

Spanish vs. English Sentence Structure

Spanish and English share a similar basic sentence structure, which makes learning Spanish feel familiar at first. Both languages often follow a subject–verb–object order, but Spanish organizes sentences differently in important ways. Spanish relies more on verb endings to show who is doing an action, allows more flexibility in word order, places adjectives differently, and uses object pronouns and negatives in ways that do not exist in English. Understanding these similarities and differences helps students avoid word-for-word translation and build more natural, accurate sentences in Spanish.

Big Picture: What They Have in Common

1. Both languages are SVO (Subject–Verb–Object)

In simple statements, **Spanish and English follow the same basic order**. This is why English speakers can start forming Spanish sentences quickly.

English:

The girl eats apples.

Spanish:

La chica come manzanas.

This shared SVO structure is the foundation of both languages

 **Why this helps learners:** You don't need to relearn sentence order from scratch.

2. Both use declarative, negative, and interrogative sentences

Statements, negatives, and questions exist in both languages, and their core purposes are the same (to state, deny, or ask something).

Key Differences (Where Learners Feel the Shift)

1. Subject pronouns: Required in English, optional in Spanish

English

You **must** include the subject.

I speak Spanish.

She works here.

Spanish

The **verb ending already shows who the subject is**, so pronouns are often dropped.

(Yo) hablo español.

(Ella) trabaja aquí.

Pronouns are mainly used for **emphasis or clarity**, not necessity.

✔ Think of it this way:

English = *Who + action*

Spanish = *Action already tells who*

2. Word order flexibility: Spanish is looser

English

Word order is **rigid**. Changing it often breaks the sentence.

The dog chased the ball.

✗ Chased the dog the ball.

Spanish

Word order is **flexible**, especially for emphasis or style.

El perro persiguió la pelota.

La pelota la persiguió el perro.

Persiguió el perro la pelota.

The meaning stays the same, but **focus shifts**.

✔ Why Spanish allows this:

Verb conjugation + object markers keep meaning clear.

3. Adjective placement: Before in English, after in Spanish

English

Adjectives come **before** the noun:

a red car

a beautiful house

Spanish

Adjectives usually come **after** the noun:

un coche rojo

una casa hermosa

This is one of the **most noticeable differences** for English speakers

Meaning can change with position

un hombre pobre = a man with no money

un pobre hombre = a man who is unfortunate

Adjective position in Spanish can add **emotional or subjective meaning**, something English rarely does.

4. Object pronouns: After the verb in English, before in Spanish

English

I see her.

I give him the book.

Spanish

Object pronouns usually come **before** the verb:

Yo **la** veo.

Yo **le** doy el libro.

With two pronouns:

Yo **se lo** doy. (I give it to him/her)

This reversal is one of the **hardest adjustments** for English speakers.

✅ Mental shift:

Spanish prefers *short words first, action later*.

5. Negation: Double negatives are correct in Spanish

English

I don't see anything.

❌ I don't see nothing. (incorrect)

Spanish

Double negatives are **normal and required**:

No veo nada.

No le dije nada a nadie.

At least one negative comes **before the verb**

✅ **Rule:** In Spanish, negatives *agree* rather than cancel each other.

6. Questions: No auxiliary verbs in Spanish

English

Questions require **do/does/did**:

Do you speak Spanish?

Spanish

Questions use **intonation or word order**, not auxiliaries:

¿Hablas español?

Same verb, same order—just question marks and rising tone

✅ **This is actually simpler than English.**

Quick Comparison Table

Feature	English	Spanish
Basic order	SVO	SVO
Subject pronouns	Mandatory	Often omitted
Word order	Rigid	Flexible
Adjective position	Before noun	After noun (usually)
Object pronouns	After verb	Before verb
Double negatives	Incorrect	Correct
Questions	Use auxiliaries	Use intonation

The Takeaway for Learners

- Spanish and English think alike at the core, but

- **Spanish relies more on verb endings and agreement**, while
- **English relies more on fixed word order**

If English is like **following a strict recipe**, Spanish is like **cooking with flexible steps—but clear ingredients**.

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