

Speak Basic Spanish ... In No Time

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Getting to Know One Another

Date: June 15, 2010

In this chapter

- How to break the ice and interact with Hispanics
- Greetings and the forms of address
- Basic conversational Spanish to talk about yourself and your Hispanic friend
- How to talk about where you both are from

Certain casual words and sentences can get you off to a great start in learning how to speak Spanish. Small talk allows you to break the ice with a Spanish-speaking person. The conversation does not have to be deep in order to make friends with a stranger. Say "Hola," which means "Hello" in Spanish, to the next Hispanic person you see and watch the reaction. Don't worry about the pronunciation. You will get plenty of practice later on in the book.

The words and sentences in this chapter are grouped by topics that are commonly engaged in by total strangers. There may be some redundancy in word and phrase translations within this and subsequent chapters. This is necessary because the intent is to provide you a complete set of sentences applicable to a specific circumstance.

NOTE

You will find additional "small talk" words and sentences within the other chapters. Chapter 6, "Describing the Tasks of Daily Life," for example, includes sentences you can use at work to make small talk with your coworkers. Chapter 7, "Shopping," offers some casual conversation about groceries, and Chapter 9, "Managing Your Health," guides you through basic conversations you might have with friends and co-workers about your health.

Breaking the Ice

As in any language, when you first meet someone and begin speaking with him or her, you'll probably use a series of simple, polite expressions to break the ice. The following sections describe how to say "Hello," "How are you?" and other basic introductory phrases, as well as understand the typical responses you might hear.

Before we begin, however, here are some important phrases that can bail you out of any situation in which you do not understand what the Spanish speaker says:

I do not understand.	No entiendo.
Please repeat what you said.	Por favor repita lo que usted dijo.

Or

Please repeat what you said,	Por favor repita lo que usted dijo,
<i>a little slower.</i>	<i>un poco más despacio.</i>

Forms of Address

In Spanish there are two forms of address, informal and formal, when talking to a person. If you know the person really well, or if the person is the same age or younger than you, then you would use the informal or familiar address. If the person you are addressing is an elderly person, or a person that you believe warrants a high level of respect, then you would use the formal address.

The best way to learn the forms of address is by example. This chapter provides a significant number of examples on the form of address. Subsequent chapters will use whatever form of address is appropriate without further explanation.

Remember what you learn in Chapter 1 about feminine and masculine nouns:

Masculine	Nouns end in the letter <i>O</i>
Feminine	Nouns end in the letter <i>A</i>

The formal and informal translations for the word *you* are

Informal address	<i>tú</i>
Formal address	<i>usted</i>

Basic Greetings and Their Follow-up

Use any of the following words or sentences as a basic greeting depending on the time of day. "Hello" can, of course, be used at any time of day and in any situation. Each group of questions includes possible Spanish responses.

Hello	Hola
Good morning	Buenos días
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes
Good evening	Buenas noches
Good night	Buenas noches

A good follow-up to the basic greeting is to ask, "How are you?" This expression can be used at any time, regardless of the gender of the person you are speaking to. In English you often get an identical response to a "How are you?" greeting; in other words, if you say, "How are you?" the person you've spoken to may respond, "How are you?" In Spanish, people more commonly respond to the greeting with a phrase that states how they are, such as "I am fine."

The Spanish phrase "How are you?" translates into a variety of sentences depending on the gender, age, or level of respect warranted by the person you are addressing.

Below you will find the words "you all" included as part of the greeting. Although it is recognized that not everybody that speaks English uses "you all" in lieu of the word "you," it is used here to demonstrate how the singular Spanish words for "you"—"tú" and "usted"—become the single term "ustedes" when you use the plural form of "you."

The Origin of Usted

At some point you may see the letters Ud. and Uds. on some document or book. These are abbreviations for, and are pronounced as, *usted* and *ustedes*. *Usted* originated from *vuestra merced*, which literally means "Your Mercy," or "Your Highness." *Vuestra merced* was used in addressing royalty. *Usted* and *ustedes* are sometimes abbreviated *Vd.* and *Vds.* which is a shortened version of *vuestra merced*.

Informal Greetings

If you are addressing one person, you ask:

How are you?	¿Cómo estás?
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Or you can ask:

How are you doing?	¿Cómo te va?
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If you are addressing more than one person:

How are you all?	¿Cómo están?
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Or

How are you all?	¿Cómo les va?
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Formal Greetings

You can use the informal form of address when speaking to anyone that you know well and would be comfortable calling by their first name. Use the formal form of address if you feel that you should address the person as "Sir" or "Madam." When in doubt, or if you do not know the person well enough, use the formal form of address.

If you are addressing one person:

How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
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If you are addressing more than one person:

How are you all?	¿Cómo están ustedes?
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If the person is a male who warrants a high level of respect, you would ask:

How are you, sir?

¿Cómo está usted, señor?

If the person is a female who warrants a high level of respect, you would ask:

How are you, ma'am?

¿Cómo está usted, señora?

If the female is single, or if you don't know the marital status, you would ask:

How are you ma'am?

¿Cómo está usted, señorita?

Responses to Your Greeting

Some replies to the "How are you?" greeting are as follows:

<i>Very well.</i>	<i>Muy bien.</i>
<i>Very well, thank you.</i>	<i>Muy bien, gracias.</i>
<i>Okay or fine.</i>	<i>Bien.</i>
<i>So-so.</i>	<i>Así así.</i>
<i>Bad.</i>	<i>Mal.</i>
<i>Very bad.</i>	<i>Muy mal.</i>

Sometimes the response may be in the form of a question. In this version of that reply, the speaker uses informal address to reply to one person:

Very well, and you?

¿Muy bien, y tú?

If the response is to more than one person:

Very well, and you all?

¿Muy bien, y ustedes?

Using formal address, here is the response to one person:

Very well, and you?	¿Muy bien, y usted?
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If the response is to more than one person:

Very well, and you all?	¿Muy bien, y ustedes?
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Techniques for Memorizing and Recalling Terms

Follow any or all of these techniques to improve your ability to memorize Spanish terms and phrases:

- Select words and phrases that describe things that interest you. Listen to them on a media player a few times.
- Repeat the English and Spanish words and phrases until you are able to pronounce the Spanish words and phrases correctly.
- Write down the English and Spanish words and phrases that you want to learn. Practice writing them in Spanish from memory.
- Try to pronounce Spanish terms without hearing the audio file, then check out your pronunciation by playing the audio files.
- Use the things around you as your flash cards. To do that, memorize the Spanish names of objects that interest you and try to recall their names as you see them. Say the names of trees, houses, the sky, mountains, and other objects as you are driving around in your car.
- Memorize phrases that describe situations you encounter on your way to work, to the market, or around the house.
- If you see a person walking down the street as you are driving, say to yourself such things as "Hello, my name is..." or "What is your name?" in Spanish.
- Expand your practice base to other phrases.
- Practice your Spanish on someone who understands it.

Talking About Who You Are

If you get a response to your greeting and you want to initiate a conversation, introduce yourself using some of the following sentences. They will probably lead to an exchange of other information.

Exchanging Names

A good start is to just state your name without trying to translate it:

My name is...	Mi nombre es...
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If you are addressing one person using informal address, you can ask:

What's your name?	¿Cómo te llamas?
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Using formal address, you ask:

What's your name?	¿Cómo se llama?
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If you addressing more than one person, the question is:

What are your names?	¿Qué son sus nombres?
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The person, or persons, you greet will usually just state their name(s). The response is the same for an informal or formal question:

My name is María	Me llamo María.
Our names are José and María.	Nuestros nombres son José y María.
Our names are José and María.	Nos llamamos José y María.

Describing Where You Are From

If you want to tell the person(s) you are talking to where you are from, and you are in the city where you reside, you say:

I live in this city.	Vivo en esta ciudad.
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Suppose you live in Jacksonville, Florida, for example. You would say:

I live in Jacksonville, Florida.	Yo vivo en Jacksonville, Florida.
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If you are in another country and you want to say that you are from a certain state in, or from the United States, you can say:

I live in the state of Florida.	Yo vivo en el estado de Florida.
I live in the United States of America.	Yo vivo en los Estados Unidos.

If you are addressing one person, and you are interested in knowing where the person is from, you would ask the following based on the form of address. Using informal address, the question would be this:

Where are you from?	¿De dónde eres?
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Here is the question, using the formal form of address:

Where are you from?	¿De dónde es usted?
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If you are addressing more than one person, the question would be:

<i>Where are you all from?</i>	<i>¿De dónde son ustedes?</i>
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Summary

In this chapter, you learned how to make that initial contact with a Hispanic person. You learned details about when to use the formal and informal forms of address. If you learn this material, you will be able to talk about who you and your Hispanic friend are and where you are from.

Now that you and your Hispanic friend know a little bit about each other, you may want to get more specific about your respective families. The next chapter provides you extensive translated material on talking about the family and other relationships. You will be able to discuss marital status, what the family members do for a living, how the kids are doing in school, and how to say, "I love you" to that special somebody.