SPANISH SYSTEM

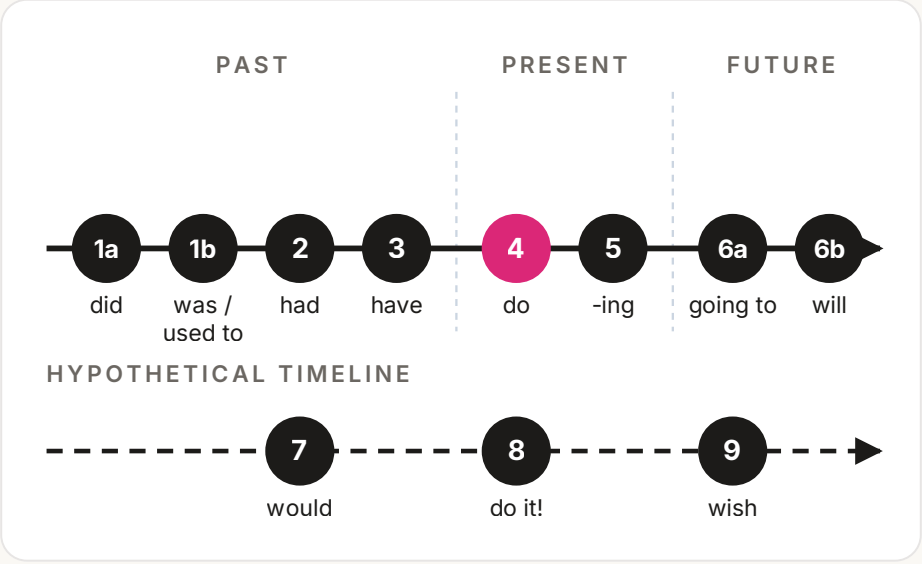
Learn pieces, not words.

LEVEL C

Manual C

Sounding natural

Where the map bends, verb phrases people use, and how people actually sound.



Practice every chapter at **spanish-system.vercel.app**

Contents

Read this first 3

1 · Where the map bends 4

2 · Verb phrases people actually use 6

3 · Ser and estar, the edges 7

4 · The pronouns, finished 8

5 · How people actually sound 9

6 · Left out on purpose 11

What you can now do 12

C assumes B. It is the shortest of the three on purpose.

Read this first

Manuals A and B gave you the map and filled it in. Manual C doesn't add anything to the map. It's about the places where Spanish is subtler than the map, and about sounding like a person rather than a system.

Be honest with yourself about what this book can do. A short manual can take you from correct to natural. It can't take you to native, and nothing you can read can. What gets you the rest of the way is hours of listening and talking, which by now you're equipped to do. Think of C as the notes a good friend would give you after a year of hearing you speak.

Roughly: A was A1–A2, B was B1–B2, and C is the useful part of C1. Nobody buying a short book expects C2, and this one doesn't pretend to.

1 · Where the map bends

Aunque: both timelines

Aunque (although, even if) is the one connector that works on either timeline, and the choice carries meaning.

- Aunque **llueve**, voy a salir. — Even though it's raining (it is), I'm going out. (slot 4: a fact)
- Aunque **llueva**, voy a salir. — Even if it rains (it might), I'm going out. (slot 9: a possibility)

Same sentence; the slot says whether you know the rain is real. This is the alternate timeline at its most precise: not "wishes," exactly, but "not asserted."

Que-clauses about things that may not exist

- Busco un apartamento que **tiene** balcón. — I'm looking for an apartment that has a balcony. (A specific one. I know it exists.)
- Busco un apartamento que **tenga** balcón. — I'm looking for an apartment that has a balcony. (Any one. It may not exist.)

Describing a thing you haven't found yet puts the description on the alternate timeline. Once you've found it, it comes back to the main one.

The polite pasts

- **Quisiera un café.** — I'd like a coffee. (9-past used as politeness; softer than *quiero*, softer even than *me gustaría*.)
- **¿Pudiera ayudarme?** — Might you help me? (Same move with *poder*. Very polite, slightly old-fashioned, perfect for a stranger.)
- **Debería / tendría que** — I should / I ought to. (Slot 7 for advice, including to yourself.)

Guessing with the future and the conditional

Spanish uses slot 6b to wonder about now, and slot 7 to wonder about then:

- ¿Qué hora **será**? — I wonder what time it is.
- **Estará** en casa. — He's probably at home.
- **Serían** las diez cuando llegó. — It must have been about ten when he arrived.

Once you hear this, you'll hear it constantly. English does it with "must be" and "probably"; Spanish moves the slot.

> **Careful.** None of this is new grammar. It's the same slots doing a second job. If a sentence seems to be in the "wrong" slot, ask what the speaker isn't sure of.

2 · Verb phrases people actually use

The Engines were your first verb phrases. Here are the ones that make intermediate speakers sound fluent. Each is a conjugated verb plus a fixed little word plus a form you know.

Phrase	Means	Example
acabo de + Action	I just…	Acabo de llegar. — I just arrived.
llevo + time + -ando	I've been …ing for	Llevo dos años trabajando aquí. — I've been working here two years.
sigo + -ando	I'm still …ing	Sigo esperando. — I'm still waiting.
vuelvo a + Action	I … again	Vuelvo a empezar. — I'm starting again.
dejo de + Action	I stop …ing	Dejé de fumar. — I quit smoking.
hay que + Action	one has to, you've got to	Hay que trabajar. — You've got to work.
suelo + Action	I usually	Suelo comer temprano. — I usually eat early.
estoy a punto de + Action	I'm about to	Estoy a punto de salir. — I'm about to leave.

Every one of these is an Engine. Treat them like the original eight: memorize the "I" form, learn the five endings, and the Action never changes. The site lists them under Level C engines.

> **Shortcut.** *Optional. If this doesn't click, skip it. Nothing later depends on it.* *Acabo de* is the single most useful of these, because it replaces slot 3 for anything recent: *Acabo de comer* says "I just ate" more naturally than *He comido*. And it never changes form except for person.

3 · Ser and estar, the edges

A gave you the rule: *es* for what something is, *está* for how or where it is right now. It holds. These are the edges where the same descriptor means two things depending on the verb:

Descriptor	with ser	with estar
aburrido	boring	bored
listo	clever	ready
rico	rich	delicious
malo	bad (a bad person)	ill, or gone off (food)
vivo	sharp, quick-witted	alive
seguro	safe	sure, certain

- Es aburrido. — He's boring. · Está aburrido. — He's bored.
- Es rico. — He's rich. · Está rico. — It's delicious.

And two that aren't about the descriptor at all:

- **Events** take *ser* even though they're "where": *La fiesta es en mi casa.* (The party is at my house.) It's what the party is, not where a thing sits.
- **Death** takes *estar*, oddly: *Está muerto.* Think of it as a state, which is what it is.

> **Sidebar · the dead and the married.** Students always ask why *está muerto* uses the "temporary" verb. The answer is that *estar* was never about temporary. It's about a state something is in, as opposed to what it is by nature. Dead, married, broken, ready, bored: all states. Nobody is born married.

4 · The pronouns, finished

B gave you one pronoun at a time. Here's two at once, which is where *dámelo* and *se lo di* come from.

Order: the "to whom" pronoun (*me, te, le, nos, les*) always comes before the "what" pronoun (*lo, la, los, las*). *Me lo dio.* — He gave it to me. *Te la mando.* — I'll send it to you.

The one swap: *le* and *les* become **se** in front of *lo, la, los, las*. Not *le lo* but **se lo**. *Se lo di.* — I gave it to him. *Se las mandé.* — I sent them to her.

On the end of a verb: both pronouns attach together, and an accent appears to keep the stress where it was: *dámelo* (give it to me), *mándasela* (send it to her), *quiero dártelo* (I want to give it to you).

> **Careful.** *Se lo di* is ambiguous: to him, to her, to them, to you (polite). Spanish doesn't mind; context does the work. If you need to be clear, add it: *Se lo di a ella.*

5 · How people actually sound

Discourse markers

These do nothing grammatically and everything socially. Native speech is full of them; learner speech has none, which is why it sounds stiff even when it's correct.

Marker	Does	Example
bueno	opens, softens, shifts	Bueno, vamos.
pues	buys a second, shrugs	Pues no sé.
o sea	rephrases	Es caro, o sea, carísimo.
es que	excuses	Es que no pude.
la verdad	"honestly"	La verdad, no me gusta.
fíjate / fíjese	"get this"	Fíjate que llegó tarde.
¿sabes? / ¿sabe?	checks you're following	Es difícil, ¿sabes?
en fin	wraps up	En fin, ya pasó.
digo	self-correction	El martes… digo, el miércoles.
¿no?	tag question	Hace calor, ¿no?

Pick three and overuse them for a week. Then pick three more.

Register: tú, usted, and the room

By C you know the forms. What C adds is reading the room:

- **Usted** to anyone older, anyone serving you, anyone you've just met in a formal setting, and anyone in uniform. In much of Colombia, *usted* is also used between friends and even family. It isn't cold there; it's just the default.
- **Tú** once someone uses it with you, or invites you: *Tutéame* (use *tú* with me).

- When in doubt, start with *usted* and let them lower it. Nobody is offended by respect.

Regional notes you'll actually meet

- **Vos** replaces *tú* in Argentina, Uruguay, most of Central America, and parts of Colombia (Antioquia, Valle). The present forms shift the stress: *vos trabajás, vos querés, vos tenés*. Commands drop the final letter: *vení, mirá, decime*. Recognize it; produce it only if you live where it's spoken.
- **Vosotros** is Spain's "you all": *trabajáis, queréis*. Not used in Latin America. If Spain is in your future, the forms are regular and take an afternoon.
- **Zheísmo:** Argentina's *ll* and *y* as *sh*. *Calle* → "CA-she." It's the same word.
- **Leísmo:** Spain says *le* where Latin America says *lo* for a male person: *Le vi* vs *Lo vi* (I saw him). Both are standard where they're used.

6 · Left out on purpose

For completeness, so you know they exist and can stop wondering:

- **Pretérito anterior** (*hube trabajado*): literary, effectively extinct in speech. Never produce it.
- **Future subjunctive** (*trabajare*): legal documents and proverbs only. *Adonde fueres, haz lo que vieres.*
- **The -se subjunctive** (*trabajase*): same meaning as *trabajara*, more common in Spain and in writing. Recognize it.
- **Vosotros commands and the rest of its forms:** an afternoon if you need them.

What you can now do

With A, B and C together you can hold a conversation on the main timeline and the alternate one, in any slot, with the little words in the right places, and sound like someone who has been listening. The gap between you and a native speaker is no longer grammar. It's hours.

So: the practice site for the mechanics, and real people for everything else. Say *pues…* *a ver…* while you find the next piece. You have all the pieces now.