BASIC SPANISH: A GRAMMAR AND WORKBOOK


This workbook presents 20 individual grammar points in realistic contexts, providing a grammatical approach that will allow students not already familiar with these terms to become accustomed to their use. Each unit is included on a graded basis beginning with the simpler aspects of Spanish grammar and proceeding to the more complex points. Grammar points are followed by examples and exercises selected to reinforce mastery of the topic.

*Basic Spanish* provides an ideal introduction to the language, with insights into the Spanish-speaking peoples and their related cultures. For use in the classroom, or for the independent learner, this workbook enables readers to express themselves in a wide variety of situations.

Features include:

- authentic reading texts to encourage an understanding of Spain and Spanish-speaking countries
- reference to Latin American usage where appropriate
- full exercise answer key
- glossary of grammatical terms

*Basic Spanish* is the ideal reference and practice book for beginners and also for students with some knowledge of the language.

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Titles of related interest published by Routledge:
Modern Spanish Grammar: A Practical Guide
Juan Kattán-Ibarra and Christopher Pountain

Modern Spanish Grammar Workbook
Juan Kattán-Ibarra and Irene Wilkie

Spanish: An Essential Grammar
Peter T. Bradley and Ian MacKenzie

Colloquial Spanish
Untza Otaola Alday

Colloquial Spanish 2
Untza Otaola Alday

Colloquial Spanish of Latin America
Roberto Rodriguez-Saona

Colloquial Spanish of Latin America 2
Roberto Rodriguez-Saona
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INTRODUCTION

This grammar workbook is designed for English speakers with no previous knowledge of Spanish, although it will also be useful to those with some knowledge of the language who wish to improve their grammatical competence. The grammar is introduced in a simple, accessible way and all grammatical terms are explained in the glossary. The grammatical explanations are deliberately kept to a minimum and do not include all exceptions to the rules or minor idiosyncracies of the language – students should consult a grammar book such as *Modern Spanish Grammar* (Kattán-Ibarra and Pountain) also published by Routledge, for a full explanation. What this course will do is enable you to use the language accurately in the majority of situations and will certainly give a thorough grounding in basic Spanish grammar.

There is no audio material to accompany this book, but guides to pronunciation and stress are given at the beginning of the book (pp. ix–xiii) and this should be sufficient to allow you to make yourself clearly understood. There is no substitute, of course, for seeking as much contact as possible with native speakers of the language.

The vocabulary used is contemporary and functional. Although it is predominantly peninsular Spanish, some reference is made to Latin American usage. Reading texts are included at the end of each unit to encourage gist comprehension and to provide some background information about Spain and Spanish-speaking countries. A vocabulary list for reading texts is provided at the end of each unit, but you may need to consult a good basic dictionary for some of the vocabulary in the exercises. An answer key to all exercises can be found at the end of the book.

This book should be particularly useful for adults studying alone or as a grammatical underpinning for a taught communicative language course.
The English equivalents given are a rough guide to pronunciation and they will enable you to understand spoken Spanish and to be understood, but you should be aware that in some cases they are not exactly the same sounds as used in English.

**a**
[a] as in English ‘bag’.

**b**
[b] as in ‘big’ at the beginning of a phrase or after n or m. Otherwise [β]. The lips are shaped as for [b] but slightly apart.

**c**
[k] as in ‘cat’ when before a, o, u or a consonant.
[θ] as in ‘think’ before e or i in standard peninsular Spanish, but [s] in Latin America and southern Spain.

**ch**
[ç] as in ‘church’.

**d**
[d] as in ‘dog’ at the beginning of a phrase or after n or l. Otherwise as in ‘this’.

**e**
[e] as in ‘bed’.

**f**
[f] as in ‘feather’.

**g**
[g] as in ‘game’ when before a, o or u. But before e or i, [x] as in Scottish ‘loch’.

**h**
always silent.

**i**
[i] as in ‘meat’.

**j**
[x] as in Scottish ‘loch’.

**k**
[k] as in ‘car’.

**l**
[l] as in ‘flat’.

**ll**
[j] as in ‘yet’ (this is the most commonly heard pronunciation in standard Spanish, although strictly speaking it should be pronounced as in ‘million’).

**m**
[m] as in ‘mother’.

**n**
[n] as in number’.

**o**
[o] as in ‘opera’.

**p**
[p] as in ‘pear’.

**q**
This is always followed by u and qu is pronounced [k] as in ‘corner’.

**r**
[r] this is a rolled ‘r’ as in Scottish pronunciation of ‘car’, i.e. with a slight flick or vibration of the tongue.

**rr**
this requires a more pronounced rolling of the ‘r’, or vibration of the tongue.
| s | [s] as in ‘single’. |
| t | [t] as in ‘take’. |
| u | [u] as in ‘soon’. |
| v | This is pronounced the same as b. |
| w | This only occurs in borrowed words in Spanish and its pronunciation varies. The most common variations are [β], [b] and [w]. |
| x | [ks] as in ‘extra’, but more commonly in spoken peninsular Spanish it is simplified to [s]. |
| y | [j] as in ‘yellow’ when on its own, but when it is used in combination with a vowel it is weakened to [i]. |
| z | [θ] as in ‘think’. |
STRESS

Apart from a very few cases where the diaresis (e.g. ü) is used, there is only one written accent in Spanish (á) and this is used in the following circumstances:

• to show that a word does not follow the rules of natural stress;
• to differentiate between words which are spelt the same;
• in interrogatives and exclamations.

Rules of natural stress

If a word ends in an -n, -s or a vowel, the stress naturally falls on the penultimate (last but one) syllable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>palabra</td>
<td>word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juguetes</td>
<td>toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compran</td>
<td>they buy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a word ends in any other sound, the stress naturally falls on the last syllable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pared</td>
<td>wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feliz</td>
<td>happy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words that follow these rules of natural stress do not require a written accent (or stress mark), but if the word is pronounced in a way that does not follow these natural rules then a stress mark must be put on the vowel in the stressed syllable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lápiz</td>
<td>pencil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inglés</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some words require a stress mark in the singular but not in the plural, since by making the word plural it now ends in an -s, resulting in the natural stress now falling on the appropriate syllable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inglés</td>
<td>ingleses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The situation outlined above is fairly straightforward, but when two or more vowels occur together in a word you will need to understand the rules about diphthongs in order to work out the stress.
Vowels are divided into strong and weak vowels – *a*, *e* and *o* are ‘strong’ vowels and *u* and *i* are ‘weak’ vowels. When a weak vowel occurs together with another vowel, they form a diphthong, which counts as only one syllable. If the weak vowel is next to a strong vowel, the stress falls on the strong vowel:

**piedra** (stone) – two syllables **pie-dra**

If both vowels are weak, the stress falls on the second vowel in the diphthong:

**viuda** (widow)

If, however, two strong vowels occur together they form two separate syllables:

**ateo** (atheist) – three syllables **a-te-o**

**Differentiating between words**

Sometimes stress marks are used to differentiate between two words that are spelt and pronounced in exactly the same way:

**el** (the)  
**él** (he)

**sí** (if)  
**sí** (yes)

**tu** (your)  
**tú** (you)

**Interrogatives and exclamations**

When certain words are used as interrogatives (questions) or exclamations they require a stress mark, whereas they do not require a stress mark in other circumstances:

¿*Qué*?  
What?

¿*Dónde*?  
Where?

¿*Cuándo*?  
When?

¿*Cómo*?  
How?

¿*Quién*?  
Who?

¡*Qué hermoso!*  
How lovely!
UNIT ONE
Nouns and articles

Nouns

All nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine, regardless of whether they are animate or inanimate objects. A number of factors can determine the gender of a noun, such as its meaning, its origin or its ending. Whenever you learn a noun in Spanish you will have to learn its gender as well:

e.g. masculine nouns:  
el niño (the boy)
el libro (the book)

feminine nouns:  
la niña (the girl)
la playa (the beach)

Generally speaking nouns that end in -o are masculine as well as those ending in -or -ema, -ista, while those that end in -a, -ión, -ad, -ud are feminine. There are, however, some exceptions such as la mano (hand) and you will just have to learn these as you come across them.

It is relatively simple to form the plural of most nouns: if the noun ends in a vowel, -s is added, if the noun ends in a consonant, -es is added:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>niño</td>
<td>niños</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playa</td>
<td>playas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coche (car)</td>
<td>coches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bar</td>
<td>bares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ciudad (city)</td>
<td>ciudades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are a few irregular plurals and nouns that do not change in the plural. Most of these are not common words and therefore will be indicated as they appear.

Note: Some nouns lose their written accents in the plural for reasons which follow the normal rules of pronunciation – see sections on ‘Pronunciation’ and ‘Stress’:

e.g. acción/acciones

jardín/jardines (garden)

The noun carácter (character) changes its spoken stress in the plural and therefore loses its written accent: caracteres.
Articles

The gender of the noun will be shown by the article that is used before it. There are two types of articles – definite and indefinite. Definite articles (English ‘the’) tend to be used with nouns that have already been mentioned while indefinite articles (English ‘a/an’) introduce a previously unmentioned noun. Compare:

The dog ran across the road.
I saw a dog in the park.

In the first sentence, the speaker is referring to a dog which both s/he and the person to whom s/he is speaking already know about – i.e. a specific (definite) dog; while in the second sentence the speaker is introducing a new topic.

In Spanish the form of the article changes according to both the number and gender of the noun with which it is used.

The definite article

The equivalent of English ‘the’ has four forms in Spanish:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>el</td>
<td>la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>los</td>
<td>las</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Feminine nouns beginning with a stressed a or ha are preceded by el and not la, but this does not make them masculine nouns, it is just for ease of pronunciation. If another word comes between the article and the noun, la is used because pronunciation is no longer a problem. Also, las is used in the plural.

E.g.  
el agua (water), el hacha (axe), el águila (eagle)

but  
la gran águila, las hachas

The indefinite article

The equivalents of English ‘a’, ‘an’ and, in the plural ‘some’, are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>un</td>
<td>una</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>unos</td>
<td>unas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What has been said with regard to feminine nouns beginning in stressed a or ha is also true for the indefinite article:

E.g.  
un hacha, un águila

But  
unas hachas, unas águilas
The plural forms unos and unas are commonly omitted without any significant change of meaning (as they are in English). When used, they often have the meaning of ‘a few’ or ‘some’:

e.g. Hay galletas en la caja.
There are biscuits in the box.

Hay unos niños en la calle.
There are some children in the street.

Another way of saying ‘some’ will be seen later.

Un(o) and una are also used to mean ‘one’:

e.g. Sólo tengo un hermano.
I only have one brother.

But note that the form uno/una is used to mean ‘one’ when referring to a masculine singular noun when the noun itself is not mentioned:

e.g. ¿Tienes un perro?
Do you have a dog?

Sí, tengo uno.
Yes, I have one.

¿Tienes una casa?
Do you have a house?

Sí, tengo una.
Yes, I have one.

Although the use of the definite and indefinite articles in Spanish is generally similar to their use in English, there are a number of important cases when this is not so. Here are some common ones.

When referring to nouns in general

Nouns that refer to all the members of the relevant class usually require the use of the definite article, although in English the article is omitted in such cases:

Me gusta el café.
I like coffee – i.e. all coffee in general.

La violencia es inaceptable.
Violence is unacceptable – i.e. all violence.
El ruido me molesta.
Noise irritates me – i.e. all noise in general.

With nouns in apposition
When the noun refers back to the one just mentioned, the definite article is omitted:

Juan Carlos, rey de España
Juan Carlos, the King of Spain

Madrid, capital de España
Madrid, the capital of Spain

Before professions and status
Nouns that refer to professions, occupations and status, do not normally require an indefinite article, unless they are qualified by an adjective or other expression:

Es médico.
He’s a doctor.

Es un buen médico.
He’s a good doctor.

Soy soltero.
I’m a bachelor.

Soy un soltero muy feliz.
I’m a very happy bachelor.

Exercises
1 Give the appropriate definite article form (el/la/los/las) to agree in gender and number with the noun:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>problema</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>niños</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ciudades</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>sol</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>cantidad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>perro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>nación</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>casas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Give the appropriate indefinite article form (un/una/unos/unas) to agree in gender and number with the noun:

1. hermana  
2. ciudad  
3. pueblo  
4. pie  

5. funciones  
6. copa  
7. camión  
8. autobús  

9. bares  
10. clase  
11. tren  
12. tapa

3 Form the plural of the following noun phrases. A written accent on the final syllable of the singular noun will disappear in the plural: e.g. la sesión – las sesiones (see introductory sections on ‘Pronunciation’ and ‘Stress’):

1. el maestro  
2. un camino  
3. la madre  
4. un hacha  

5. la pensión  
6. el hermano  
7. una mano  
8. el mapa  

9. el abuelo  
10. la canción  
11. un hotel  
12. una habitación

4 Complete this text by filling in the gaps with the singular form of the definite/indefinite article where appropriate:

María es _____ madrileña. Es _____ soltera. Vive en _____ piso en _____ centro de Madrid. _____ piso es muy grande. De 9.00 a 6.00 María trabaja en _____ oficina y todos los días toma _____ metro. A las 6.30 María estudia _____ inglés en _____ academia y luego, a las 8.00, canta en _____ coro con _____ amiga.

5 Complete this text by filling in the gaps with the singular or plural form of the definite/indefinite article where appropriate:

Marisol es _____ colombiana. Marisol vive en _____ casa en el campo. Tiene _____ hija, Elena, y _____ hijo, Juan. Marisol trabaja en _____ grandes almacenes por la mañana. Elena estudia en _____ colegio inglés y Juan en _____ instituto. _____ niños viajan al colegio en _____ autobús. Por _____ tardes, Marisol limpia _____ casa y lava y plancha _____ ropa. _____ niños ayudan a _____ Marisol aunque primero terminan _____ deberes del colegio.

Cultural brief

Greetings and farewells

Ana is in her local market. Rosa is serving her in the fruit stall and then Ana meets a friend, Pepe.

ANA: Buenas tardes. ¿Tienen naranjas?
ROSA: Sí y son muy dulces, también tenemos unas manzanas muy buenas hoy.
ANA: ¿A cuánto están las naranjas?