos/ellas	han	tienen	van	pueden	quieren	hacen

All these verbs must be mastered perfectly as soon as possible, these are the kind of verbs that you cannot afford to have to think about in the middle of the speech, they have to come up immediately.

You have noticed that we have two verbs for “have”, but don't worry, just like “ser” and “estar” it's easy to tell when to use each.

“Tener” means possession, and we use it for everything we have, including parts of our bodies. We use “haber” when we want to use it with another verb, just like in English:

I have read a book Yo he leído un libro

These tenses are called compound tenses (formas compuestas) and, just like in English, there is one for each simple tense (see below for more information).

Out of the 8 main verbs (see further down in “repertoire of irregular verbs”), there are 7 that can be used for very important things in Spanish. Let's see each of them.

Ser: passive clauses.

Just like in English, you can create passive clauses using the verb “ser”. In Spanish the clauses that are considered impersonal (in Swedish these would be those in which the subject is “man” and in french those in which the subject is “on”) are included as a type of passive called reflex passive or “pasiva refleja”, and instead of “man” we use “se”.

The more common type of passives is the one analogous to the English version:

The car is washed	el coche es lavado
Those companies are helped	esas empresas son ayudadas
The building is watched	el edificio es vigilado

Estar: perífrasis durativa.

Just like in English, we have a periphrasis (for periphrasis, see master file) to state that an action is taking place right now.

I am writing	yo estoy escribiendo
The dog is barking	el perro está ladrando
My aunt is sleeping	mi tía está durmiendo
You are cooking	vosotros estais cocinando

As you can obviously see, the verb that is conjugated is “estar” and the other verb (which is the actual action that is taking place) remains as gerund no matter what tense we use for the other.

Haber: formas compuestas.

The verb “haber” is present in half of all the tenses in Spanish. The same happens in English; for every simple tense there is a compound one in which the verb “have” is combined with the other verb. Let's see examples.

I sing	I have sung
I played	I had played
I would write	I would have written
I will break	I will have broken

You can see that, in each pair, the verb “have” in the compound form is in the same tense the other verb was in the simple form, that is, in “I would have written” the verb “would have” is in conditional form, just like “would write”.

The exact thing happens in Spanish (but with 8 tenses instead of 4), that's why it's crucial that you master this verb as soon as possible (unfortunately, it's quite irregular).

So far it will be more than enough that you master the “present perfect” or, as it is called in Spanish, “pretérito perfecto compuesto”. Let's see a few examples.

I have eaten	yo he comido
You have played	tú has jugado
He has kissed	él ha besado
We have built	nosotros hemos construido
You(pl) have drunk	vosotros habeis bebido
They have found	ellos han encontrado

I recommend (for those who want to go forward learning Spanish) that, every time you learn a new simple form, you also learn the compound one.

Tener and the obligation periphrasis.

I have to pee	yo tengo que mear
You have to clean	tú tienes que limpiar
He has to open	él tiene que abrir
We have to repair	nosotros tenemos que reparar
You(pl) have to dance	vosotros teneis que bailar
They have to pay	ellos tienen que pagar

Simple enough. Just remember that you always have to use “que” in the middle and the action goes in infinitive.

Ir: perífrasis de intención.

In English we say “I’m going to buy”, but in Spanish we just say “I go to buy” when we mean that we intend to do the action in the near future. Remember that the verb “ir” is the most irregular verb, so keep an eye on it.

I’m going to close	yo voy a cerrar
You are going to speak	tú vas a hablar
He is going to call	él va a llamar
We are going to search	nosotros vamos a buscar
You(pl) are going to break	vosotros vais a romper
They are going to sleep	ellos van a dormir

Poder: perífrasis de habilidad.

This one is also exactly like in English, all you have to remember is that the action verb goes in infinitive.

I can clean	yo puedo limpiar
You can type	tú puedes teclear
He can walk	él puede andar
We can cut	nosotros podemos cortar
You(pl) can throw	vosotros podeis tirar
They can put	ellos pueden poner

One thing you also have to remember is that when we mean human abilities that require learning such as driving, playing an instrument or swimming, we don’t use the verb “poder”, we use “saber” (to know). Examples:

I can swim	yo sé nadar
He can play piano	él sabe tocar el piano
You can drive	tú sabes conducir

Querer y la perífrasis desiderativa.

This is yet another periphrasis that goes with the action verb in infinitive. Use it like you would use the English version.

I want to fly	yo quiero volar
You want to run	tú quieres correr
He wants to catch	él quiere atrapar
We want to build	nosotros queremos construir
You(pl) want to sell	vosotros quereis vender
They want to burn	ellos quieren quemar