

1.2 People, Places, and Things

Understanding Nouns

Nouns are words used to name or identify a person, animal, place, thing, or idea. Examples include: *girl, hat, coat, weather, picture, coffee, hotel*.

Just as in English, Spanish nouns can either be singular, such as “cat” or *gato*, or plural (i.e., more than one), like “cats” or *gatos*.

The first thing that you must learn about Spanish, however, is that all nouns also have a *gender*. In other words, all objects and living things are either **masculine** or **feminine**.

Is it a Boy or a Girl?

The concept of gender can feel confusing for new students of Latin languages. Having a gender does not mean that nouns actually refer to *male* or *female* things, although, in most circumstances, the nouns that refer to males (such as a male doctor or a male animal) are *masculine*, while nouns that refer to females are generally *feminine*.

In many situations, you will be able to distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns by the distinctive association to a gender. For example, the sun tends to be associated with masculine imagery, and in Spanish we find that its gender is also masculine: *el sol*. The moon tends to be associated with feminine imagery, and, in Spanish, it is feminine: *la luna*.

You may find it impossible to figure out the gender of other nouns, however. For example, how would anyone know whether a table or a cup is masculine or feminine? (*La mesa* and *la taza* are both feminine.)

You won’t be able to figure out the gender of most nouns from their English equivalents. Once you know the word in Spanish, however, you’ll be able to figure out the gender in a snap.

Talking about People and Animals

Masculine nouns often end in **–o** or **–or**, while feminine nouns often end in **–a** or **–ora**.

Masculine nouns		Feminine nouns	
el hombre	<i>the man</i>	la mujer	<i>the woman</i>
Ends with –o		Ends with -a	
el perro	<i>the (male) dog</i>	la perra	<i>the (female) dog</i>

el gato	<i>the (male) cat</i>	la gata	<i>the (female) cat</i>
Ends with -or		Ends with -ora	
el doctor	<i>the doctor</i>	la doctora	<i>the (female) doctor</i>
el señor	<i>the gentleman</i>	la señora	<i>the lady</i>
Ends with -ista		Ends with -ista	
el pianista	<i>the pianist</i>	la pianista	<i>the (female) pianist</i>

Examples:

1. ¿Dónde está **el gato**?
- *Where is the cat?*
2. ¿Cuándo fue **el doctor** a ver a **la señora**?
- *When did the doctor go to see the lady?*
3. **La mujer** está llorando.
- *The woman is crying.*
4. ¿Cómo está **el señor**?
- *How is the gentleman?*
5. **El hombre** está en España.
- *The man is in Spain.*

What “The”?!

One of the most common words in the English language is “**the**.” In Spanish, “**the**” is not a single word, however. Rather it has four forms, depending on the gender and quantity of the noun to which it is matched.

This isn’t as confusing as it sounds! For right now, just remember that the word “**the**”, if followed by a masculine noun, is **el**. If followed by a feminine noun, use **la**.

- **the** + masculine noun = **el**
- **the** + feminine noun = **la**

Same Endings, Different Story

When you find a noun ending in **-ista** (e.g. *pianista*) you will notice the ending is the same for both the masculine and feminine forms. In these cases, the gender of the noun will be indicated by whether it is preceded by **el** (masculine) or **la** (feminine).

Other nouns follow this pattern. Review the following:

el artista	la artista
<i>the male artist</i>	<i>the female artist</i>
el atleta	la atleta
<i>the male athlete</i>	<i>the female athlete</i>

Examples:

1. **La atleta** sale a correr todos los días.
- *The athlete goes for a run every day.*
2. Jose es **el artista** en **la familia**.
- *Jose is the artist in the family.*

Talking about Things and Ideas

Who could guess that the word “problem” would be masculine? Or that the word “destruction” would be feminine? Non-living things can be quite tricky to assign a gender to.

As mentioned before, figuring out the gender of these nouns from the English is impossible, but you can figure out gender easily once you know how the noun ends in Spanish.

- Nouns that end in **–o**, **–ma**, and **–s** (in their singular form) are generally *masculine*.
- Nouns that end in **–a**, **–ción**, and **–dad** are generally *feminine*.

Review the examples in the following table:

Masculine nouns		Feminine nouns	
End with –o		End with -a	
el cuchillo	<i>the knife</i>	la computadora	<i>the computer</i>
el zapato	<i>the shoe</i>	la puerta	<i>the door</i>
el pelo	<i>the hair</i>	la guitarra	<i>the guitar</i>
el ajo	<i>the garlic</i>	la ventana	<i>the window</i>
End with –ma		End with -ción	
el problema	<i>the problem</i>	la conversación	<i>the conversation</i>
el sistema	<i>the system</i>	la destrucción	<i>the destruction</i>
End with -s		End with -dad	
el país	<i>the country</i>	la universidad	<i>the university</i>
		la sociedad	<i>the society</i>

Hermaphroditic Nouns

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rules. For example, *la mano* (the hand) finishes on **–o**, but it is a feminine noun.

There’s no way around it: some memorization will be necessary. Once you get into the habit of associating a gender with each new noun you learn, however, the **el** or **la** will come naturally.

4.2 Indirect Object Pronouns

Now that you understand the concept of the direct object (i.e., the object to which the action is being done in a sentence), you are ready to look at the concept of the indirect object.

An indirect object is the person or thing for whom an action is being or has been performed, usually indicated in English by the words “to” or “for.”

For instance, take a look at the following sentence:

Jenny is writing a **letter** to her **father**.

The subject in this sentence is “**Jenny**,” and the verb is “**is writing**.” The direct object is “**letter**.” The indirect object—the person or thing for whom the action is being performed—is “**father**.”

You could also say the sentence in the following way:

Jenny is writing a letter to **him**.

Him refers to Jenny’s father. In this sentence, the indirect object noun has been replaced by a pronoun.

You can do the same thing in Spanish, if you know the indirect object pronouns.

Singular		Plural	
me	<i>me</i>	nos	<i>us</i>
te	<i>you</i>	os	<i>you</i>
le	<i>you, him, her, it</i>	les	<i>you, them</i>

Unlike in English, the indirect object pronouns go directly before the verb. If the sentence is negative (has a “**no**” in it), the indirect object pronoun still goes directly before the verb (see example 2).

Por ejemplo:

1. **Quiero comprar un regalo para Teresa.**

I want to buy a gift for Teresa.

Le quiero comprar un regalo.

I want to buy her a gift.



2. No voy a invitar a Pedro y Ernesto a la fiesta.

No **les** voy a invitar a la fiesta.

I'm not going to invite Peter and Ernest to the party.

I'm not going to invite them to the party.

3. Lupe está hablando con nosotros.

Lupe is talking with us.

Lupe **nos** está hablando.

Lupe is talking with us.

There is one case, however, in which the indirect object pronoun can be placed somewhere else. It can be attached to the end of an infinitive. For example, in example 1 above, the second sentence could be written, "**Quiero comprarle un regalo.**" In example 2 above, the second sentence could be written, "**No voy a invitarles a la fiesta.**"

To Whom? Adding Clarity to "Le" and "Les"

As you can see in the table above, when you use the indirect pronouns **le** or **les**, you could be referring to anyone: you, him, her, them! English is much more specific than Spanish in that sense. For that reason, if it is unknown or unclear to whom the indirect object pronoun is referring, it's a good idea to use proper nouns in addition to the indirect object pronoun.

Por ejemplo:



1. **Jenny le está escribiendo una carta a su padre.**
- *Jenny is writing a letter to her father.*
2. Carlos quiere dar**les** algo **a ustedes.**
- *Carlos wants to give you something.*
3. **Le** voy a llamar **a Juan** mañana.
- *I'm going to call John tomorrow.*

You can also use the indirect object noun in addition to the pronoun if you want to emphasize to whom or for whom the action is occurring.

Por ejemplo:

Te invito a ti y nadie más.
- *I'm inviting you and no one else.*



A Note of Caution

Indirect object pronouns in the "yo," "tú," "nosotros," and "vosotros" forms are **identical** to reflexive pronouns! (You'll study reflexive pronouns further in Chapter 6.3.) Their uses are quite different, however, so the only way you'll be able to tell the difference is by the context of the sentence.

4.3 Putting Direct & Indirect Object Pronouns Together

Now that you've learned about direct and indirect object pronouns, what happens if you want to use them together?

The sentences that follow are examples of both object pronouns being used together. The direct object is in **bold**, while the indirect object is underlined.

- Does Hector give **them** to you? ¿*Te **los** da Héctor?*
- They ask us for **it**. *Ellos **nos lo** piden.*
- I need to give **it** to him tomorrow. *Necesito **dárselo** mañana.*

To refresh your memory, the direct and indirect object pronouns that you will use in combination are as follows:

<i>Indirect object pronouns</i>	<i>Direct object pronouns</i>
me	
te	
<u>se</u> (<i>this is le normally</i>)	lo, la
nos	
os	
<u>se</u> (<i>this is les normally</i>)	los, las

When you combine the direct and indirect object pronouns in a sentence, you have two options.

- You can put the indirect object pronoun, followed by the direct object pronoun, as two separate words **before the verb**.
 - such as, "**Te lo voy a dar.**" *I'm going to give it to you.*
- You can **attach** the indirect object pronoun and the direct object pronoun **onto the end of an infinitive**.
 - such as, "**Voy a dártelo.**" *I'm going to give it to you.*

(Note that you must add an accent on the infinitive ending to preserve the correct pronunciation.)

Which Object Comes First?

In English, you can switch the order of the direct and indirect objects. For example:

- I will give **it** to him. or I will give him **it**.
- Hector gave **them** to you. or Hector gave you **them**.

In Spanish, on the other hand, the indirect object pronoun will ALWAYS come before the direct object pronoun.

Por ejemplo:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Mi profesor me enseña hablar español.
Mi profesor me lo enseña.</p> | <p><i>My professor teaches me to speak Spanish.</i>
<i>My professor teaches me it.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Nos arreglan los boletos de avión.
Nos los arreglan.</p> | <p><i>They arrange our plane tickets for us.</i>
<i>They arrange them for us.</i></p> |
| <p>3. Paula te repara la computadora.
Paula te la repara.</p> | <p><i>Paula repairs the computer for you.</i>
<i>Paula repairs it for you.</i></p> |
| <p>4. Jorge le pide los libros a Carla.
Jorge se los pide.</p> | <p><i>George asks Carla for the books.</i>
<i>George asks her for them.</i></p> |

Why Does ‘Le’ Change to ‘Se’?

As with so many irregularities in the Spanish language, the change of the indirect object pronoun in the third person makes pronunciation easier.

- Try saying, “*Le loy voy a dar.*”
- Now, try saying, “**Se lo voy a dar.**” *I’m going to give it to him.*
- Can you hear why **le** changes to **se**?

Por ejemplo:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Les servimos la comida.
Se la servimos.</p> | <p><i>We serve them the food.</i>
<i>We serve them it.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Le muestra la casa.
Se la muestra.</p> | <p><i>He shows them the house.</i>
<i>He shows them it.</i></p> |
| <p>3. Les explican los chistes a Uds.
Se los explican.</p> | <p><i>They explain the jokes to you.</i>
<i>They explain them to you.</i></p> |

To Whom? Clarifying “Se”

The word “**se**” can refer to any number of indirect pronouns: him, her, it, them, you.... Just as it is recommended to add a clarification after “**le**,” if your audience does not know to whom you are referring, it is also recommended to add a clarification after the use of “**se**” if the indirect object is not clear.

To do so, use “**se**” as you normally would, then append one of the following to the end of your sentence:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Ud. • a él • a ella | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Uds. • a ellos • a ellas |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|