



To be functional in Spanish, you must be familiar with social protocol.

The basis of social protocol in the hispanic culture is acknowledging the presence of another person when you enter or leave their space. This is usually done with a

1. a greeting
2. a farewell
3. a request for space or attention
4. a blessing on their meal

It is considered rude and reflects badly on your mother (who gave you a poor education) if you don't use appropriate protocol.

1. **The greetings** are cheerfully said to everyone you pass, especially to all with whom you make eye contact.



- **BUENOS DÍAS** = "Good morning," used from daylight until noon.
- **BUENAS TARDES** = "Good afternoon," used from noon until 7 P.M. or dark.
- **BUENAS NOCHES** = Good evening from 7 P.M. or dark. Sometimes it may get dark before 7 P.M.

- **ADIÓS** can be said to a person in passing. For example anytime you pass someone on the street and you make eye contact, it is good to say *adiós*.

*Adiós* literally means "to God" and is considered a high greeting, not just good-bye.

- **HOLA** = "Hi." It is an informal greeting which can be used with children or good friends. Otherwise, it is usually combined with a formal greeting like this:

**HOLA, BUENOS DÍAS** = "Hi, good morning."

If you know the person, it is common to ask how they are doing. For example:



- **BUENOS DÍAS ¿CÓMO ESTÁ?** = "Good morning. How are you (formal)?"  
or  
**BUENOS DÍAS ¿CÓMO ESTÁS?** (informal)

A quick dialogue may go something like this:

- **BUENOS DÍAS, ¿CÓMO ESTÁ?** = "Good morning, How are you?"
- **MUY BIÉN GRACIAS ¿Y USTED?** = "Very well, thank you. And you?"

2. **Farewells** are usually said with:



- **ADIÓS. HASTA LUEGO.** = "Goodbye, until later."  
or  
■ **ADIÓS. BUENAS NOCHES.** = "Goodbye, good night."

It is common at a party to go around and say good night to everyone present before one leaves. This is called a *despedida*.

3. **Request for space or attention** is very important.

In Mexico, people have a different level of spatial comfort than in the U.S. or Canada, where people may feel uncomfortable when someone is closer than arm's length.

In Mexico people are comfortable at elbow's length. As a result it is common for people to seem to be crowding, or to be "balled up."



If you need space to pass by, simply say:



- **CON PERMISO, POR FAVOR** = "With your permission, please."

This request will quickly be answered by people moving and sometimes saying:

- **PROPIO** = "It's yours."

As you pass through, you can say:

- **GRACIAS, ADIÓS** = "Thank you, goodbye."

*Con permiso* is also used to request attention. In hispanic cultures the attendants in a retail store will usually not wait on you until you request help unless you are in a tourist area.

So in most cases they will linger back attentively until you ask for help. Raising your hand and saying *con permiso, por favor* will get you service. And don't forget to smile!

Waiters will not bring you the check at a restaurant until you ask for it. It is considered rude and is like asking you to leave if they bring you the check without your request. When you are ready for the check, simply call the waiter or waitress with a raising of the hand and say:



- **LA CUENTA, POR FAVOR.** = "The check, please."
- **JOVEN, SENORITA** (to get the attention of a waiter/waitress ... if the waiter is older, you can say **SEÑOR** or **SEÑORA**) - it's considered rude to call a working person by their occupation, e.g. *mesero* or *mesera*.

When you leave don't forget to say:

- **MUCHAS GRACIAS** and smile!  
It is good to be generous with tips.

4. When you enter the space where someone is eating, it is courteous to say:



- **BUEN PROVECHO.**

This translates as "I hope you get the most from your meal." It is a blessing on their meal. People will always look up, smile, and say **GRACIAS**.

It is common in a restaurant to say *buen provecho* as you pass a table of people eating, whether you make eye-contact or not. People really appreciate this gesture and it is a sign of good breeding.

Using these four areas of social protocol has many benefits.

1. It connects you with other people and helps you to overcome your psychological fears about using Spanish. When you do this and people respond, there is a little voice in the back of your mind that say, "Yes, this language is real and it works!" This connection is very empowering.

2. It shows respect for the hispanic people and lets them know that you are indeed "educated" and know the social niceties of their culture.

This is important because hispanics usually perceive Americans as cold or even rude because we don't commonly greet each other in our culture.

Use the social protocol every day, everywhere. It is important. *Es muy importante.*

**You will need these:**

- No Entiendo** = I don't understand.
- Repita por favor** = Repeat please.
- Despacio por favor** = Slowly please.
- No hablo español muy bien** = I don't speak Spanish very well.
- Necesito practicar mi español** = I need to practice my spanish.
- Gracias por su paciencia.** = Thank you for your patience.