

Dictionary skills

Using a dictionary is a skill you can improve with practice and by following some basic guidelines. This section gives you a detailed explanation of how to use the *Collins Easy Learning Spanish Dictionary* to ensure you get the most out of it.

The answers to the questions in this section are on page 11.

Make sure you look on the right side of the dictionary

The Spanish – English side comes first, followed by the English – Spanish. At the side of the page, you will see a tab with either **Spanish – English** or **English – Spanish**, so you know immediately if you’re looking up the side you want.

- 1 Which side of the dictionary would you look up to translate ‘la bicicleta’?

Finding the word you want

When looking for a word, for example **feliz**, look at the first letter – **f** – and find the **F** section in the Spanish – English side. At the top of each page, you’ll find the first and last words on that page. When you find the page with the words starting with **fe**, scan down the page until you find the word you want. Remember that even if a word has an accent on it, for example **fórmula**, it makes no difference to the alphabetical order. The exception to this rule is **ñ** (*n tilde*), which is treated as a separate letter in Spanish, so that *leña* follows *lento*.

- 2 On which page will you find the word – ‘hermana’?
- 3 Which comes first – ‘francesa’ or ‘francés’?

To help you expand your vocabulary, we have also suggested possible alternatives in the WORD POWER features at the most common adjectives in English – try looking up **big** on page 24 and learning some of the words you could use.

Make sure you look at the right entry

An entry is made up of a **word**, its translations, and, often, example phrases to show you how to use the translations. If there is more than one entry for the same word, then there is a note to tell you so. Look at the following example entries:

flat ADJECTIVE

▷ see also **flat** NOUN

llano (FEM llana)

□ a flat surface una superficie llana

■ **flat shoes** zapatos bajos

■ **I've got a flat tyre.** Tengo una rueda desinflada.

flat NOUN

▷ see also **flat** ADJECTIVE

el piso (el apartamento *Latin America*)

4 Which of the two entries above will help you translate the phrase 'My car has a flat tyre'? Look for the two clues which are there to help you:

- > an example similar to what you want to say
- > the word ADJECTIVE



Look out for information notes which have this symbol on the left-hand side. They will give you guidance on grammatical points, and tell you about differences between Spanish and British life.

Choosing the right translation

The main translation of a word is shown on a new line and is underlined to make it stand out from the rest of the entry. If there is more than one main translation for a word, each one is numbered. On the English – Spanish side, Latin American equivalents are shown in brackets after the main translation, and are labelled *Latin America*.

Often you will see phrases in **light blue**, preceded by a white square □. These help you to choose the translation you want because they show how the translation they follow can be used.

5 Use the phrases given at the entry ‘hard’ to help you translate: ‘This bread is hard’.

Words often have more than one meaning and more than one translation. For example, a **pool** can be a puddle, a pond or a swimming pool; **pool** can also be a game. When you are translating from English into Spanish, be careful to choose the Spanish word that has the particular meaning you want. The dictionary offers you a lot of help with this. Look at the following entry:

pool NOUN
1 el estanque (*pond*)
2 la piscina (*swimming pool*)
3 el billar americano (*game*)
■ **a pool table** *una mesa de billar*
■ **the pools** *las quinielas* □ I do the pools every week. *Juego a las quinielas todas las semanas.*

The underlining highlights all the main translations, the numbers tell you that there is more than one possible translation and the words in brackets in *italics* after the translations help you choose the translation you want.

6 How would you translate ‘I like playing pool’?

Never take the first translation you see without looking at the others. Always look to see if there is more than one translation underlined.

Phrases in **bold type** preceded by a blue or black square ■/■ are phrases which are particularly common or important. Sometimes these phrases have a completely different translation from the main translation; sometimes the translation is the same. For example:

el **acuerdo** NOUN
agreement
□ llegar a un acuerdo *to reach an agreement*
■ **estar de acuerdo con alguien** *to agree with somebody*
■ **ponerse de acuerdo** *to agree* □ Al final no nos pusimos de acuerdo. *In the end we couldn't agree.* □ Nos pusimos de acuerdo para prepararle una bienvenida. *We agreed to organize a welcome for him.*
■ **¡De acuerdo!** *All right!*

When you look up a word, make sure you look beyond the main translations to see if the entry includes any **bold phrases**.

7 Look up 'ir' to help you translate the sentence 'Voy a casa mañana'?

Making use of the phrases in the dictionary

Sometimes when you look up a word you will find not only the word, but the exact phrase you want. For example, you might want to say 'What's the date today?'. Look up **date** and you will find that exact phrase and its translation.

Sometimes you have to adapt what you find in the dictionary. If you want to say 'I ate a sandwich' and look up **eat** you will find:

to **eat** VERB

comer

□ Would you like something to eat?

¿Quieres comer algo?

You have to substitute **comí** for the infinitive form **comer**. You will often have to adapt the infinitive in this way, adding the correct ending and choosing the present, future or past form. For help with this, look at the verb tables. On the **Spanish - English** side of the dictionary, you will notice that verbs are followed by a number in square brackets, which correspond to verb tables on pages 19-30 in the middle section of this dictionary. **Estudiar** is a verb ending in **-ar** so it follows the same pattern as verb number [25] **hablar**, which is set out in full on page 24.

8 How would you say 'I don't eat meat'?

Phrases containing nouns and adjectives also need to be adapted. You may need to make the noun plural, or the adjective feminine or plural. Remember that some Spanish nouns and adjectives change their spelling in the feminine or plural and that this is shown in the entry.

9 How would you say 'The boys are Spanish'?

Don't overuse the dictionary

It takes time to look up words so try to avoid using the dictionary unnecessarily, especially in exams. Think carefully about what you want to say and see if you can put it another way, using words you already know. To rephrase things you can:

> Use a word with a similar meaning. This is particularly easy with adjectives, as there are a lot of words which mean *good*, *bad*, *big* etc and you're sure to know at least one.

> Use negatives: if the cake you made was a total disaster, you could just say it wasn't very good.

> Use particular examples instead of general terms. If you are asked to describe the sports *facilities* in your area, and time is short, you could say something like '*In our town there is a swimming pool and a football ground.*'

10 How could you say '*Argentina is huge*' without looking up the word '*huge*'?

You can also often guess the meaning of a Spanish word by using others to give you a clue. If you see the sentence '*María lee un buen libro*', you may not know the meaning of the word **lee**, but you know it's a verb because it's preceded by **María**. Therefore it must be something you can do to a book: **read**. So the translation is: *María is reading a good book.*

11 Try NOT to use your dictionary to work out the meaning of the sentence '*La chica escribe una carta a su amiga en español*'.

Parts of speech

If you look up the word **flat**, you will see that there are two entries for this word as it can be a noun or an adjective. It helps to choose correctly between entries if you know how to recognize these different types of words.

Nouns and pronouns

Nouns often appear with words like *a, the, this, that, my, your* and *his*. They can be singular (abbreviated to SING in the dictionary):

his dog *her cat* *a street*

or plural (abbreviated to PL in the dictionary):

the facts *those people* *his shoes* *our holidays*

They can be the subject of a verb:

Vegetables are good for you

or the object of a verb:

I play **tennis**

Words like *I, me, you, he, she, him, her* and *they* are pronouns. They can be used instead of nouns. You can refer to a person as *he* or *she* or to a thing as *it*.

I bought my mother a box of chocolates.

- 12 Which three words in this sentence are nouns?**
- 13 Which of the nouns is plural?**
- 14 Which word is a pronoun?**

Spanish nouns are either masculine or feminine (abbreviated to MASC and FEM). Masculine nouns are shown by **el**:

el hombre ***el gato*** ***el fútbol***

Feminine nouns are shown by **la**:

la mujer ***la economía*** ***la fábrica***

The plural forms of **el** and **la** are **los** and **las**. The plural of most Spanish nouns is made by adding **s** if the word ends in a vowel, or **es** if it ends in a consonant:

los gatos *las mujeres*

Adjectives

Flat can be an adjective as well as a noun. Adjectives describe nouns: your tyre can be **flat**, you can have a pair of **flat** shoes.

15 In which sentence is 'dark' an adjective?

I'm afraid of the dark.

The girl has dark hair.

Spanish adjectives can be masculine or feminine, singular or plural, depending on the noun they describe:

un chico **guapo** (MASC SING)

una chica **guapa** (FEM SING: replace **-o** of masculine with **-a**)

unos chicos **guapos** (MASC PL = masculine singular + **s**)

unas chicas **guapas** (FEM PL = feminine singular + **s**)

The masculine and feminine singular forms of regular adjectives are shown on both sides of the dictionary. So if you want to find out what kind of houses **unas casas viejas** are, look under **viejo**.

There are separate masculine and feminine, singular and plural forms for irregular adjectives of nationality, and those ending in **-án**, **-ín**, **-ón**, eg **español** MASCULINE SINGULAR, **española**, FEMININE SINGULAR, **españoles** MASCULINE PLURAL, **españolas** FEMININE PLURAL.

Adjectives ending in **-or** also follow the above pattern unless they are comparatives. The feminine is shown in the dictionary for adjectives of this type.

hablador (FEM **habladora**) ADJECTIVE

- 1 chatty
- 2 gossipy

talkative ADJECTIVE

hablador (FEM habladora)

Other adjectives ending in a consonant do not have a separate feminine form, but do change in the plural, eg **azul** MASCULINE and FEMININE SINGULAR, **azules** MASCULINE and FEMININE PLURAL.

feliz (FEM **feliz**, PL **felices**) ADJECTIVE

happy

□ Se la ve muy feliz. *She looks very happy.*

■ **iFeliz cumpleaños!** *Happy birthday!*

■ **iFeliz Año Nuevo!** *Happy New Year!*

■ **iFelices Navidades!** *Happy Christmas!*

happy ADJECTIVE

feliz (FEM **feliz**, PL **felices**)

□ Janet looks happy. *Janet parece feliz.*

■ **to be happy with something** *estar contento con algo* □ I'm very happy with your work. *Estoy muy contento con tu trabajo.*

■ **Happy birthday!** *iFeliz cumpleaños!*

■ **a happy ending** *un final feliz*

If the masculine form of an adjective ends in **-e** or **-a**, the feminine form is the same, and both the masculine and feminine plurals are formed by adding **-s** to the masculine, eg **verde** MASCULINE and FEMININE SINGULAR, **verdes** MASCULINE and FEMININE PLURAL. Some adjectives remain the same whether they're masculine, feminine or plural. This is also shown in the dictionary:

el **rosa** ADJECTIVE, NOUN

pink

□ Va vestida de rosa. *She's wearing pink.*

■ **Llevaba unos calcetines rosa.** *He was wearing pink socks.*

Verbs

She's going to record the programme for me.

His time in the race was a new world record.

Record is a verb in the first sentence. In the second, it is a noun.

One way to recognize a verb is that it frequently comes with a pronoun such as **I**, **you** or **she**, or with somebody's name. Verbs can relate to the present, the past or the future. They have a number of different forms to show this: **I'm going** (present), **he will go** (future), and **Nicola went by herself** (past). Often verbs appear with **to**: **they promised to go**. This basic form of the verb is called the infinitive.

In this dictionary, verbs are preceded by 'to', so you can identify them at a glance. No matter which of the four previous examples you want to translate, you should look up 'to **go**', not '**going**' or '**went**'. If you want to translate '**I thought**', look up 'to **think**'.

16 What would you look up to translate the verbs in these phrases?

I came *she's crying* *they've done it* *he's out*

Verbs have different endings in Spanish, depending on whether you are talking about **yo, tú, nosotros** etc: **yo hablo, tú hablas, nosotros hablamos** etc. They also have different forms for the present, future, past etc. **Hablamos** (*we speak* = present), **hemos hablado** (*we spoke* = past), **hablaremos** (*we will speak* = future). **Hablar** is the infinitive and is the form that appears in the dictionary.

Sometimes the verb changes completely between the infinitive form and the **yo, tú, él** etc form. For example, *to give* is **dar**, but *I give* is **doy**, and **digo** comes from **decir** (*to say*).

On pages 24-30 of the middle section of this dictionary, you will find 7 of the most important regular and irregular Spanish verbs shown in full. On pages 19-23, you will find a list of the main forms of other key Spanish verbs. On the **Spanish - English** side of the dictionary, each Spanish verb has a number beside it - if you look this number up in the verb table section on pages 19-30 you will find the verb forms for that type of verb. Irregular Spanish verbs are marked in the dictionary with an asterisk.

to **fulfil** VERB

realizar*

□ He fulfilled his dream to visit China. **Realizó su sueño de viajar a China.**

■ **to fulfil a promise** **cumplir una promesa**

ir* VERBO [27]

1 to go

□ Anoche fuimos al cine. **We went to the cinema last night.** □ ¿A qué colegio vas? **What school do you go to?**

■ **ir de vacaciones** **to go on holiday**

■ **ir a por** **to go and get**

17 Which verb pattern does the verb **estudiar** follow?

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that describes a verb or an adjective:

Write **soon**.

Check your work **carefully**.

The film was **very** good.

In the sentence ‘*The swimming pool is open daily*’, **daily** is an adverb describing the adjective **open**. In the phrase ‘*my daily routine*’, **daily** is an adjective describing the noun **routine**. We use the same word in English for both adjective and adverb forms, but to get the right Spanish translation, it is important to know if it’s being used as an adjective or an adverb. When you look up **daily** you find:

daily ADJECTIVE, ADVERB

1 diario

□ daily life [la vida diaria](#) □ It’s part of my daily routine. [Forma parte de mi rutina diaria.](#)

■ a daily paper [un periódico](#)

2 todos los días

□ The pool is open daily. [La piscina abre todos los días.](#)

The examples show you **daily** being used as an adjective and as an adverb and will help you choose the right Spanish translation.

Take the sentence ‘The menu changes daily’.

18 Is ‘daily’ an adverb or an adjective here?

Prepositions

Prepositions are words like **for**, **with** and **across**, which are followed by nouns or pronouns:

*I’ve got a present **for** David. Come **with** me. He ran **across** the road.*

The party’s over.

The shop’s just over the road.

19 Which sentence shows a preposition followed by a noun?

Answers

- 1 the Spanish side
- 2 on page 159
- 3 **francés** comes first
- 4 the first (ADJECTIVE) entry
- 5 **Este pan está duro.**
- 6 **Me gusta jugar al billar americano.**
- 7 **I'm going home tomorrow.**
- 8 **No como carne.**
- 9 **Los niños son españoles.**
- 10 **Argentina es muy grande.**
- 11 **The girl is writing a letter to her friend in Spanish.**
- 12 **mother**, **box** and **chocolates** are nouns
- 13 **chocolates** is plural
- 14 **I** is a pronoun
- 15 in the second sentence
- 16 to **come**, to **cry**, to **do**, to **be**
- 17 **hablar**, number [25]
- 18 daily is an **adverb**
- 19 the second sentence