

Present Tense -ar Verbs in Spanish

How verb classes work in Spanish

Wait, what's a verb class?

When we think about verb classes, we can change the word “class” for “type”. In other words, certain verbs follow a pattern that others don't. We call those patterns “types” or “classes”.

English has remnants of our old verb class system, but it's mostly forgotten and not taught in school.

Nevertheless, *you* have knowledge on English's old weak- and strong-verb class system. Have you ever wondered why you change the vowel in some verbs to make them past tense (e.g., **hold** → **held**; a strong verb) but not with others (e.g., **walk** → **walked**; a weak verb)?

Really, *-ar* verbs in Spanish are one of **three** types of verbs that Spanish has. We like to teach *-ar* verbs in Spanish first because they're the ones with the simplest pattern of conjugation.

Conjugating

A lot of Spanish homework, comprehension, and communication comes down to deciding which ending a verb should have. We use the word “conjugating” to talk about the **act of choosing those endings**.

Conjugating in English

In English, believe it or not, we already conjugate verbs on the fly without really noticing.

Every time we add the ending *-ed* to a verb to make it in the past tense, like in this sentence:

I talked to David for roughly one hour last night.

we're conjugating the verb.

The same is true for the present tense, when we add the *-s* to the end of a verb to make it third-person singular, like this:

David takes a walk once a week.

Spanish has a bit more going on

The *-ed* and the *-s* endings in English are about as complex as it gets with our conjugations (excluding the strong verbs mentioned earlier).

In Spanish, there are more than just two endings that we have to think about. Generally, *-ar* verbs follow this pattern for their endings:

	First person ("I" and "We")	Second person ("You" and "Y'all")	Third person ("He/She/It" and "They")
Singular	-o	-as	-a
Plural	-amos	-an	-an

The steps to conjugating in Spanish:

Conjugating verbs in English is relatively easy. We see a word like “Walk”, and then we either do nothing, or we add an -s or a -ed to the end of the word.

In Spanish, the word for “Walk” is “Caminar”, and there are two more steps than we have in English.

Before we can add anything on to the ending of the word, we have to take off the -ar from the end.

Step 1: Taking off the ending

In our example above, “Caminar” turns into “Camin”

We can think of “Camin” as the root of the verb.

Step 2: Look for context clues to figure out who the subject of the sentence is

Sometimes this is as simple as looking for a subject pronoun, like “Yo” or “Tú”. Other times, the homework gives you a clue as to who the verb should be conjugated to without telling you explicitly.

Look at this example and try to figure out who the subject is¹:

Juan no _____ (hablar) mucho porque tiene ansiedad.

Step 3: Follow the conjugation chart (usually found in your textbook or online)

Now that you know *who* the subject is, try to follow along a conjugation chart to see which ending you should put on the end of “Camin”.

Here’s an [example of a conjugation chart](#) you can find on [SpanishDict.com](#)²

	Present
yo	<u>camino</u>
tú	<u>caminas</u>
él/ella/Ud.	<u>camina</u>
nosotros	<u>caminamos</u>
vosotros	<u>caminaís</u>
ellos/ellas/Uds.	<u>caminan</u>

¹ Look for the answer at the end of the document!

² Most conjugation charts online and in your textbook won’t give you English translations. They expect you to know what all the words in the left column mean. If you get lost, refer back to our resource on subject pronouns, or just look at the following two charts in the current document.

Below are the endings in action, coded in red. The English translations are in blue.

Singular forms of regular -ar verbs

Yo hablo ---- I speak

First person singular

Tú hablas ---- You speak

Second person singular (informal)

Él habla ---- He speaks

Third person singular (masculine)

Ella habla ---- She speaks

Third person singular (feminine)

Usted habla ---- You speak

Second person singular (formal)

Plural forms of regular -ar verbs

Nosotros hablamos ---- We speak

First person plural

Ustedes hablan ---- You (all) speak

Second person plural

Ellos hablan ---- They speak

Third person plural (masculine)

Ellas hablan ---- They speak

Third person plural (feminine)

Summary

If you follow these steps, you should have no problem figuring out most Spanish activities in the classroom, in your homework, and even in the real world.

As you may have noticed, there are a few more steps than we have in English, but it's good to think of this as a benefit to the language!

Because Spanish has such specific conjugation possibilities, it actually makes it possible to leave out the subject pronoun when you're speaking or writing the language.

If we say "Hablo español", we really don't have to specify that it's "yo" who's the subject in the sentence. The only possible subject that takes the unaccented *-o* ending is "yo", so that entire word becomes optional. Languages like these are called pro-drop languages because you can drop the pronoun when the verb contains all the meaning of the pronoun.

Finally, although these systems are more complex than English's verb systems in certain aspects, they, just like everything, get easier with practice, even for a second language learner. So, keep up the hard work!

ⁱ "Juan" is a person who is not "me" and is not "you". So, we're talking about a third person! And since he's only one guy, "Juan" is a third-person singular subject. That means he gets the simple ending of *-a*, which gives us the word "habla"