

Getting started with Spanish 1



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You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University –

[Getting started with Spanish 1](#)

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

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Introduction

Introduction

¡Empezamos! Let's begin!

Let's begin an exciting learning journey together in this beginners Spanish course, *Getting started with Spanish 1*



This might be the first time that you've tried learning Spanish or you may have picked up some words and phrases from perhaps travelling across the Spanish-speaking world. It doesn't matter whether you're a total beginner or not, we hope that you'll enjoy this course.

This two-week course is the start of your learning journey. Each week comprises 3–4 hours of interactive activities, explanations and tips about language-learning. It's a good idea to keep notes either on paper in a notebook or on your preferred digital device; in any case each week you'll be encouraged to add to your own personal phrase book and decide how best you can go about memorising and practising key phrases and vocabulary. There's also a weekly quiz for you to practise what you've been learning.

You'll start by learning how to say hello and goodbye at different times of the day. You'll also learn how to say your name. And you'll begin to use your language notebook to make

a note of the points you want to remember, such as important words, grammar rules, or expressions.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- pronounce vowel sounds and the letter 'h' in Spanish
- understand how to type the special characters á é ñ ¿
- make introductions using both formal and informal expressions
- greet people at different times of the day
- recognise the value of keeping a language notebook.

Enjoy the journey!

Open Centre for Languages and Cultures

This course has been developed from extract parts of [LXS001 - Beginners Spanish 1: ¡Empezamos!](#). The Open University has launched a dedicated learning centre called [The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures](#). OpenLearn is supporting this project and is providing extracted units of all courses on The Open Centre in our dedicated [Language and Cultures Hub](#).

The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures is the exciting new home for non-accredited language and intercultural communication short courses. You can study a wide range of language and language related subjects with us anywhere in the world, in any time zone, whatever your motivation – leisure, professional development or academic.

It's the one stop shop for engaging with languages, professional communication and intercultural dialogue.

Our short courses allow us to be agile and responsive to the needs of learners who want to be part of a global society. We offer non-accredited short courses in a range of subjects including modern languages and languages for business and the workplace. We are also leading the way in developing short courses for academic research methods and pre-sessional English with IELTS, which will be available for registration in due course.

The Open Centre for Languages and Cultures is an international leader in online language learning and intercultural communications, built on our pioneering pedagogy and research.

What makes the Open Centre different?

- The OU is the leader in online learning and teaching with a heritage of more than 50 years helping students achieve their learning ambitions.
- The short courses are underpinned by academic rigour and designed by native speakers experienced in producing engaging materials for online learning of languages and cultures.
- The graduating nature of the courses means that learners can build up their language and skills over time.
- Learners will also gain a better understanding of the culture(s) associated with the language(s) they study enabling the development of intercultural communication skills.
- Learners can mix and match the short courses and study more than one course at a time.

Once this course is complete you will be directed to OpenLearn's hub for language content where you will be able to build on your newly found language skills.

Now that you're fully prepared, it's time to start on [Week 1](#).

Week 1: How to say hello and goodbye

Introduction

Spanish (castellano or español), in its various forms, is the official language in 23 countries, and is spoken in many more. It is the world's second most spoken first language with millions of learners speaking it as a second or foreign language too.

This week you will learn how to greet people in the Spanish-speaking world, as well as be introduced to some basic Spanish pronunciation.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [LXS001 Beginners Spanish 1: ¡Empezamos!](#).

1 Greetings

Learning how to greet someone in another language is not just about learning the right words. Each culture has different customs which may vary, for example according to gender or level of familiarity. Let's first look at how people greet each other in the Spanish-speaking world.

Table 1 Expressions used for greetings

Hola.	<i>Hello.</i>
Buenos días	<i>Good morning</i>
¿Qué tal? / ¿Cómo estás?	<i>How are you?</i>
Muy bien, gracias.	<i>Very well, thank you.</i>
¿Y tú?	<i>And you?</i>

Activity 1

Listen to the following people greeting each other and tick the names that you hear. You will hear five names altogether.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Alejandro
- ☐ Antonio
- ☐ Marta
- ☐ María
- ☐ Guillermo
- ☐ señor García
- ☐ señor González
- ☐ Manolo
- ☐ Lola
- ☐ Lucía

Now listen to the conversation again and tick the greetings that are used.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Hola
- ☐ Adiós
- ☐ ¿Qué tal?
- ☐ Buenos días
- ☐ Buenas tardes
- ☐ Buenas noches
- ☐ ¿Cómo estás?

In Spanish and Latin American countries it is customary to greet female friends and family members by kissing them on one or both cheeks. Among men it is more usual to greet friends with a hug or a pat on the back, although some male relatives and friends kiss as well. In formal or business situations the norm is to shake hands.



The best way of judging what to do and thereby avoiding appearing too formal is to follow the lead of others or wait to see whether the person you are meeting offers an outstretched hand or leans towards you.

2 Spanish vowels

In Spanish there are only five vowel sounds: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*. These vowels are pronounced with a steady sound of similar length and quality whatever their position in the word. So whether the vowel is at the start, in the middle or at the end of the word – and even when two vowels appear together in a word – each vowel retains its own sound; for example, the sound of the letter ‘o’ is the same in *Olga*, *Curro* and *Asunción*.

Activity 2

Listen and repeat the five vowel sounds (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*) and the Spanish names that you hear. Record yourself as you do this and then listen back to your recording and compare it to the models. You can record yourself as many times as you wish by pressing ‘Re-record’ or ‘Start again’; your last recording will be saved.

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3 Listening practice

Now have a go at Activity 3.

Activity 3

Look at the following names and notice where there are two vowels together. Listen and repeat the names out loud, paying attention to the vowel sounds. Make sure that you pronounce a single steady sound for each vowel.

Matías, Eulalia, Consuelo, Juan, Ignacio, Sebastián, Asunción

Audio content is not available in this format.

Now listen to the audio below and click all the names that you hear.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Antonio
- ☐ Elena
- ☐ Consuelo
- ☐ Isabel
- ☐ Juan
- ☐ Octavio
- ☐ Umberto

4 Pronunciation of the letter 'h'

You will now look at how to pronounce the letter 'h' in Spanish.

Activity 4

Listen and pay attention to the pronunciation of the letter 'h'. How would you describe the way in which this letter is pronounced in Spanish?

hola, Horacio, historia, hotel, hospital, Helena, Honduras, alcohol

Audio content is not available in this format.

Discussion

Notice that the 'h' isn't sounded at all in Spanish, whether it's at the beginning or in the middle of a word. This is one of the few exceptions to the rule of sound–letter correspondence in Spanish.

Sound–letter correspondence in Spanish

Most sounds in Spanish are represented by a single letter. This is true for all vowel sounds and also for most of the consonant sounds, with a few exceptions. This makes reading and writing much easier than in some other languages, even when you have never seen or heard a word before.

You will now hear the same words one by one. Listen again and practise repeating each word out loud. Record yourself as you do this and then listen back to your recording and compare it to the model.

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5 Greetings at different times of the day

Table 2 lists greetings for different times of the day.

Table 2 Greetings for the morning, afternoon and evening

Buenos días.	<i>Good morning</i>
Buenas tardes.	<i>Good afternoon. / Good evening</i>
Buenas noches.	<i>Good evening. / Good night</i>

Buenos días is used in the morning and, in Spain, until lunchtime, even if lunchtime is at 2 or 3 p.m. *Buenas tardes* is used until around 8 o'clock, and from then on *Buenas noches* is used.

Activity 5

Listen to the following people greeting each other and click how many times each of the following expressions is used.

Buenos días • Buenas tardes • Buenas noches

Audio content is not available in this format.

How many times is *buenos días* used?

- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times

How many times is *buenas tardes* used?

- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times

How many times is *buenas noches* used?

- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ Three times

Activity 6

Match each greeting with the correct speech bubble.



Figure 1 a) top left, b) far top right, c) top right, d) bottom

- (a)
- (b)
- (c)
- (d)

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Buenas tardes

¡Buenas noches, chicos !

Buenas noches

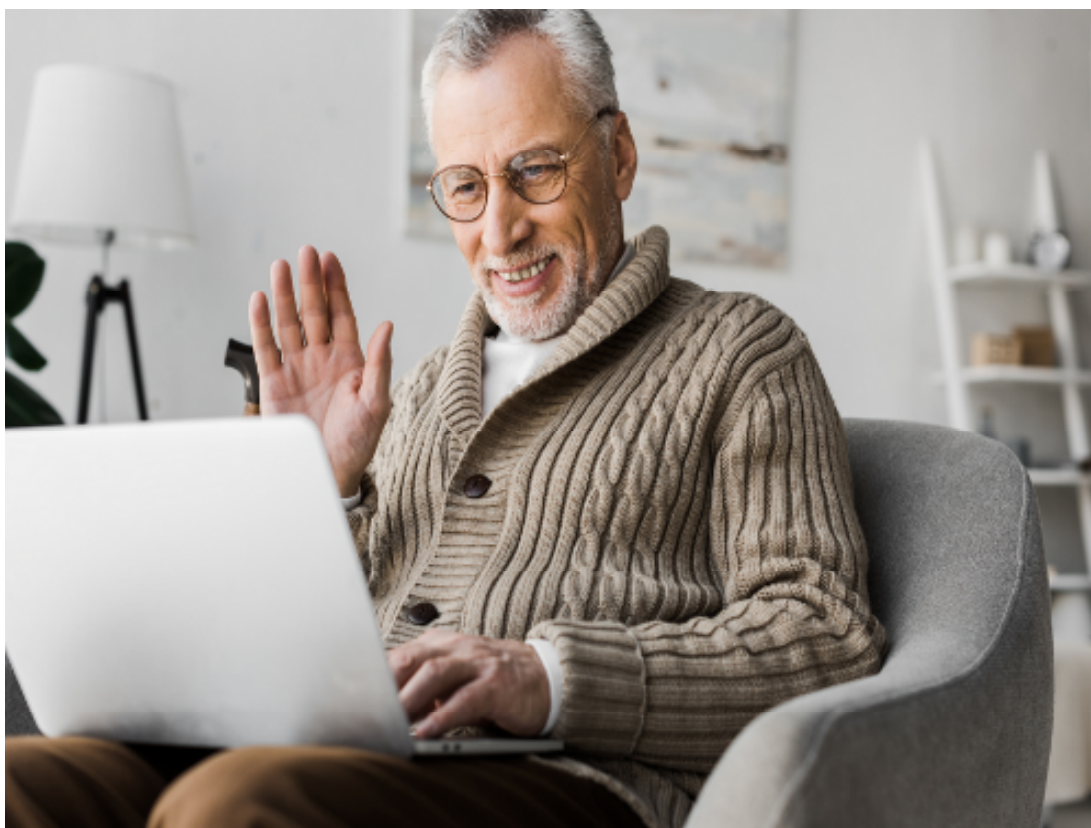
Buenos días

6 Saying goodbye

The most common expressions for saying goodbye in Spanish are given in Table 3.

Table 3 How to say goodbye

¡Adiós!	<i>Goodbye!</i>
¡Hasta luego!	<i>See you later.</i>
¡Hasta mañana!	<i>See you tomorrow.</i>
¡Chao! / ¡Chaíto! (LAm)	<i>Bye!</i>



Many people tend to reply using the expression that they have just heard. If someone says, “¡Hasta luego!” the other speaker often replies “¡Hasta luego!” too.

Activity 7

Listen to the following people saying goodbye to their friends. Match the person's name to the expression that he or she uses.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Clara

Liliana

Pedro

Aurora

Match each of the items above to an item below.

¡Adiós!

Chaíto

¡Hasta luego!

¡Hasta mañana!

Activity 8

Now listen to the greetings and respond with the same greeting.

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Activity 9

Now, to revise the language you have learned so far in this course, listen and take part in the dialogues, following the instructions given in the prompts. Say your responses out loud.

Listen and take part in the dialogue

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7 Typing special characters

Spanish has a variety of accented and special characters and it is important that you use them in writing. The quizzes in this course will mark your answer as incorrect if you leave out an accent which should be there! If you are typing a document, there are several ways of producing these characters depending on the device and the keyboard.

Mobile devices

On most mobile devices with a keyboard on its touchscreen, such as Android or Apple smartphones or tablets, the easiest way to produce an accented character is to press and hold the letter, wait for a popup showing all the possible accents, then slide your finger onto the one you want and let go.

PC

On a PC, desktop or laptop, with a physical keyboard, there are three ways to produce these characters:

- Press Ctrl and an accent symbol, then the letter; the accent symbol is ' (apostrophe) : (colon) or ~ (tilde). This works in Microsoft Office (including Microsoft Word) on recent computers, but it may not work on older computers or with other applications. You also cannot produce ¿ or ¡ this way.
- Hold down the Alt key and type a number code on the numeric keypad; you may need to have the Num Lock on for this to work. Note: you cannot use the number keys above the letters; if your keyboard does not have a numeric keypad (and some laptops do not), then this option is not available to you. The number codes to use are in this ['Accented character number codes'](#) document.
- In Microsoft Word, on the 'Insert' tab, click on 'Symbols' then 'Symbol' then 'More symbols'; from the table, choose the character you want and click 'Insert'.

Mac

On a Mac, desktop or laptop, with a physical keyboard:

- for accented vowels, press Option and e, then the vowel key
- for ñ, press Option and n, then n
- for ü, press Option and u, then u
- for ¿, press Option and Shift and ?
- for ¡, press Option and 1.

Whichever option you use, make sure you can type all of these characters: á é í ó ú ü ñ ¿ ¡

If you have difficulty, try the [Spanish dict](#) or [Macworld](#) websites, or search the web for "Accented or special characters on [manufacturer and model of your device OR the name of your software]".

Activity 10

Try typing the following characters, words and phrases in the box below.

á

é

ñ

¿

Adiós

Hasta mañana

inglés

Provide your answer...

Discussion

As you've probably realised, if the accented letter you want is already somewhere on your screen, then a further way of writing it is to copy and paste it where you want it to go! But you can't always count on having an example of the accented letter to hand, so you need to know how to produce them for yourself. It may feel cumbersome to start with, but it will soon become second nature.

8 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 1 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link), then return here when you have done it.

9 Summary of Week 1

Now you have reached the end of Week 1, reflect a little on what you have learnt.

Week 1 Reflection

In the boxes below, note down what you have found easy, useful or fun, and what was more difficult. If you would like, you can download your weekly reflections.

What was easy, useful or fun this week?

Provide your answer...

What was more difficult?

Provide your answer...

What do I need to practice?

Provide your answer...

¡Enhorabuena!

You have come to the end of Week 1. Next week you'll be learning how to introduce yourself and other people in formal and informal situations, and you'll be able to work further on your pronunciation and listening skills.

¡Hasta la semana que viene!

Week 2: Names and introductions

Introduction

¡Bienvenido/a a semana 2! Welcome to Week 2!



It's natural to ask someone's name when you first meet them, but you don't always meet people in the same circumstances. Meeting a parent at a children's birthday party is not the same as meeting the person who's going to interview you for a job.

This week you'll learn the formal and informal expressions used in Spanish to introduce yourself when you meet people for the first time.

Keep writing in your language notebook the things you want to remember. We'll give you some more tips for this such as adding examples to your notes.

Enjoy the week!

1 Saying your name

To start this week, you will learn how to say your name using the verb *ser* ('to be').

Verbs: *ser* ('to be')

Verbs in Spanish are conjugated; this means that they change according to which person they refer to. For most verbs, conjugating involves changing the verb ending, but *ser* and a few other commonly used verbs are irregular which means you need to learn the different forms individually.

Table 1 *Ser* ('to be')

	ser	
(yo)	soy	<i>I am</i>
(tú)	eres	<i>you are</i>
(usted)	es	<i>you are</i>
(él, ella)	es	<i>he, she is</i>
Soy Martín.	<i>I'm Martín.</i>	
¿Eres Mónica?	<i>Are you Mónica?</i>	
¿Usted es la señora Pérez?	<i>Are you Mrs Pérez?</i>	
Es José María.	<i>He is José María.</i>	

Note that in Spanish it is not always necessary to use the personal pronouns for 'I', 'you', 'he' or 'she'.

Activity 1

Listen to the audio, in which people are saying their names, and write down the word they all use before saying it.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

2 Formal and informal form of address

The use of *tú* and *usted* for 'you' in the singular varies across the Spanish-speaking world. In Spain, the informal *tú* is used increasingly not just with friends and family, but among people of the same age in general. Nowadays *usted* is restricted to formal situations or when addressing elderly people, as a mark of respect, courtesy or polite distance.



Figure 1 Introductions

In Latin America, the use of *usted* is the norm in most countries, sometimes even among family members, and *tú* is used in very few situations. There are differences from country to country, with the use of *tú* being more widespread in the coastal Caribbean areas, whilst in the Andean areas of Colombia or Venezuela *usted* is used even between siblings.

Activity 2

Listen to the recording and decide whether people are being addressed using *tú* or *usted*.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Tú
- ☐ Usted

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Tú
- ☐ Usted

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Tú
- ☐ Usted

Audio content is not available in this format.

- Tú
- Usted

Audio content is not available in this format.

- Tú
- Usted

3 Practising the verb *ser*

Personal pronouns are used to refer to a person when their name is not being used. In Spanish, the personal pronouns for the singular are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Personal pronouns

yo	<i>I</i>
tú/usted	<i>you</i>
él/ella	<i>he/she</i>

However, personal pronouns in Spanish are optional as the verb already has information about the person.

Soy Antonia. – *I'm Antonia.*

(Soy already signals that it is first person singular.)

When personal pronouns are used, it is generally for emphasis, contrast, or to avoid ambiguity.

Soy José María. – *I'm José María.*

Pues yo soy María Teresa. – *Well, I'm María Teresa.*

Y yo soy Juan Manuel. – *And I'm Juan Manuel.*

Activity 3

You will now take part in short dialogues where you will say your name and ask for other people's. Listen and take part in the introductions by following the prompts. In some cases you will have to decide whether to use *tú* or *usted*.

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4 Asking and giving names with *llamarse*

The verb *llamarse* ('to be called') is generally used when asking or giving names. To ask someone's name, you can use one of these two expressions:

¿Cómo te llamas? – (tú, *you*)

¿Cómo se llama? – (usted, él/ella, *you, he/she, it*)

Table 3 Giving your name using *llamarse*

me llamo	Me llamo José Antonio.	<i>My name is José Antonio.</i> <i>lit. 'I am called...'</i>
te llamas	¿Cómo te llamas?	<i>What's your name?</i> <i>(lit. 'What are you called?')</i>
se llama	¿Cómo se llama?	<i>Her name is María del Pilar.</i> Se llama María del Pilar.

Activity 4

Part 1

Read out loud these key phrases as you listen to them.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Part 2

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Activity 5

You will now take part in some short dialogues. First, you will hear the example below. Listen to it and then continue answering the questions you hear in the same way.

Example

You hear: —¿Cómo te llamas? (Josefina)

You say: —Me llamo Josefina

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5 Introducing people to each other

To introduce people in formal situations in Spanish, you can use the following expressions:

Le presento a Carlos Frutos. – *Let me introduce Carlos Frutos.*

Le presento a la señora Serra. – *Let me introduce Mrs Serra.*

Le presento al* señor Bustos. – *Let me introduce Mr Bustos.*

(* a + el → al)

To introduce people in informal situations in Spanish, you can use the following expressions:

Este es Carlos. – *This is Carlos.*

Esta es Consuelo. – *This is Consuelo.*

Note that you use *este* when introducing a male, and *esta* when introducing a female. You can also just motion to each person as you say their name.

If the situation is formal, you can reply as follows.

Mucho gusto.

Encantado. – *'Pleased to meet you.'*

Encantada.

If the situation is less formal, you can respond with the following:

¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?

¡Hola! ¿Cómo estás? – *'Hello, how are you?'*

Activity 6

Listen to people being introduced and decide whether the situation is formal or informal.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Informal
- ☐ Formal

Discussion

In dialogue (a) the language used is informal: *"Esta es..."*, *"¡Hola, ¿qué tal?"*. Fernando is introducing his friend María and his partner Liliana to another friend of his, Cristina.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- Informal
- Formal

Discussion

In dialogue (b) the language used is formal: “*señora Hernández*”, “*señor Fernando Cortés*”, “*le presento*”, etc. This conversation takes place in a work context, and the participants haven’t met before.

Activity 7

Listen to the audio below in which you are introduced to a number of people. Respond to the introduction formally or informally according to how they are introduced to you. Say your response out loud. A model answer is provided in the recording, although this may differ from the response you choose.

Note that *encantada* is said by a woman, *encantado* by a man; it does not depend on the gender of the person addressed, but on the gender of the person speaking.

Audio content is not available in this format.

6 Giving information about people you are introducing

You can give more information about the person you are introducing by saying how they are related to you, or how you know them.

Este es Andrés, mi marido. – *This is Andrés, my husband.*

Esta es Begoña, mi esposa. – *This is Begoña, my wife.*

Esta es mi amiga Isabel. – *This is my friend Isabel.*

Este es Fede, un amigo del colegio. – *This is Fede, a school friend.*

Esta es Laura, una vecina. – *This is Laura, a neighbour.*

Activity 8

Look at the way the lady in Figure 2 introduces her son Ernesto and her grandson Quique. Then fill in the gaps to write full sentences to introduce each person, giving some information about who they are. Follow the example.



Figure 2

Example:

_____ es Mireia, mi amiga

Esta es Mireia, mi amiga.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

7 Introducing people you know

You now know how to greet and introduce people in different situations. Read through Table 4 which lists some more key phrases to use when introducing people you know.

Table 4 Key phrases when introducing people

Le presento al señor Iturri.	<i>This is Mr Iturri.</i>
Mucho gusto.	<i>Pleased to meet you.</i>
¡Encantado! / ¡Encantada!	<i>Pleased to meet you.</i>
Este es Jorge, un amigo.	<i>This is Jorge, a friend.</i>
¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?	<i>Hello! How are you?</i>

Based on what you have learned so far in this course, now have a go at Activity 9.

Activity 9

Read the key phrases in Table 4 as you listen to them in the audio below. Click on pause so you can repeat them out loud one at a time.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Now record yourself introducing people you know. Firstly write down the names of 6 to 8 people you know, such as colleagues, friends or relatives. Then write a sentence to introduce each person, like in the example.

Examples

Les presento a Gonzalo Blázquez, mi jefe.

Esta es María, mi hermana.

jefe/jefa – *boss*

amigo/amiga – *friend*

vecino/vecina – *neighbour*

compañero/compañera – *colleague*

ayudante – *assistant*

pareja – *partner*

marido – *husband*

mujer – *wife*

8 The intonation of questions

In Spanish, questions do not require any changes in form or word order. A statement “*Eres Javier*” (‘You are Javier’) changes into a question either in writing by adding both initial (¿) and final (?) question marks or in speech by changing to an interrogative intonation.

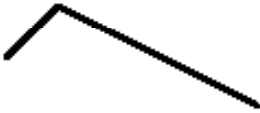

Statement Voice initially goes up, then goes down gradually.	<i>Eres Manolo.</i> 	You are Manolo.
Yes-no question Voice initially goes up, then down, then up again at the end.	¿ <i>Eres Manolo?</i> 	Are you Manolo?

Figure 3 Asking questions in Spanish

Activity 10

Listen and decide whether each sentence is a statement or a question.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

Audio content is not available in this format.

- ☐ Question
- ☐ Statement

9 Language notebook

Remember to take down notes in your language notebook of the things you want to remember.

When you note down a grammar rule, it is a good idea to write down a couple of examples, too, as this will help you to remember quickly how the rules are applied.

When you note down a table or a vocabulary list, it is useful to write down a couple of sentences that would be relevant to you and you could potentially use. For example, if you write down the alphabet, you can also write down how to spell your name, surname and place of birth.

10 This week's quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 2 quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new window or tab (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link), then return here when you have done it.

11 Summary of Week 2

You have now completed *Getting started with Spanish 1*. We hope you have enjoyed it. If you haven't done so already, start up a notebook to keep a record of things you learn as you go. This notebook will be your essential companion throughout your studies. When learning a language you may want to keep notes on the main points to remember, such as grammar rules, words or useful expressions.

Revise all the new words and expressions covered this week and try to memorise them. Revisiting them at regular intervals will help you keep everything you have learnt fresh in your memory and ready to use. You can also have mini-conversations with yourself.

Take some time to listen to the audios again and try to repeat out loud what you hear and reflect on what you've been doing this week.

Week 2 Reflection

What was easy, useful or fun this week?

Provide your answer...

What was more difficult?

Provide your answer...

What do I need to practice?

Provide your answer...

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University badged course [LXS001 Beginners Spanish 1: ¡Empezamos!](#).

Visit the [OpenLearn's hub for language](#) content where you will be able to build on your newly found language skills.

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