



## Spanish and English

### Language background

Spanish is a Romance language spoken by more than 480 million people across Spain, Latin America and many parts of the world. It developed from Latin and belongs to the Indo-European language family, the same broad family as English.

Spanish uses the Roman alphabet, the same writing system as English. However, Spanish spelling generally reflects pronunciation closely, meaning words are usually written as they are spoken.

Spanish verbs change form to show both tense and the subject performing the action. Because these verb endings provide information about the subject, the subject pronoun is sometimes omitted in Spanish sentences. These differences can influence how Spanish speakers approach English sentence structure and spelling.

### Key linguistic differences from English

- Spanish uses the Roman alphabet, the same writing system as English
- Spanish spelling is highly phonetic
- Spanish verbs show subject and tense through verb endings
- Spanish sometimes omits subject pronouns
- Spanish has five main vowel sounds, while English has many more
- Spanish pronunciation distinguishes /b/ and /v/ differently from English
- English consonant clusters can be difficult for Spanish speakers
- Spanish and English share many cognates (similar words with shared origins)

### What teachers may notice in English

Teachers may notice patterns such as:

- spelling English words exactly as they sound
- confusion between /b/ and /v/ sounds
- omission of subject pronouns in sentences
- difficulty distinguishing English vowel sounds
- additional vowel sounds inserted in words such as *eschool* or *especial*
- recognition of familiar vocabulary due to cognates

These patterns are often predictable forms of language transfer between Spanish and English.



## Why this happens

Spanish spelling closely reflects pronunciation, so learners often apply similar phonetic strategies when spelling English words. Because English spelling contains many irregular patterns, this can result in spellings that differ from standard English forms.

Spanish verbs include endings that indicate the subject performing the action. Because this information is embedded in the verb form, subject pronouns are sometimes omitted in Spanish sentences. When learners produce English sentences, they may transfer this pattern.

Spanish has a smaller vowel system than English, which means several English vowel sounds may sound similar to Spanish speakers. This can influence both pronunciation and spelling.

English also allows consonant clusters such as school or spring. Because Spanish words rarely begin with these clusters, speakers may insert a vowel to make pronunciation easier.

## Classroom strategies

- explicitly teach irregular English spelling patterns
- highlight English vowel contrasts during reading and speaking
- model sentence structures that include subject pronouns
- practise pronunciation of consonant clusters
- use cognates to support vocabulary development
- encourage oral rehearsal before writing

## Strengths to leverage

- familiarity with alphabetic writing systems
- strong oral communication skills
- ability to recognise cognates between languages
- confidence in discussion
- experience navigating multilingual environments

## Reflective questions for teachers

- Are spelling patterns influenced by pronunciation?
- Are sentence structures influenced by Spanish grammar?
- Could cognates support vocabulary learning?