

# Gustar

English, what does it mean to “like” someone or something? This question is difficult to answer, because “to like” is not a physical action. It is hard to visually represent. This means trouble when you are trying to convey the idea with words alone to a Spanish-speaker. What does it mean to “like” something, after all? What are you doing, exactly, by liking it?

If we were speaking of an ice cream cone, you might say, “Well, I’m eating it!” But that’s another verb altogether; to *like* and to *eat* are two totally different actions.

To Spanish speakers, “to like” makes no sense; in fact, their way of looking at it is the exact opposite of ours. When they like something, they are not acting upon it—it is acting upon them. They use the verb GUSTAR, which, loosely translated, means “to please.” For example:

NOT *I like ice cream.*

BUT *Ice cream pleases me.*

For this reason, to translate this to Spanish, you must change the message structure and use indirect object pronouns to complete the thought.

|                                                                                 | gustar = to please             |                                      | Indirect Object Pronouns |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----|
|                                                                                 |                                |                                      |                          |     |
| I like ice cream. OR<br>Ice cream pleases me.<br>El helado me gusta.            | yo <b>gusto</b>                | nosotros <b>gustamos</b>             | me                       | nos |
|                                                                                 | tú <b>gustas</b>               | vosotros <b>gustáis</b>              | te                       | os  |
| Do you like ice cream? OR<br>Does ice cream please you?<br>¿Te gusta el helado? | él<br>ella <b>gusta</b><br>ud. | ellos<br>ellas <b>gustan</b><br>uds. | le                       | les |

In conversation, we most often speak of things that we like. For example:

I like cheese. *El queso me gusta.*  
She likes blue cars. *Los coches azules le gustan.*

Notice, in the second example, that since what she likes—cars—is plural, gustan (they please) is used. In other words, “The cars (they) please her.”

But we can also like people... that is, people can please us. For example:

I like you. ... You please me. ... *Tú me gustas.*  
¿Do you like me? ... Do I please you? ... *¿Te gusto yo?*

Notice that in questions, the pronouns are at the end, because we switch the pronoun/verb order for questions. “I can swim” (statement) becomes “Can I swim?” (question).

Other verbs can be used in this fashion. Some of the most common are listed below.

|              |                  |                                          |                                     |
|--------------|------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| to displease | <b>chocar</b>    | <i>Tu manera de hablar me choca.</i>     | Your way of speaking displeases me. |
| to interest  | <b>interesar</b> | <i>Tu opinión me interesa.</i>           | Your opinion interests me.          |
| to fascinate | <b>fascinar</b>  | <i>La ciencia ficción me fascina.</i>    | Science Fiction fascinates me.      |
| to enchant   | <b>encantar</b>  | <i>La torta de chocolate me encanta.</i> | Chocolate cake enchants me.         |

In English, we often say that we love something... but we just mean to say that we really like it, that it pleases us a lot—not that we have romantic liaisons with it. In Spanish, they use the verb *encantar* to express this idea, as in the last sentence above. In other words, I love chocolate cake!

To say that you love a person (to have affection for him/her) in Spanish, you say “Te amo” or “Te quiero”. Although the verb *querer* literally means to want, in this context it also means to love.

QUIZ TIME • Please translate the following sentences.

- I like long books.
- You like music.
- She loves to dance.
- Do they like us?
- The planets fascinate us.
- Are you interested in Math?
- They love the house.
- I don’t like Bradley.
- Do y’all like to swim?