

Speech register

Spanish · British English › Spanish

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Formal vs. Informal Style in Spanish (C1)

Hello there! At C1 level in Spanish, it's not just about using grammar correctly, but also mastering the art of adapting your speech style to the context. In Spain, much like in the UK, there are clear distinctions between formal and informal language, which influence vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, and even intonation. Grasping these nuances will help you sound natural and appropriate in any situation.

The main grammatical differences between formal and informal styles often revolve around the choice of pronouns and their corresponding verb forms, ways of making requests or suggestions, and the use of the passive voice and more complex sentence structures.

- The use of pronouns *tú* (informal) vs. *usted/ustedes* (formal).
- Imperative forms (*imperativo*) for *tú* and *usted/ustedes*.
- The use of the conditional mood (*condicional*) for politeness (*Quisiera* instead of *Quiero*).
- The subjunctive mood (*subjuntivo*) in formal requests/suggestions.
- The passive voice (*ser + participio*) vs. constructions with *se* (impersonal/passive).
- Future tenses (*futuro simple* vs. *ir a + infinitivo*).
- Formal conjunctions and adverbs (e.g., *no obstante*, *asimismo*).
- Subject-verb inversion (especially in formal writing).

For politeness: **Conditional + Infinitive** (e.g., *Me gustaría hablar*)

Verb	Informal (tú)	Formal (usted)	Formal (ustedes)
Hablar (to speak)	Habla	Hable	Hablen
Comer (to eat)	Come	Coma	Coman
Vivir (to live)	Vive	Viva	Vivan

Por favor, dirija sus preguntas al ponente.

Please, direct your questions to the speaker.

Watch out! A common pitfall is mixing formal and informal forms within the same conversation. Decide on one style at the outset and stick to it consistently, unless you're intentionally shifting your register.

Memory Trick: Usted/Ustedes commands are always Subjunctive! - remember that the imperative forms for *usted* and *ustedes* (both positive and negative) are identical to their *Presente de Subjuntivo* forms. Easy to recall!

Another area where style plays a crucial role is the passive voice. In formal language (especially in writing and reports), we often use the *ser + participio* construction to emphasise the agent of the action or to lend an objective tone to the statement. In informal and impersonal styles, you'll more frequently encounter constructions with *se*.

Las casas son vendidas por la agencia.

~~Se venden las casas por la agencia.~~

The **ser + participio** construction is preferred when the agent of the action is clearly specified (e.g., *por la agencia*). The **se** construction is more neutral or used when the agent is unknown or unimportant.

¿Podría indicarme el camino más corto, por favor?

Could you please show me the shortest way?

Also, bear in mind the differences in future tenses: the futuro simple (e.g., *La delegación arribará...*) is more frequently used in formal announcements and writing, whereas *ir a + infinitivo* (e.g., *Vamos a comer...*) is typical of colloquial speech and for expressing immediate future plans or intentions. Finally, formal conjunctions and adverbs like *no obstante* or *asimismo* lend elegance and precision to your expression, in contrast to simpler options such as *pero* or *además*.

El informe presenta datos preocupantes; no obstante, hay margen de mejora.

The report presents worrying data; nevertheless, there is room for improvement.

By practising these distinctions, you'll gain greater fluency and confidence in using Spanish in any situation, from formal correspondence to casual conversations with friends. ¡Mucha suerte!

Part 1 – Choose the correct word

Circle the option that correctly fills each gap.

1. _____ leche, no queda nada en la nevera.

We must buy milk, there's none left in the fridge.

- A) Tenemos que comprar B) Teníamos que comprar C) Tuvimos que comprar D) Compraríamos

2. Una vez aprobado, _____ a la ejecución del plan.

Once approved, we will proceed to carry out the plan.

- A) se procedería B) se procederá C) se procediera D) se procedió

3. No _____ por el examen, te irá bien.

Don't worry about the exam, you'll do fine.

- A) te preocupas B) se preocupa C) te preocupes D) preocupaste

4. Es _____ a un experto en estos casos.

In these cases, it is advisable to consult an expert.

- A) aconsejable que consulte B) aconsejable que consultará C) aconsejable que consultaba
D) aconsejable que consulta

5. Señor, no _____ en contactarnos si tiene preguntas.

Sir, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

- A) dudes B) dudará C) dudas D) dude

6. La conferencia _____ puntualmente a las nueve.

The conference will begin punctually at nine.

- A) comenzará B) comenzaría C) comenzó D) comience

7. La información solicitada _____ en breve.

The requested information will be sent shortly.

- A) se enviarán B) será enviada C) está enviando D) enviará

8. _____ sus trabajos antes del viernes, por favor.

Hand in your assignments by Friday, please.

- A) Entrega B) Entregas C) Entreguen D) Entregan

Part 2 – Fill in the gap

Write the missing word or phrase on the line.

1. _____ considerar esta oferta con más detenimiento.
You should consider this offer more carefully.
2. ¿_____ facilitarnos su dirección completa?
Would you be so kind as to give us your full address?
3. Señora López, _____, por favor; la reunión comenzará pronto.
Mrs López, please take a seat; the meeting will start soon.
4. Señor Pérez, nos complace _____ de que su solicitud ha sido aprobada.
Mr Pérez, we are pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.
5. _____ pronta respuesta a este asunto.
Thank you in advance for your prompt reply to this matter.
6. Los asistentes _____ antes de entrar al evento.
Participants will have to register before entering the event.

Part 3 – Translate

Write each word in Spanish on the line.

1. to come › _____
2. want › _____
3. be kind › _____
4. ask › _____
5. for this purpose › _____
6. to go out › _____

Part 4 – Match the pairs

Write the letter of the matching translation next to each term.

Term	Translation
1. examinar	A like
2. mediante	B examine
3. hablar	C speak
4. desarrollar	D via
5. gustar	E to forward
6. remitir	F can

7. poder

8. llegar

G develop

H to arrive

Answer Key

Part 1 — Choose the correct word

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. A) Tenemos que comprar | 5. D) dude |
| 2. B) se procederá | 6. A) comenzará |
| 3. C) te preocupes | 7. B) será enviada |
| 4. A) aconsejable que consulte | 8. C) Entreguen |

Part 2 — Fill in the gap

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Debería | 4. informarle |
| 2. Tendría la bondad de | 5. Agradezco de antemano su |
| 3. siéntese | 6. habrán de registrarse |

Part 3 — Translate

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. venir | 4. pedir |
| 2. querer | 5. a tales efectos |
| 3. ser amable | 6. salir |

Part 4 — Match the pairs

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. B (examine) | 5. A (like) |
| 2. D (via) | 6. E (to forward) |
| 3. C (speak) | 7. F (can) |
| 4. G (develop) | 8. H (to arrive) |