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SPANISH STEM CHANGING VERBS Pensar, perder and sentir are Spanish stem-changing verbs. A stem-changing verb suffers a change in its stem when it is conjugated. For a full explanation of stem-changing verbs visit the post Spanish Stem Changing Verbs for Beginners. Alright, here are the most common stem-changing verbs that end in -ar! STEM CHANGING AR VERBS Stem Change E to IE pensar (think) | see conjugation acertar (guess) alentar (encourage) apretar (tighten) arrendar (rent) asentar (settle) aterrar (terrify) atravesar (cross) calentar (heat) cegar (blind) cerrar (close) comenzar (start) concertar (conclude) confesar (confess) denegar (deny) desalentar (discourage) desconcertar (confuse) desenterrar (dig up) deshelar (defrost) despertar (wake up) desplegar (display) desterrar (expatriate) emparentar (relate) empezar (begin) encerrar (confine) encomendar (entrust) enmendar (amend) enterrar (bury) gobernar (govern) helar (freeze) invernar (winter) manifestar (express) mentar (mention) merendar (eat an afternoon snack) negar (deny) nevar (impersonal verb “to snow”) quebrar (brake) recalentar (reheat) recomendar (recommend) regar (water) remendar (patch) renegar (deny) restregar (scrub) reventar (burst) salpimentar (season with salt and pepper) segar (reap) sembrar (sow) sentar (seat) serrar (saw) sosegar (calm) soterrar (underground) temblar (shake) tentar (tempt) tropezar (trip) Stem Change O to UE recordar (remember) acordar (agree) apostar (bet) aprobar (approve) asolar (destroy) colar (strain) comprobar (check) concordar (agree) consolar (comfort) contar (count) costar (cost) demostrar (demonstrate) desaprobar (disapprove) descontar (discount) encontrar (find) engrosar (swell) mostrar (show) poblar (populate) probar (try) recostar (tilt) renovar (renew) repoblar (repopulate) reprobar (fail) resonar (resonate) rodar (roll) sobrevolar (overfly) soldar (weld) soltar (release) sonar (sound) soñar (dream) tostar (toast) tronar (impersonal verb “to thunder”) volar (fly) volcar (overturn) STEM CHANGING ER VERBS Stem Change E to IE querer (love, want) ascender (promote) atender (attend) defender (defend) desatender (neglect) descender (descend) encender (turn on) entender (understand) extender (extend) perder (lose) tender (tend) trascender (transcend) verter (pour) Stem Change O to UE poder (can, to be able to) absolver (absolve) conmover (stir) demoler (demolish) desenvolver (unfold) devolver (return) disolver (dissolve) doler (hurt) envolver (wrap) llover (impersonal verb “to rain”) moler (grind) morder (bite) mover (move) promover (promote) remorder (chew) remover (remove) resolver (solve) revolver (scramble) STEM CHANGING IR VERBS Stem Change E to IE preferir (prefer) mentir (lie) concernir (concern) adherir (adhere, attach) adquirir (acquire, buy) diferir (differ, defer) digerir (digest, absorb) herir (hurt, injure) inferir (infer, conclude) ingerir (eat, ingest) interferir (interfere) preferir (prefer) referir (refer, relate) transferir (transfer, assign) discernir (discern) divertir (entertain, amuse) sentir (feel, sense) revertir (reverse, revert) resentir (resent) presentir (sense) invertir (invest) Stem Change E to I seguir (follow) sonreír (smile) repetir (repeat) teñir (dye) elegir (choose) regir (govern) pedir (ask) derretir (melt) despedir (dismiss) freír (fry) gemir (groan) impedir (prevent) servir (help) repetir (repeat) rendir (render) reñir (quarrel) medir (measure) vestir (dress) Stem Change O to UE morir (die) dormir (sleep) Here you have a chart that can help you conjugate stem-changing verbs easily! Think this is neat? Share it with your friends! There are many common, everyday verbs that fall into the category of stem-changing verbs in Spanish. That’s why it’s important to understand what they are and how they work. We’ve talked a lot about the different irregular verb conjugations in Spanish on this blog, as well as the regular verb conjugations. But there is a certain type of verb that we haven’t really addressed, and it’s somewhere between regular and irregular verbs. Stem-changing verbs in Spanish are conjugated differently from regular verbs, but unlike irregular verbs, they all follow the same pattern. Please note: if you do not know the conjugations for regular verbs, this post will be confusing for you. First check out our guide to conjugations in Spanish, and then come back to continue. So, what is a stem and how exactly do these verbs change? A stem is the part of the verb that comes before the ending (which, in infinitive verbs, is always either ar, er, or ir). In regular conjugations, the stem doesn’t change, where in irregular conjugations, it can be completely different. In stem-changing verbs, the change is in the last vowel of the stem. Stem-changing verbs in Spanish can also be thought of as 1, 2, 3, 6 verbs. This is because in the traditional conjugation tables, the conjugations that change are the first, second, third and sixth. Let’s see that visualized. Stem-changing verbs in Spanish: affected conjugations 1 yo I 2 tú you 3 usted, él, ella you (formal), he, she 4 nosotros we 5 vosotros plural you (informal) 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas plural you (formal), they In other words, the affected conjugations are in singular, the first person (yo), the second person (tú) and second person formal (usted), the third person (él, ella), and in plural, the second person formal (ustedes), and the third person (ellos, ellas). It might be easier to think of it as the ones that are not affected as there are fewer: just nosotros and vosotros. In case you were wondering about vos, it is also unaffected. These are conjugated just as they are when it’s a regular verb. There are a few different ways that stem-changing verbs in Spanish can change. The key is in the vowels in the verb. Let’s see the different possibilities: e -> ie (e.g: pensar) e -> i (eg: conseguir) o -> ue (eg: encontrar) others (i -> ie, u -> ue) Stem-changing verbs where the e in the stem changes to ie In the Spanish stem-changing verbs where e conjugates into ie, the last e of the stem turns into ie in the present tense conjugations 1, 2, 3, and 6. Examples: 1. Pensar | to think Breakdown: Pens – ar Stem: pens Stem change: e -> ie – pens -> piens Pensar conjugation 1 yo pienso 2 tú piensas 3 usted, él, ella piensa 4 nosotros pensamos 5 vosotros pensáis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas piensan 2. Preferir | to prefer Stem change: prefer -> prefier Note that the stem changes in the same way no matter whether the verb ends in ar, er, or ir. Preferir conjugation 1 yo prefiero 2 tú prefieres 3 usted, él, ella prefiere 4 nosotros preferimos 5 vosotros preferís 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas prefieren 3. Entender | to understand Stem change: entend -> entiend Entender conjugation 1 yo entiendo 2 tú entiendes 3 usted, él, ella entiende 4 nosotros entendemos 5 vosotros entendéis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas entienden 4. Empezar | to start Stem change: empez -> empiez Note that the change is always on the last syllable of the stem, no matter how many other vowels there are in the verb. Empezar conjugation 1 yo empiezo 2 tú empiezas 3 usted, él, ella empieza 4 nosotros empezamos 5 vosotros empezáis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas empiezan Stem-changing verbs where the e in the stem changes to i These are similar to the verbs above, except instead of ie, the vowel in the last syllable of the stem just changes to i in the first, second, third and sixth. This type of stem-changing verb tends to be ir-ending verbs only. Examples: 1. Conseguir | to obtain Breakdown: Conseg – (u)ir Note: the u before the i is there to show that the g in the word is pronounced as a hard g. So this is not considered part of the stem. Some would say that this makes conseguir irregular in the present first person, but since it is caused by a straightforward spelling rule, I wouldn’t consider it as such. Stem: conseg Stem change: e -> i – conseg -> consig Conseguir conjugation 1 yo consigo 2 tú consigues 3 usted, él, ella consigue 4 nosotros conseguimos 5 vosotros coneguís 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas consiguen 2. Servir | to serve Stem change: serv -> sirv Servir conjugation 1 yo sirvo 2 tú sirves 3 usted, él, ella sirve 4 nosotros servimos 5 vosotros servís 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas sirven Stem-changing verbs where the o in the stem changes to ue Again, once you understand the rules, this is a pretty straightforward vowel change. Examples: 1. Almorzar | to have lunch Breakdown: Almorz – ar Stem: almorz Stem change: o -> ue – almorz -> almuerz Almorzar conjugation 1 yo almuerzo 2 tú almuerzas 3 usted, él, ella almuerza 4 nosotros almorzamos 5 vosotros almorzáis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas almuerzan 2. Encontrar | to find Stem change: econtr -> encuentr Encontrar conjugation 1 yo encuentro 2 tú encuentras 3 usted, él, ella encuentra 4 nosotros encontramos 5 vosotros encontráis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas encuentran 3. Mover | to move Stem change: mov -> muev Mover conjugation 1 yo muevo 2 tú muevas 3 usted, él, ella mueva 4 nosotros movemos 5 vosotros movéis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas mueven 4. Dormir | to sleep Stem change: dorm -> duerm Dormir conjugation 1 yo duermo 2 tú duermes 3 usted, él, ella duerme 4 nosotros dormimos 5 vosotros dormís 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas duermen Other possible stem-changing verbs in Spanish The above mentioned three types of stem-changing verbs in Spanish are, without a doubt, the main stem-changing verbs. However, there are two other types which we also see, albeit there are much fewer of those. They are so uncommon, in fact, that it is easier to remember the one common verb that follows each conjugation than it is to remember the conjugation itself. Example 1: jugar | to play (u->ue) Breakdown: Jug – ar Stem: jug Stem change: u -> ue – jug -> jueg Jugar conjugation 1 yo juego 2 tú juegas 3 usted, él, ella juega 4 nosotros jugamos 5 vosotros jugáis 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas juegan Example 2: adquirir | to acquire (i->ie) Breakdown: Adquir – ir Stem: adquir Stem change: i -> ie – adquir -> adquier Adquirir conjugation 1 yo adquiero 2 tú adquieres 3 usted, él, ella adquiere 4 nosotros adquirimos 5 vosotros adquirís 6 ustedes, ellos, ellas adquieren How can you tell if a Spanish verb is a stem-changing verb? Unfortunately, there is no real way to know just by looking at a verb whether it is regular, stem-changing, or even irregular. This is one of those things that you just have to memorize. It might sound bad, but really this is something you will often just pick up in normal speech. For example, if you have heard of the verb pedir and you hear people saying pido and pides etc. all the time, you can confidently assume that pedir is an e->i stem-changing verb. As a Spanish learner, I can’t tell you the last time I had to think about whether a verb was stem-changing or irregular as all the differences have been acquired into my speech for a long time. So don’t think it’s not possible! If, however, you want to find all the stem-changing verbs there are and attempt to memorize them, there is nothing wrong with that. However, there really are many stem-changing verbs in Spanish, so a complete list is hard to come by. The best I have found is here (you have to click into each category of cambio de raíz). If you are learning by doing a course or using a textbook, whenever a new word is introduced, you should be told if it is stem-changing. The way this is communicated will vary from textbook to textbook, but in my text books they would just write the stem change next to the new infinitive verb. For example: Arrepentirse (ie) Recordar (ue) Elegir (i) Another way you can get to know the stem-changing verbs in Spanish faster is by looking at the root verb. Many Spanish verbs are prefixed forms of simpler verbs. For example, we’ve talked about pedir and now know it as a stem-changing verb. So seeing despedir, we can safely assume it is also a stem-changing verb of the same category. In this case, the two verbs have unrelated meanings, but that doesn’t matter. Do Spanish stem-changing verbs change in other tenses and conjugations? In this post, we have talked about how the stem-changing verbs in Spanish change in the present tense. Stem-changing verbs generally only change their stems in the present tense (including present indicative, present subjunctive, and present imperative, i.e. commands). However, that doesn’t make the other conjugations necessarily regular. Some good examples of verbs that are stem-changing in the present tense, while irregular in other tenses, are querer (ie), poder (ue), and tener (ie). The only exception to the rule that stem-changing verbs change only in the present tense are the e -> i category of stem-changing verbs. In this case, the stem also changes: in the gerund (e.g sirviendo) in the past preterite third person – only singular and plural (e.g sirvió, sirvieron) in the imperfect preterite – all 6 conjugations (e.g: sirviera, sirvieses). This conjugation and how it’s formed is explained in our post about all the Spanish tenses So, you should now understand what stem-changing verbs in Spanish are. Practice using them in context with Clozemaster! Challenge yourself with Clozemaster Test your skills and see what you’ve learned from this article by playing a selection of sentences with Spanish stem-changing verbs: Sign up here to save your progress and start getting fluent with thousands of Spanish sentences at Clozemaster. Clozemaster has been designed to help you learn the language in context by filling in the gaps in authentic sentences. With features such as Grammar Challenges, Cloze-Listening, and Cloze-Reading, the app will let you emphasize all the competencies necessary to become fluent in Spanish. Take your Spanish to the next level. Click here to start practicing with real Spanish sentences! If you’re learning Spanish, you’ve probably come across stem-changing verbs, also known as boot verbs. These tricky verbs can confuse beginners because their root (stem) changes when conjugated. But don't worry — with some practice, you'll get the hang of it! What Are Stem-Changing Verbs? Stem-changing verbs are verbs in which the vowel in the root of the verb changes in some forms when conjugated, but not in others. This happens in all present tense forms except for nosotros and vosotros. For example, the verb pensar (to think) changes to pienso in the yo form. Types of Stem Changes There are four common types of stem changes: 1. e → ie Examples: pensar → pienso, querer → quiero 2. o → ue Examples: dormir → duermo, poder → puedo 3. e → i Examples: pedir → pido, servir → sirvo 4. u → ue (less common) Example: jugar → juego How to Recognize Stem-Changing Verbs Unfortunately, there is no easy rule to recognize stem-changing verbs — you have to memorize them. However, many of the most frequently used verbs fall into this category, so you’ll naturally get familiar with them over time. Practice and exposure are key! Tips for Learning Stem-Changing Verbs Practice with common verbs: Focus on frequently used verbs like pensar, dormir, pedir, and jugar. You'll encounter them often in real conversations. Use flashcards: Create flashcards with the infinitive on one side and the conjugated form on the other. This will help you memorize the changes faster. Practice with native speakers: Engaging in conversations with Spanish speakers will reinforce your understanding of stem-changing verbs in context. Final Thoughts Stem-changing verbs may seem tricky at first, but with regular practice, they’ll become second nature. Keep practicing, and don’t be afraid to make mistakes — that’s how you learn! For more tips and interactive activities, download Lingobi and start practicing today! Stem-changing verbs in the present tense use the same endings as regular -ar, -er, and -ir verbs when conjugated, but undergo a vowel change in the last syllable of the stem. In this article, we'll take a look at the following present tense stem changes: e > ie changes o > ue changes e > i changes i > ie changes u > ue changes 1. e > ie Changes This type of stem change affects the largest number of verbs. For verbs in this group, the e in the last syllable of the stem changes to ie. Check out an example of this in the conjugation table for the verb querer(to want). Present Simple Conjugation Table for Querer quieroqueremos quieresqueréis quierequieren Present tense stem changes do not apply to nosotros and vosotros forms. These two forms maintain the form of the infinitive stem. If you think of the way many traditional verb tables are presented (see the conjugation table of querer above), you'll notice that the four verb conjugations that do undergo a stem change make the form of a rudimentary boot (or an "L"). This is a neat way to remember which verbs undergo a stem change. Common Verbs with e > ie Changes acertarto guessatenderto attend to atravesarto crosscalentarto warm cerrarto closecomenzarto begin confesarto confesshelarto freeze defenderto defenddescenderto descend despertarseto wake updivertirseto have fun empezarto beginencenderto light/ignite encerrarto encloseentenderto understand fregarto scrub/washgobernarto govern mentirto lienegarto deny nevarto snowpensarto think perderto losepreferirto prefer recomendarto recommendremendarto mend/patch sentar(se)to sit downsentirto feel sugerirto suggesttenerto have tropezarto stumblevenirto come The yo forms of venir and tener are irregular. The yo form of venir is vengo(I come), while the yo form of tener is tengo(I have). 2. o > ue Changes For verbs in this group, the o in the last syllable of the stem changes to ue. Check out an example of this in the conjugation table for the verb soñar(to dream). 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SpanishEnglish comprobarto check/prove descontarto deduct/exclude descolgarto take down Ready to practice?Master Present with our interactive video lessons. ⇒ Stem-changing verbs in the present tense use the same endings as regular -ar, -er, and -ir verbs when conjugated, but undergo a vowel change in the last syllable of the stem. ⇒ In these notes, we'll take a look at the following present tense stem changes: e > ie changes o > ue changes e > i changes i > ie changes u > ue changes ⇒ Looking for an introduction to the present tense in Spanish? Check out our notes on Spanish present tense forms. Stem-changing verbs in the present tense use the same endings as regular -ar, -er, and -ir verbs when conjugated, but undergo a vowel change in the last syllable of the stem. 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