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# The Personal 'A' of Spanish

## Preposition often not translated to English

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In English, there's no difference in the way the following two sentences are structured:

I saw the tree.

I saw Teresa.

But in the Spanish equivalent, there's an obvious difference:

*Vi el árbol.*

*Vi a Teresa.*

The difference is a one-letter word — *a* — but it's an essential one to learn. Known as the personal *a*, the short preposition is used to precede direct objects when those objects are people. Although [a](#) is usually translated as "to," the personal *a* normally isn't translated into English.

### The First Rule of the Personal A

The basic rule is a simple one: The *a* precedes the mention of a specific person or persons used as a [direct object](#), and (except in some rare cases where it's used for clarification) it is not used in other cases. Some simple examples:

*Levantó la taza.* (He lifted the cup.)

*Levantó a la muchacha.* (He lifted the girl.)

*Oigo la orquesta.* (I hear the orchestra.)

*Oigo a Taylor Swift.* (I hear Taylor Swift.)

*Recuerdo el libro.* (I remember the book.)

*Recuerdo a mi abuela.* (I remember my grandmother.)

*No conozco tu ciudad.* (I don't know your city.)

*No conozco **a** tu padre.* (I don't know your father.)

*Quiero comprender la lección.* (I want to understand the lesson.)

*Quiero comprender **a** mi profesora.* (I want to understand my teacher.)

The *a* is not used if the object doesn't refer to anyone specific:

*Conozco **a** dos carpinteros.* (I know two carpenters.)

*Necesito dos carpinteros.* (I need two carpenters.)

Keep in mind that *a* is a very common **preposition** with a variety of translations. The basic rule here pertains to its use preceding a direct object, not in the numerous other cases where a preposition is called for.

Although the basic rule is quite simple, there are a few exceptions (aren't there always?), and even an exception to an exception.

## Key Takeaways: The Personal A in Spanish

The personal *a* is used in Spanish before direct objects.

The personal *a* is generally used when the direct object is a person, or an animal or thing that is thought of as having personal qualities.

Although in other contexts *a* is the equivalent of the English "to," the personal *a* is usually not translated to English.

## The Exceptions

**With certain pronouns:** This is really more of a clarification rather than an exception. When used as direct objects, the pronouns *alguien* (somebody), *nadie* (nobody) and *quién* (whom) require the personal *a*. So do *alguno* (some) and *ninguno* (none) when referring to people.

*No veo **a** nadie.* (I don't see anyone.)

*Quiero golpear **a** alguien.* (I want to hit somebody.)

*¿**A** quién pertenece esta silla?* (Whose chair is this?)

*¿Taxis? No vi ningunos.* (Taxis? I didn't see any.)

*¿Taxistas? No vi **a** ningunos.* (Taxi drivers? I didn't see any.)

**Pets:** Many pet owners think of their animals as people, and so does Spanish grammar, so the personal *a* is used. But the *a* isn't used with ordinary animals.

*Veo **a** mi perro, Ruff.* (I see my dog, Ruff.)

*Veo tres elefantes.* (I see three elephants.)

**Personification:** A country or object can be **personified**, that is it can be treated as if it were a person. Use of the personal *a* often implies some sort of a personal relationship, such as an emotional attachment, with the noun personified.

*Yo extraño mucho **a** Estados Unidos.* (I very much miss the United States.)

*Abracé **a** la muñeca a causa de era mi amiga.* (I hugged the doll, for she was my friend.)

**With *tener*:** Generally, the *a* is not used after *tener*.

*Tengo tres hijos y una hija.* (I have three sons and a daughter.)

*No tengo jardinero.* (I don't have a gardener.)

### Exceptions to an Exception

**After *tener*:** The personal *a* is used after *tener* when it is used in the sense to physically hold someone or to have someone somewhere.

*Tengo a mi hijo en los brazos.* (I have my son in my arms.)

*Tengo a mi hija en el pesebre,* I have my daughter in the crib.

The personal *a* can also be used after *tener* when its usage suggests a particularly close or emotional relationship.

*Cuando estoy triste y necesito hablar, tengo **a** mis amigos.* (When I am sad and need to talk, I have my friends.)

*Tengo amigos.* (I have friends.)