

Formal Commands

Commands are used when ordering, or telling someone to do something. This is often referred to as the “imperative” form of the verb.

Compre Ud. el anillo.

(You) Buy the ring.

Haga Ud. la tarea.

(You) Do the homework.

Compren Uds. los libros.

(You-all) Buy the books.

Hagan Uds. el trabajo.

(You-all) Do the work.

By now, you are well acquainted with the fact that Spanish has both a formal and an informal style of speech (tú / Ud.). This distinction applies to commands.

Compre Ud. el anillo.

Buy the ring. (formal)

Compra (tú) los dulces.

Buy the candy. (familiar)

Informal, or familiar, speech is used among friends, coworkers, relatives, or when addressing a child. Formal speech is generally used to be polite or to express respect. For that reason, the formal commands are often referred to as **polite commands**.

The formal commands are formed the same way as the present subjunctive:

1. Start with the **yo** form of the present indicative.
2. Then drop the **-o** ending.
3. Finally, add the following endings:

-ar verbs..... -e (for Ud.), -en (for Uds.)

-er and -ir verbs..... -a (for Ud.), -an (for Uds.)

The following examples of formal commands use three regular verbs: hablar, comer, and escribir.

Hable Ud. más lentamente.

Hablen Uds. más lentamente.

Speak more slowly.

Coma Ud. la cena.

Coman Uds. la cena.

Eat the dinner.

Escriba Ud. la carta.

Escriban Uds. la carta.

Write the letter.

Remember, if the first person singular (yo) form is irregular, that irregularity is carried over into the formation of the formal command.

Tengan Uds. un buen viaje. (yo tengo)
Have a good trip.

Traiga Ud. el dinero. (yo traigo)
Bring the money.

Venga Ud. conmigo. (yo vengo)
Come with me.

This also applies to stem-changing verbs.

Cuente Ud. sus beneficios. (yo cuento)
Count your blessings.

Vuelvan Uds. pronto. (yo vuelvo)
Return quickly.

Pida dinero. (yo pido)
Ask for money.

As with the present subjunctive, the following verbs are irregular:

dar
dé Ud.
den Uds.

estar
esté Ud.
estén Uds.

ir
vaya Ud.
vayan Uds.

ser
sea Ud.
sean Uds.

saber
sepa Ud.
sepan Uds.

Note that affirmative and negative commands use the same verb forms.

Hable Ud..... Speak.
No hable Ud..... Don't speak.
Coma Ud Eat.
No coma Ud..... Don't eat.
Escriba Ud..... Write.
No escriba Ud Don't write.

Also note that the subject pronouns Ud. and Uds. may or may not be used. Using them adds a degree of formality or politeness to the command.

Hable Speak.

Hable Ud..... Speak (sir). (more respectful)

Coma..... Eat.

Coma Ud Eat (sir). (more polite)

Let's add two flashcards for the formal commands:

Verb Flashcards

80. Formal Commands (Imperative)

Use the present subjunctive forms

Hable Ud..... Speak.

No hable Ud..... Don't speak.

Coma Ud Eat.

No coma Ud..... Don't eat.

Escriba Ud Write.

No escriba Ud ... Don't write.

81. Irregular Formal Commands (Imperative)

Same irregulars as the present subjunctive forms

dar

dé Ud.

den Uds.

estar

esté Ud.

estén Uds.

ir

vaya Ud.

vayan Uds.

ser

sea Ud.

sean Uds.

saber

sepa Ud.

sepan Uds.