

Students entering Spanish classes starting at level 2 and above will keep a journal over the summer. Details on how to get the most out of this practice are below.

Why are we doing this?

Developing a consistent writing practice in a foreign language has many benefits. The key benefit, however, is that you will be gaining control over the language to express yourself by using and perfecting the tools (grammar and vocabulary) with which you are familiar. The more consistent and intentional your practice, the more your competence and abilities will grow.

As you progress over the summer, you might find that you are starting to *lift off*, meaning you can write without relying on your tools. That, my friends, is the first step towards proficiency and the beginning of fluency.

What follows is a rather detailed guide that includes instructions for how to carry out your writing practice. It includes information on the notebook itself, resources, writing tools and strategies, and tips on how to overcome procrastination. Familiarizing yourself with the information in this guide (about 10 – 15 minutes) will pay dividends when you sit down to write.

What kind of notebook should I use?

All journaling must be done by hand in this exact composition notebook. Purchase [this college ruled composition notebook](#). Write your name on the cover using a permanent black marker.

- a. Spiral bound notebooks will not be accepted.
- b. Stapled loose leaf will not be accepted.
- c. Digital notebooks will not be accepted.
- d. In short, no other notebook besides the one above will be accepted.

How often should I make an entry?

Here are the guidelines for making an entry in your notebook.

For students preparing for Spanish 2, 2H, 3, and 3H – 3 times a week

For students entering Spanish 4 and 4H – 4 times a week

For students entering AP Spanish – 5 times a week

Do I need a heading for each entry?

Yes. Each entry will start on a new page (front or back is fine). The entry will take up the first line of the page and will read as follows.

“Your first and last name. The day of the week (in Spanish). The date (in Spanish)”

What are the days of the week in Spanish?

Remember that days of the week are lowercased. Starting with Monday, they are: lunes, martes, miércoles, jueves, viernes, sábado, domingo.

And while we are at it, here are the months during which you will keep your journal, starting with June: junio, julio, agosto

How do I write the date in Spanish?

Remember that the date in Spanish is written in reverse order compared to English. June 2, therefore, is written, “el dos de junio”. Spell out your numbers.

What should I write about?

Here are a few tips, guidelines, and strategies to promote your growth as you write.

- Use what you know: use grammatical structures and vocabulary domains from your prior years of study. Review the resources listed when necessary.
- Grow what you know: when you are curious about how to say a new word or phrase: look it up. You'll have to "cite" words that you look up. Instructions for how to cite a word are given later in this tutorial.

What are the grammatical structures that I should be practicing?

It depends on your level. Here are some structures you have learned listed by year. You should focus on using these as you write. Again, there are resources to review these in the resources section.

- Spanish 1 – the present tense, the simple future (ir + a + infinitive), the verb gustar
- Spanish 2 – the present progressive tense (estar + gerund), the preterite tense, the imperfect tense, reflexive verbs
- Spanish 3 – the present perfect tense (haber + past participle), the present subjunctive

As such, students entering Spanish 2/2H should mainly use the present tense, the simple future, and verbs like gustar as they write. This means that you should not attempt to write in the past tense, but rather you will write about what you do and are going to do. Gustar will also allow you to discuss what you like. Students entering Spanish 3 / 3H, should use a mix of tenses to express what they do (present), are doing (present progressive), did (preterite), and used to do (imperfect). Students entering 4 / 4H / and AP should employ the highest variety of tenses to express what they do (present), are doing (present progressive), have done (present perfect), are going to do (simple future), did (preterite), and used to do (imperfect). The subjunctive will also allow upper level students to discuss what they hope / recommend / wish / desire / suggest that *other* people do. It is absolutely key that you review the formation of these tenses as you write.

Ok, it's great to have a reminder about grammatical structures, but what should I actually write about?

Here are some prompts to spark your writing.

¿Qué haces durante un día típico de verano? ¿Qué hace tu familia? ¿tus amigos?

¿Qué haces durante las vacaciones? ¿Qué hacen tus amigos?

¿Dónde te gusta estudiar y por qué?

¿Qué haces durante tu tiempo libre en el verano? ¿tu familia? ¿tus amigos?

¿Tienes un trabajo en el verano? ¿Qué es?

¿Qué vas a hacer hoy?

¿Qué hiciste ayer? (For levels Spanish 3 and above)

¿Qué hacías durante el verano cuando eras un niño? (For levels 3 and above)

¿Qué vas a hacer durante este mes?

¿Qué comes? ¿Qué come tu familia? ¿Qué comen tus amigos?

¿Qué haces con los amigos en el verano?

¿Qué deportes practicas durante el verano?

¿Vas a la playa o a las montañas durante el verano?

¿Qué te gusta leer?

¿Qué haces durante los fines de semana durante el verano?
¿Qué programas de televisión te gusta mirar en el verano?
¿Cómo es tu rutina del verano?
¿Cómo es tu familia?
¿Cómo es tu escuela?
¿Cómo es tu perro?
¿Cómo es tu profesor de historia?
¿Qué clases tienes el año que viene?
¿Qué clases tuviste el año pasado? (For levels Spanish 3 and higher)
¿Qué quieres hacer este verano? ¿Qué no quieres hacer?

Keep in mind, these prompts are designed to spark your thinking. You do not necessarily need to respond to any of them, but hopefully they will give you a sense of where your writing could go. It is key that you write in a way that allows you to grow your abilities and explore your curiosity. Also, being that diary writing is a regular practice, you could conceivably write about a similar topic multiple times and change the specifics. For example, if you typically write in the morning about what you are going to do that day (simple future, ir + a + infinitive), your overall structure would be similar on a daily basis but the activities that you are going to do as well as the vocabulary and details related to them would change.

Ok, I think I'm ready to start writing. How long should each entry be?

Here are the word count guidelines for each entry. You don't need to have the exact number of words, but you do need to count the number of words and cite it at the end of the entry.

For students moving into Spanish 2 / 2H – 40 words
For students moving into Spanish 3 / 3H – 60 words
For students moving into Spanish 4 / 4H – 80 words
For students moving into AP Spanish – 90-100 words

You will need to count and cite the number of words at the end of each entry.

Is there anything else I need to include in each entry?

Yes. You must "cite" any new grammatical structure or words that you look up. You'll do this by listing these words and structures at the bottom of the entry and writing the name of the website where you found them. Remember that if you cannot explain a structure or a word, then you are not ready to use it. Using advanced grammar without understanding it is like handing a jackhammer to a child. It is not the child who will have control, but rather the tool. In language, one of your main goals is to demonstrate – mainly for yourself – that you have control over the tools available to you.

Ok, this is a lot. Could you review what I need in each entry, and could I see an example of an entry for my level?

Yes. Here is a list of the required elements of each entry.

Heading – written on the first line. First Name Last Name, day in Spanish, date in Spanish

Handwritten Spanish entry – be sure to double space these.

Word count – count and write the number of words

References – write in English and Spanish the words that you looked up as well as where you found them.

[Example – For students entering Spanish 2 / 2H](#)

[Example – For students entering Spanish 3 / 3H](#)

[Example – For students entering Spanish 4 / 4H / AP](#)

Ok, what resources are available to help me?

Here are resources to help you. Keep in mind, however, that it is your strategy that will really determine your success.

Resources – grammatical topics

[Present tense](#)

[Gustar](#)

[Simple future](#)

[Present progressive](#)

[Preterite](#)

[Imperfect](#)

[Present perfect](#)

[Present subjunctive](#)

Resources – verbs

[List of AR, ER, IR verbs](#)

[Infinitive phrases](#)

Resource - Transition words

[List of transition words](#)

You mentioned strategies? How should I approach the writing?

If you sit down to write and find yourself going black and having no idea to begin, it might not necessarily be because you lack Spanish, but because you lack a strategy for writing in Spanish. A strategy is a process, an approach, and a way forward. Here are some strategies – both of mind and of practice – that can help you begin.

Strategy: lead with your Spanish – part I – simplify

Instead of thinking about what you want to say in English and then translating it in Spanish, start with the Spanish that you have available to you.

For example, if you start out wanting to say, “Yeah, this summer my bros and I are going to go mudding in upstate PA with some brand new four-wheelers for who knows how long,” you’re only going to get yourself into trouble. Instead, say something that it is your wheelhouse. For example,

“Mis amigos y yo vamos a las montañas de Pennsylvania. Tenemos coches pequeños. Vamos a divertirnos mucho.” (Translated: My Friends and I are going to the mountains of PA. We have small cars. We are going to enjoy ourselves a lot.) You’ve successfully communicated the essence of the idea using vocab you know, which is the real skill when it comes to learning a different language. Overtime, the nuance and details will come with advanced vocabulary and structure.

Strategy: lead with your Spanish – part II – use a process

Sometimes, you do not even need to plan out what you are going to say. Instead, let the Spanish you have available to you guide you. Here is an example of a process that will lead you to success.

1. Pick a subject (any person place or thing)
2. Pick a verb (there is a very long list in the resources section)
3. Add details – with whom, when, where, why, how, what?

Example 1

Subject → El astronauta (the astronaut)

Verb → Olvida (to forget)

Details → Hmm, maybe I say what he forgot and where it is.

Sentence: El astronauta olvida el almuerzo en el coche rojo.

Why write about an astronaut in your journal? Well, why not? It might open the door to a more creative entry.

Example 2

Subject → Mi gato

Verb → Compartir (to share)

Details → Hmm, maybe I say my cat does not share something with my dad and my dad is angry.

Sentence: Mi gato no comparte la pizza con mi padre. Mi padre está enojado. El gato está contento. Ellos son enemigos.

How did my cat just become the antagonist of the entry? Simply because you picked a subject and picked a verb and saw where it took you.

Example 3

Subject → El árbol (the tree)

Verb → esperar (to wait / to hope)

Details → Hmm, this is getting poetic, maybe I say for whom the tree waits and where. This is leading me down a path to some poetic personification. Who knew?

Sentence: El árbol espera a sus amigos en el jardín. No habla. No grita. Espera y mira las flores. ¿Dónde están los amigos? ¿Quiénes son sus amigos?

How did my entry just turn into a mini poem about a tree who may or may not have friends? I didn't really plan to make that happen, but just by picking a subject and a verb, I've opened the door to some creative possibilities.

Strategy: add details to sentences

You can improve any sentence by adding details that answer these questions.

¿con quién? – with whom

¿dónde? – where

¿cuándo? – when

¿por qué? – why

¿cómo? – how

Example

Let's say you're writing a sentence about what you are going to do this afternoon. Here is your original sentence.

Yo voy a comer la cena.

Ok, great sentence. Nice use of the simple future. Now, you can improve this sentence by answering the question "¿dónde?"

Yo voy a comer la cena en una montaña.

This revision is a huge improvement that – once more – opens the door to creativity. Why are you eating on the mountain? What else might be happening on the mountain?

You can supercharge the sentence further by answering the question, "¿con quién?"

Yo voy a comer la cena en una montaña con los profesores de historia.

The added details are bringing you to the brink of a story, giving both yourself and your audience reason to ask more questions: Who are the professors? What are you talking about? What mountain is it? What is going on? And you've done this by adding only two details. Reach further by answering the question "¿cuándo?"

Yo voy a comer la cena en una montaña con los profesores de historia a la medianoche.

Why ever you might be eating dinner on a mountain with history teachers at midnight is beyond me, but at this point only you can decide the why and the how. It might even be time to break this into a separate sentences, so you don't drown your reader with heretofore unimaginable details. You could, however, keep the sentence going as one.

One sentence: Yo voy a comer la cena en una montaña con los profesores de historia a la medianoche porque necesitamos hablar sobre el futuro de los Estados Unidos.

Two sentences: Yo voy a comer la cena en una montaña con los profesores de historia a la medianoche. Necesitamos hablar sobre el futuro de los Estados Unidos.

It looks like you're on your way to a great entry.

Strategy: always use the active voice

For example, instead of saying "He was given a good grade," say "He received a good grade." (Él recibió una nota buena.) Here are some other examples of how you can convert passive writing into active writing.

The students were directed to the class → The students traveled to the class (Los estudiantes viajaron a la clase)

I was seen by my friends → My friends saw me (Mis amigos me vieron a mí)

We were driven to school by my parents. → My parents drove us to school (Mis padres nos condujeron a la escuela)

You are given a doctor's note. → The doctor gives you a note. (El medico te da una nota)

What if I sit down to write and I go completely blank, or I don't even know how to begin?

Your first step will be to write a list of five subjects and five verbs in the infinitive form. From there, start forming sentences using a tense that is comfortable to you. Let's look at an example.

I don't know what to write. Ok, let me write down five subjects.

Yo

Mi padre

Mi madre

Mi hermano

Mi perro

Ok, now I am going to write five verbs.

Mirar

Escribir

Escuchar

Ir

Estudiar

Ok, now I can match the subjects and verbs. I'll use the present tense because I'm familiar with it.

Yo miro.

Mi padre escribe.

Mi madre escucha.

Mi perro va.

Mi hermano estudia.

Sentences! The holy grail. Now I will add details to each sentence.

Yo miro la televisión *en mi habitación*.

Mi padre escribe *un informe para el trabajo*.

Mi madre escucha *la música de Carlos Santana*.

Mi perro va *al baño*.

Mi hermano estudia *las matemáticas para un examen*.

And just like that you have a 36 word entry. You can add some transition words to make it a smooth paragraph.

Yo miro la televisión en mi habitación. *También*, mi padre escribe un informe para el trabajo. *En la sala*, mi madre escucha la música de Carlos Santana. *Además*, mi perro va al baño. *Por fin*, mi hermano estudia las matemáticas para un examen.

This is a slam dunk entry talking about what is going on around you. Perhaps tomorrow you do a similar entry but you change the subjects and verbs and see where it takes you. As time goes on, you'll find yourself changing details, asking more questions, and naturally growing your Spanish.

Strategy: create tools that will support your abilities

When you have a large project to complete, the time you spend outlining and prepping saves you lots of time and headaches when it comes to executing, even though it may seem annoying and might not resemble traditional progress (in this case, completing an entry).

Writing – especially in a foreign language – can feel like a big project that is difficult to begin. Ultimately, that feeling can spur procrastination, which is what you want to avoid.

So, if you sense that you are about to procrastinate, start with some planning and legwork.

One way to begin this process is to start by turning the resources into tools. Yes, there are plenty of resources listed here that are available to you, and you could print them out and keep them handy as you write, but it is likely that having all these resources laid out before you might feel a little overwhelming. Ok, I have 100 AR verbs, but I only really need one right now. Double procrastination! It's important that you make sense of the resources yourself and decide what you want to use. Creating your own tools will help you come to terms with the resources AND prepare you to write successfully.

So what is meant by “making your own tools”? Your tools could be anything that you have handy that *helps* you with the writing process. Most immediately, these could be lists of words, notes on grammatical topics, and some example sentences that you have copied down that help you understand a concept. Here is an example of a tool that might be useful.

One piece of loose leaf with the following

10 AR verbs, 5 ER verbs, 5 IR verbs

5 tener expressions (like tener sueño – to be sleep)

5 emotion words

5 infinitive phrases

5 places

5 foods

10 random words that you just so happen to be interested in knowing.

Another idea is to categorize vocabulary using index cards. Maybe one card has a list of 10 places, another has a list of 10 words used for going to the beach, another a list of 10 items in your house, and another with a list of 10 verbs that you feel like you use all the time. Perhaps you have others with transition words, notes on how to use the present tense, or the simple future. *It's likely that you could make an index card like this in less than five minutes, so if you feel stuck, just make one index card with some words on it and then set it aside for later.* If you feel stuck the next time you sit down to write an entry, make another index card with 5-10 more words. Before you know it, you'll have a lot to draw on and you'll be ready to start writing.

A final word on strategies and the *elefante en la habitación*

Perhaps, as you've been reading this section, you've thought, “Ok, my strategy will be to write my entry in English, copy and paste it into google translate, and copy it by hand into the notebook. Boom.” This is, of course, a strategy, but not a viable one, at least not if you want to improve. It's unlikely – highly unlikely, in fact – that such an approach will produce any sort of meaningful growth in your abilities to produce Spanish on your own. Your teachers would argue that it is a waste of time, and that the seven to ten minutes you would spend doing this would be better spent creating a list of verbs, subjects,

transition words, grammatical notes, and other details that you keep handy and refer to as you write. Writing in another language is not easy – at least not at first. If you're willing to do a little grunt work that is nearly the same level of complexity as typing and copying by hand, then maybe you're willing to create some word lists (making your index cards and tools), and choose a *viable* strategy, and see how it goes. To learn and improve, you have to give yourself a chance to experiment and make your own meaning with the material. Choosing the plug-and-chug google translate strategy shuts down your opportunities to grow.

Um, so, what about being graded on this? Will we be getting a grade? What will that look like?

I'm sorry to say, fair student, but if you are doing this only to get a grade, you are sorely missing the point. Think, for a moment, if you will, about how much you can improve your Spanish if you spend 20-30 minutes 3 – 5 times a week in an undistracted environment thinking and acting curiously about your Spanish. The results – and this is no exaggeration – could be staggering. It is likely that within a few short weeks you will surprise yourself with what you have learned and your ability to express yourself with more fluidity. Perhaps, for you, that sort of growth and sense of possibility is motivating. If it is, then you're on the right track.

But seriously, will we be graded on this?

If you insist. Yes. This could take on a lot of forms, depending on your teacher in the Fall. He or she could...

-collect your journals for review. Keep in mind that they will not accept a notebook other than the one we recommend that you buy. It's also important to note that your name must be on the cover and every page with an entry. Have you ordered the notebook yet? What have you been waiting for?

-give you time to write a prompt in class without any support. If you've done the work, you will be pleased to show off your writing abilities.

-Ask you to submit your first or first few entries and your last or last few entries to see how you have grown, and – potentially – ask you to write a reflection that accompanies the samples of your writing in which you yourself describe how you have improved using examples from your writing as evidence.

When should we start writing?

Plan to start writing the week of Sunday, June 5. That will give you ten weeks of writing. Here are the total number of entries (and words) you should have by level.

For students entering Spanish 2 / 2H – 30 entries (approximately 1200 words total)

For students entering Spanish 3 / 3H – 30 entries (approximately 1200 words total)

For students entering Spanish 4 / 4H – 40 entries (approximately 4000 words total)

For students entering AP Spanish – 50 entries (approximately 4500 – 5000 words total)