

Chapter 1

Putting Verbs into Action

In This Chapter

- ▶ Grasping the meaning of essential terms and concepts
- ▶ Recognizing and utilizing the infinitive verb form
- ▶ Meeting the subject pronouns
- ▶ Conjugating Spanish verbs
- ▶ Forming and using the present and past participles

This book primarily is a Spanish verb reference book, but to put that reference material to good use, you need to be able to use those verbs in a sentence. This chapter covers basic verb and grammar terminology, introduces subject pronouns and explains how to use them, and shows you how to conjugate verbs so they make sense in the context of a sentence.

Defining Verb and Grammar Terms

When I tell you to conjugate a verb or when I reference different verb terms, you need to know what I'm talking about to fully understand.



Most of these definitions are used when studying English grammar too, so they should be somewhat familiar to you. I just want to stress that having an awareness of these definitions makes learning a new language easier because you can link information about the new language to concepts you already understand in your native language.

The following are some key terms you need to brush up on in preparing to work with Spanish verbs:

- ✓ **Subject:** The person, place, or thing that's performing the action in a sentence.
- ✓ **Verb:** A word that expresses action (like "to run" or "to read") or a state of being (such as "to believe" or "to be").

- ✔ **Verb stem:** The part of the verb that's left after you remove its **-ar**, **-er**, or **-ir** ending from the infinitive form of the verb. (Check out the next section for what an infinitive is.)
- ✔ **Verb ending:** When a verb is in its infinitive form, it has only three possible endings: **-ar**, **-er**, or **-ir**. Also, the ending of a conjugated verb indicates who or what the subject of the verb is and shows what tense the verb is in.
- ✔ **Conjugation:** A verb form that expresses who is doing the action (subject) and when they're doing it (tense).
- ✔ **Tense:** The time when the action or the state of being takes place.
- ✔ **Simple tense:** A verb form that uses the verb stem and the appropriate conjugated ending, based on the subject of the sentence.
- ✔ **Compound or complex tense:** A verb form that uses the helping verb **haber** (*to have*) and the past participle of the verb.
- ✔ **Present progressive:** A verb form that uses the verb **estar** (*to be*) and the present participle form of the verb to express action in progress.
- ✔ **Mood or mode:** A verb form that reflects the subject's state of mind or feeling, such as the imperative mood, which is used to issue commands.
- ✔ **Indicative mood:** A statement or question related to an objective fact — an event that has, is, or will occur.
- ✔ **Conditional mood:** A statement or question that uses the term "would," where the action hinges on the occurrence of another event.
- ✔ **Subjunctive mood:** A statement or question related to the feeling about an action (such as desire, doubt, fear, regret, or joy) rather than referring to a factual occurrence.

Using the Infinitive

The *infinitive* form of the verb is pure action or being, when nobody's doing it or being it and time doesn't matter — in other words, the verb without a subject or tense, such as past, present, or future. In English, you form the infinitive by adding "to" before the verb; for example, *to run*, *to skip*, *to jump*. In Spanish, the infinitive forms end in **-ar**, **-er**, or **-ir**.

When you conjugate a verb, you start with the infinitive form and drop the ending and add the appropriate conjugated ending according to the subject of the sentence and the tense that you're using. (See "Conjugating Verbs to Agree with the Subject" later in this chapter for details.)

The infinitive is often used directly after another conjugated verb in a Spanish sentence, such as **Quiero leer su libro** (*I want to read his book*). In this case, **Quiero** (*I want*) is the conjugated verb followed by the infinitive **leer** (*to read*).



Certain verbs require a preposition after the conjugated form in order to be followed by an infinitive. Here's a sample of those verbs:

acabar de: *to have just (finished)*

consistir en: *to consist of*

olvidarse de: *to forget about*

pensar en: *to think about*

terminar de: *to finish*

Unfortunately, Spanish has no rule for determining which verb requires a preposition after the conjugated form in order to be followed by an infinitive. You just have to memorize them.

One of the most common verb combinations is the verb **ir** (*to go*) followed by the preposition **a** (*to*) and then an infinitive. This formation is sometimes referred to as the *proximate future* (near future) because it describes an action that is about to occur. Here are a couple of examples:

Voy a estudiar esta noche. (*I'm going to study tonight.*)

Ellos van a llegar esta tarde. (*They are going to arrive this afternoon.*)

Presenting the Subject Pronouns

To know which conjugated verb form to use, you need to know the subject of the verb — whatever or whoever is performing the action — because the verb must agree with the subject in both person (for example, I, you, or he) and number (for example, "I" is singular and "We" is plural). When conjugating verbs, however, you often use subject pronouns to substitute for actual nouns.

In Spanish and English, you typically use a subject pronoun so you don't have to keep repeating the subject. For example, instead of saying *Juno likes to climb up trees, but Juno doesn't like to climb down*, you'd say *Juno likes to climb trees, but she doesn't like to climb down*. The Spanish subject pronouns are:

Spanish Pronoun	English Translation
yo	<i>I</i>
tú	<i>you</i> (singular, informal)
él	<i>he</i>
ella	<i>she</i>
usted (abbreviated Ud.)	<i>you</i> (singular, formal)
nosotros	<i>we</i> (masculine or mixed group)
nosotras	<i>we</i> (feminine)
vosotros	<i>you</i> (plural, informal) (masculine or mixed group)
vosotras	<i>you</i> (plural, informal) (feminine)
ellos	<i>they</i> (masculine or mixed group)
ellas	<i>they</i> (feminine)
ustedes (abbreviated Uds.)	<i>you</i> (plural, formal)



Spanish has no equivalent for the English word “it.” If “it” is the subject of the sentence, then it's simply implied by the third person singular form of the verb and the context of the sentence.

Conjugating Verbs to Agree with the Subject

You conjugate verbs to agree with the subject that's performing the action and to indicate *tense* — when the action has been, is, or will be performed. Chapter 2 explains how to conjugate verbs to express tense. For now, focus on conjugating verbs in the present tense to agree with the subject in person and number.

Spanish conjugates all verbs into six *forms* or *conjugations*, as shown in Tables 1-1 and 1-2. Notice that the conjugations are divided into singular and plural sides, and that each side has a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person form. Also, note that even though **usted** and **ustedes** are actually a second person subject they're included in the 3rd person conjugation slot because they use the same form as these subjects.

Table 1-1 lays out the subject pronouns in the six conjugations while Table 1-2 shows a complete conjugation for the verb, **nadar** (*to swim*).

Table 1-1 Subject Pronouns in Conjugating Verbs

<i>Person</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1st	yo (<i>I</i>)	nosotros, nosotras (<i>we</i>)
2nd	tú (<i>you singular informal</i>)	vosotros, vosotras (<i>you plural informal</i>)
3rd	él, ella, usted (<i>he, she, you singular formal</i>)	ellos, ellas, ustedes (<i>they, you plural formal</i>)

Table 1-2 A Complete Conjugation Table

<i>Person</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1st	nado (<i>I swim</i>)	nadamos (<i>we swim</i>)
2nd	nadas (<i>you swim</i>)	nadáis (<i>you swim</i>)
3rd	nada (<i>he, she swims, you swim</i>)	nadan (<i>they, you swim</i>)

In Spanish unlike English you can usually tell who the subject of the sentence is just by looking at the verb ending, thus Spanish allows you to drop the subject out of your sentence when it's unnecessary. Only two forms may be ambiguous — the 3rd-person singular and the 3rd-person plural. These two forms represent more than one possible subject, therefore you have to first establish who the subject is, and then you don't need to state it anymore.

Forming and Using the Present Participle

Spanish uses the *present participle* primarily in the present progressive structure with the verb **estar** (*to be*) to describe an action that's in progress right now. In English, the present participle is the *-ing* form of the verb. For example: the present participle of the verb *play* is *playing*.



TIP

To form the present participle of regular verbs, drop the infinitive ending of the verb and add **-ando** for *-ar* verbs and **-iendo** for *-er* and *-ir* verbs. For example, for **hablar** (*to talk*), you drop the *-ar*, so you have the verb stem **habl** and then add **-ando** to get **hablando**.

Here's an example of the present progressive used in a sentence:

Ellos están comiendo ahora. (*They are eating now.*)

You may also use the present participle in a participial phrase without a helping verb, as in the following example:

Los estudiantes, estudiando en la biblioteca, están preocupados por el examen. (*The students, studying in the library, are worried about the test.*)

Forming and Using the Past Participle

Spanish uses the past participle primarily in the compound tenses with the helping verb **haber** (*to have*). For example, **Ella ya ha preparado la cena.** (*She already has prepared dinner.*) In English, you usually form the past participle by adding either *-ed* or *-en* to the end of the verb. For example: the past participle of *play* is *played*, and the past participle of *take* is *taken*. English also has some irregular past participles that don't use the usual *-ed*, *-en* endings. For example: the past participle of *go* is *gone*.



To form the past participle of a regular verb in Spanish, drop the infinitive ending and add **-ado** to *-ar* verbs and **-ido** to *-er* and *-ir* verbs. For example, for the *-ar* verb **hablar** (*to speak*), you drop the *-ar*, so you have the verb stem **habl** and then add **-ado** to get **hablado** (*spoken*).

Use the past participle with **ser**, (*to be*), to form the passive voice, as in this sentence:

Sus pinturas son admiradas por mucha gente. (*His paintings are admired by many people.*)

You may also use the past participle with the verb **estar** (*to be*), when giving a description of a condition that's the result of a previous action, such as:

Después de trabajar por diez horas por fin él está terminado. (*After working for ten hours he is finally finished.*)