



ESPERANTO LESSON

Esperanto Grammar 1 • Chapter 4

• Pronouns and Verbs

Esperanto Grammar 1

Chapter 4 · Pronouns and Verbs



Pronouns and Verbs — Pronomoj kaj verboj

*This is the shortest verb system you will ever meet. An Esperanto verb has **one form for every person and number**, and six endings in all. The pronouns tell you who is acting. The endings tell you when (or whether, or how). Nothing in the verb changes to agree with the subject, and nothing is irregular, including the verb to be.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Pick the pronoun. Pick the root. Add one ending: **-i** (to ...), **-as** (present), **-is** (past), **-os** (future), **-us** (would), **-u** (command or wish). The same verb serves for I, you, he, she, it, we and they.

The pronouns

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH	OBJECT (-N)	POSSESSIVE (-A)
mi	I	min	mia my
vi	you (one or many)	vin	via your
li	he	lin	lia his
ŝi	she	ŝin	ŝia her
ĝi	it (a thing or animal)	ĝin	ĝia its
ni	we	nin	nia our
ili	they	ilin	ilia their
oni	one, people, they (in general)	—	onia (rare)
si	himself, herself, itself, themselves	sin	sia own

A possessive is an adjective, so it agrees with its noun: **mia libro, miaj libroj, mian libron, miajn librojn**. The object forms add **-n** as in Chapter 2.

Watch out: vi, and a newer pronoun

vi is both singular and plural, and there is no polite/familiar split (an old singular **ci** exists in dictionaries, but it is hardly ever used; check). Also, as Chapter 2 promised, there is a proposal for a pronoun that does not say "he" or "she": **ri**. It is not in the official core, but it is widely used online and in some books (check).

si and oni

si refers back to the subject of the same clause, in the third person only, and is never the subject itself. It separates "his own" from "somebody else's":

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
Li vidas sin .	He sees himself.
Li vidas lin .	He sees him (another man).
Li amas sian patrinon.	He loves his own mother.
Li amas lian patrinon.	He loves his (another man's) mother.

oni means "one", "people" or the vague "they" in *they say*: **Oni parolas Esperanton en multaj landoj**. (Esperanto is spoken in many countries.) It is the Esperanto way to avoid a passive in many sentences.

The verb: one ending per tense

ENDING	USE	LABORI (TO WORK)	ENGLISH
-i	infinitive	labori	to work
-as	present	laboras	work, works, am working
-is	past	laboris	worked, was working

ENDING	USE	LABORI (TO WORK)	ENGLISH
-os	future	laboros	will work
-us	conditional	laborus	would work
-u	command, wish	laboru	work! let ... work

Those six endings are the whole system. Here it is with every person, so you can see that the verb never changes:

PRONOUN	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
mi	mi laboras	mi laboris	mi laboros
vi	vi laboras	vi laboris	vi laboros
li / ŝi / ĝi	li laboras	ŝi laboris	ĝi laboros
ni	ni laboras	ni laboris	ni laboros
ili	ili laboras	ili laboris	ili laboros

Compare English (*I work, she works, I am working, I do work*), French (*je travaille, nous travaillons*), German (*ich arbeite, er arbeitet*) and Hungarian (a different ending for every person). Esperanto uses one form for all of them, and **laboras** is both "works" and "is working". There is no "do" in questions and no "will" or "would" as a separate word.

The stress stays on the root vowel in every form (Chapter 1): **la-BO-ri, la-BO-ras, la-BO-ris, la-BO-ros**.

esti, the verb "to be"

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
Mi estas Filipino.	I am Philip.
Vi estis hieraŭ en la domo.	You were in the house yesterday.
Ili estos amikoj.	They will be friends.

ESPERANTO

ENGLISH

Estus bone.

It would be good.

After **esti**, a noun or adjective stays plain, with no **-n** (Chapter 3): **Li estas amiko**, not *Li estas amikon*.

The -u form: commands and wishes

-u gives a command (**Venu!** Come!), a polite request with **bonvolu** (**Bonvolu sidi**. Please sit.) and "let's" (**Ni iru!** Let us go!). In Chapter 8 you will see it in wishes inside a longer sentence.

The conditional -us

-us marks "would" and appears with **se** (if): **Se mi havus tempon, mi venus**. (If I had time, I would come.) The same **-us** is used on both halves of the sentence.

Negation, questions and helper verbs

NEED	HOW	EXAMPLE
Not	ne before the verb (or the word it negates)	Mi ne parolas rapide . I don't speak quickly.
Yes/no question	Ĉu at the start	Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton? Do you speak Esperanto?
Answer	jes / ne	Jes, mi parolas . Yes, I do.
Tag question	ĉu ne?	Vi laboras, ĉu ne? You work, don't you?
Can, want, must	povas, volas, devas + infinitive	Mi povas iri . I can go.

The helper verbs are ordinary verbs followed by the infinitive in **-i**, as in English *I can go*: **Mi volas trinki teon**. (I want to drink tea.) Another small word for questions is **ĉu** inside a

sentence, meaning "whether": **Mi ne scias, ĉu li venos.** (I don't know whether he will come.)

Watch out: do not translate "do" and "will"

There is no Esperanto word for the "do" in *Do you speak?* or *I don't speak*, and none for the "will" in *I will go*. Say **Ĉu vi parolas?**, **Mi ne parolas** and **Mi iros**. The verb ending carries the time, and **ĉu** and **ne** carry the question and the negation.



In Use — En uzo

Read each exchange aloud. Notice that the verb stays the same whoever is speaking.

① Introductions

A:

Saluton, mi estas Filipino. Ĉu vi estas nova ĉi tie?

Hello, I'm Philip. Are you new here?

B:

Jes, mi estas nova. Ni estas amikoj, ĉu ne?

Yes, I'm new. We're friends, aren't we?

② Past, present and future

A:

Kion vi faris hieraŭ?

What did you do yesterday?

B:

Mi laboris. Hodiaŭ mi ripozas, kaj morgaŭ mi vizitos mian fraton.

I worked. Today I'm resting, and tomorrow I'll visit my brother.

A:

Mi irus kun vi, se mi havus tempon.

I would go with you, if I had time.

③ Work

A:

Kion vi faras?

What do you do?

B:

Mi helpas homojn kun iliaj komputiloj.

I help people with their computers.

A:

Ĉu vi ŝatas vian laboron?

Do you like your job?

B:

Jes, mi tre ŝatas ĝin.

Yes, I like it a lot.



Quick Reference — Rapida referenco

ITEM	RULE	EXAMPLE
Pronouns	mi vi li ŝi ĝi ni ili oni si	Mi vidas vin.
Object	add -n	min, vin, lin
Possessive	add -a (agrees with its noun)	mia, miaj, mian
Verb endings	-i -as -is -os -us -u	labori, laboras, laboris, laboros, laborus, laboru
Agreement	none	mi estas · ili estas
Not / question	ne · ĉu	Ĉu vi ne parolas?



Try It Yourself — Ekzercoj

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Give the past, present and future of *paroli* (to speak) for *mi*.

▼ Show answer

mi parolis, mi parolas, mi parolos.

2. How do you say "we are" and "they are"?

▼ Show answer

ni estas and **ili estas**. The verb is the same.

3. Translate "I saw you."

▼ Show answer

Mi vidis vin.

4. Translate "I see my books."

▼ Show answer

Mi vidas miajn librojn. The possessive copies the *-j* and *-n* of its noun.

5. What is the difference between *Li vidas sin* and *Li vidas lin*?

▼ Show answer

The first: he sees himself. The second: he sees another man. *sin* refers back to the subject.

6. Translate "I would drink tea."

▼ Show answer

Mi trinkus teon.

7. Say "Come!" and "Let's go!"

▼ Show answer

Venu! and **Ni iru!**

8. Translate "Do you speak Esperanto?" and "I don't speak quickly."

▼ Show answer

Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton? and Mi ne parolas rapide.

9. Correct the sentence: *Mi estas Filipon.*

▼ Show answer

Mi estas Filipino. After *esti* the noun stays plain.

10. Translate "One drinks tea here" using *oni*.

▼ Show answer

Oni trinkas teon ĉi tie.

Words used in this chapter

mi vi li ŝi ĝi ni ili oni si (pronouns) · **labori** work · **paroli** speak · **esti** be · **iri** go · **veni** come · **havi** have · **vidi** see · **ami** love · **trinki** drink · **fari** do, make · **helpi** help · **ŝati** like · **ripozi** rest · **viziti** visit · **sidi** sit · **scii** know · **povi** can · **voli** want · **devi** must · **homo** person · **komputilo** computer · **laboro** job, work · **tempo** time · **lando** country · **multaj** many · **se** if · **ĉu** whether · **ne** not · **kun** with · **ĉi tie** here

Coming up in Chapter 5: Word-Building. How one root becomes a dozen words with prefixes and suffixes: **mal-**, **-ul-**, **-ist-**, **-ej-** and more.