

How to Greet People in Spanish (¿Doy dos besos o doy la mano?) — English translation

Recurso de apoyo opcional — no sustituye a escuchar el episodio en español.

Antes de leer esto en lugar del español...

Este documento es una red de seguridad, no un sustituto. Escucha primero, y usa esto solo si te atascas.

PALABRA = vocabulario destacado · *frase* = punto de gramática

INTRODUCTION (ENGLISH)

Hi, and welcome back to Poco a Poco Podcast — español fácil, with English explanations.

Today we're talking about something that trips up almost every visitor to Spain.

The first five seconds of meeting someone.

Do you shake hands?

Do you go in for a kiss?

How many kisses?

Which side first?

I still remember getting this wrong.

More than once.

And today, I'm not doing this alone.

For the first time on the podcast, I'm joined by a friend of mine.

Isabel.

She's from Spain, and she's lived here her whole life.

Which means she's going to correct me.

A lot.

Quick thing before we start.

If you want the five free study documents for this episode, the link is in the episode description.

Okay.

Let's get into it.

CUERPO PRINCIPAL (ENGLISH)

Well... I'm going to tell you something that happened to me many times.

When I arrived in England, to study at university, something curious happened.

The first person I met shook my hand.

A HANDSHAKE.

Very formal.

Very proper.

And I thought: okay, this is how it's done here.

But later, years after, I lived a year in Tokyo.

And in Japan, nobody touches you.

A bow.

A polite distance.

No hands.

No kisses.

So there came a point where I no longer knew what to do.

With anyone.

In any country.

And then I came back to Spain.

And my friend Isabel taught me something.

Here we do both things.

And neither of them.

That makes no sense, Juan.

Here it depends.

It depends on who the person is.

Right, that's what I didn't understand.

Look.

If it's the first time you're meeting someone, in a formal context.

For example, at work.

There, normally, you shake hands.

But if you're introduced to a friend of a friend.

At a party, for example.

There, almost always, **TWO KISSES**.

One on each cheek.

And between guys?

Between two men, normally, the hand.

Unless they already know each other well.

That they're real friends.

Not just acquaintances.

That's what I found hardest to understand.

The difference between **AN ACQUAINTANCE** and a friend.

In Japan, that didn't matter as much for greeting.

But here, it does.

Of course.

And that's why, when you're introduced to someone new.

It's important to know who's **INTRODUCING** you.

If a friend of yours introduces you to another person.

They're almost already a friend of yours too.

I have another question.

If I go to a party with fifteen people, do I greet everyone with two kisses?

Yes.

Everyone.

One by one.

You can't walk in and say "hi" just once, for everyone.

That doesn't work here.

Well, that **EXHAUSTED** me a bit at first.

Fifteen people, thirty kisses.

Exactly.

And then, when you leave, again.

Thirty kisses again.

Yes.

It's a bit like that.

But it becomes quick, with practice.

And it doesn't matter if you're not going to talk to that person all night.

The greeting is separate.

It's like an entrance ritual.

And an exit one.

And with family?

Ah, that's different.

With family, almost always, **A HUG.**

A real hug, not a quick greeting.

Even with family you don't see much.

I didn't really understand that at first.

In Japan, even siblings don't hug that much.

Here, it's almost mandatory.

There's another word you need to learn right now.

"BUENAS."

Just that.

"Buenas."

It works for everything.

To walk into a shop.

To greet someone at a bar.

To greet someone you don't know at all.

It's informal, short, and always works.

At first, it seemed too informal to me.

As if it were rude not to say the full phrase.

But no.

Here, "buenas" is completely normal.

Even with older people.

Even at work.

There's another thing that really surprised me.

On the street, with **NEIGHBORS**.

If you pass a neighbor on the stairs, you say "good morning."

Even if you don't know them at all.

Even if you don't even know their name.

In Japan, that exists too, a little.

But in England, it seemed strange to me at first.

As if talking to a stranger were **SUSPICIOUS**.

Not here.

Here, NOT greeting is what's strange.

It's almost **RUDE**.

I have a story too, you know?

Once I met a tourist in Valencia.

A very polite guy, from Germany.

And when we were introduced to each other, he shook my hand.

Very formal.

Very serious.

And I, **WITHOUT THINKING**, went straight for the two kisses.

We **COLLIDED**.

Literally.

His hand and my face.

No.

That's exactly what happened to me.

But the other way around.

And what did you do afterward?

Nothing.

We both laughed.

And that was it.

That's important too.

If you get it wrong, it's fine.

You laugh, and move on.

No one **GETS OFFENDED** over this.

And now, with tourists, what do you do?

Now, I wait a second.

Before moving.

That's why it's best to wait a second.

See what the other person does.

And follow their lead.

And "qué tal"?

Because at first, it seemed like a real question to me.

No, no.

"Qué tal" doesn't expect a long answer.

It's just a way of greeting each other.

Of acknowledging each other.

Of saying: I see you, you exist, hi.

In English, "how are you" is sometimes similar.

But in Spanish, it's used even more as an automatic greeting.

So, what do I answer?

"Fine, and you?"

And that's it.

That **BREAKS THE ICE**.

Nothing more is needed.

Ah, one more thing.

The "tú" and the "usted."

That's a whole other episode, Juan.

We'll leave that for another day.

Okay, okay.

Last question.

How do I know if someone **LIKES ME**?

You can tell by the **CLOSENESS**.

If someone **KEEPS THEIR DISTANCE** with you, you're probably still just acquaintances.

Not friends.

But if they start getting closer, joking around.

Then, you two are starting to get along.

Like us.

Like us.

LIFELONG FRIENDS.

You know what I've learned, after so many years abroad?

That the way people greet says a lot about a country.

More than many other things.

In England, distance.

In Japan, respect.

And here, in Spain, closeness.

There's no one correct way.

Just different ways of saying the same thing.

"I'm glad to see you."

That's nice.

Well, I think we now know how to greet people.

Thanks, Isabel, for joining me today.

My pleasure.

Really.

This was really fun.

Until next time.

And thanks to all of you too, for listening until the end.

CLOSING — VOCABULARY & GRAMMAR (ENGLISH)

Okay, let's break down what we just heard.

First: "dar dos besos" — to give two kisses.

The nuance is in the "when," not the "how."

In Spain, it's standard for friends and semi-formal situations.

It says nothing about how close you actually are.

Second: "un apretón de manos" — a handshake.

Reserved for first meetings and formal contexts.

Third: "romper el hielo" — to break the ice.

In Spanish, "¿qué tal?" itself IS the ice-breaker.

It's a ritual, not a real question.

Fourth: "un conocido" versus "un amigo."

This distinction quietly decides how you greet someone, every time you see them.

Fifth: "presentar" — to introduce someone.

When a friend "te presenta" to one of their friends, there's an implied social contract.

And sixth: "llevarse bien" — to get along.

It's reflexive and reciprocal, which brings us to today's grammar point.

Reflexive, reciprocal verbs: saludarse, conocerse, llevarse bien, abrazarse, despedirse.

These describe something two people do to each other, not to themselves.

"Nos saludamos" means we greeted each other, mutually.

Isabel said: "ya os estáis empezando a llevar bien" — you two are starting to get along.

And "nos presentaron" — we were introduced to each other, again with "se."

Before we go, a quick word about the website.

Every episode comes with five free PDF study guides: Vocabulary, Transcript, Grammar, Translation, and a sentence-by-sentence document.

This episode's Grammar PDF has something extra: twenty ready-to-use phrases for introducing yourself in Spanish, and for keeping a conversation going afterward.

You'll also find a page about me, from Valencia, to England, to Tokyo, and back.

Everything is free, and the link is in the episode description.

Thanks for listening, and... nos vemos pronto.