¿Le gusta el español? You have probably heard the verb gustar in conversation many times before. You already know that it means, to like, or literally to please. But did you know gustar is conjugated differently than most other Spanish verbs? We often hear and say we like or dislike something. If we want to say this in Spanish we must know how to use gustar. And if we know how to use gustar, we will be able to use other verbs in Spanish that act like gustar, known as gustar verbs. We will look at a few other gustar verbs in the next article.

There are two things to know about gustar. First, it is most often used in the third person singular or plural. And second it almost always uses what is know as an indirect object pronoun (me, te, le, les, nos).

Let's look at indirect object pronouns first. They are used quite often in Spanish. And they are for sure one of the most bazaar concepts in Spanish for an English speaker to understand. But don't worry because their use with gustar is relatively easy. Just remember with gustar, they indicate to whom is receiving the pleasure from the object or activity that is liked. The indirect pronoun does not represent the person or persons who like something. It shows, or points to where the pleasure from that something is going.

These are the indirect object pronouns. They are always placed before the conjugated form of gustar.

Me.- me, (pronounced like'may').

Te- you, (informal).

Le- you, (formal), he, she, it.

Les- them.

Nos- we.

Now let's look at gustar. In the present tense gustar will only be conjugated as 'gusta' or 'gustan', depending if the object liked is singular or plural. We will look at gustar in some of the other tenses in the next article.

Now let's put the indirect pronouns and gustar together. First, ask yourself who likes or dislikes it. Or literally, who is receiving pleasure by it. Is it just one person or more than one person? Is it 'us' who likes it? This will determine what indirect pronoun to use. Second. What is liked? Is it just one or more than one thing? Is it an activity? This will determine how gustar will be conjugated. If only one thing is liked, 'gusta' will be used. If more than one thing is liked, 'gustan' will be used. If it is an activity, a verb will represent this and gustar will be conjugated as 'gusta'.

Look at the differences in these three examples:

I like the house. – Me gusta la casa.

I like the houses. – Me gustan las casas.

She likes to study Spanish. – A ella le gusta estudiar español.

In the first example the 'me' points to who is pleased by the house (I). And gustar is conjugated 'gusta' to refer to only one house. And in the second example, 'gustan' refers to more than one house. In the third, the 'le' points to she as the one receiving pleasure from studying Spanish.

Also, when a noun is liked, you must insert the article (la, las) before it (casa, casas). And if you are saying someone else likes something, add an ‘a’ before that person (a ella).

Look at a few more examples using gustar in the present tense:

I like to walk. – Me gusta caminar.

I like Colombian wines. – Me gustan los vinos colombianos.

Do you like to swim? – ¿Te (or le) gusta nadar?

She likes sweet things. – (A ella) le gustan las cosas dulces.

Bill likes to work out every day. – A Bill le gusta hacer ejercicio todos los días.

They like the flowers. – Les gustan las flores.

They like to play golf every day. - Les gusta jugar golf todos los días.

We like to wake up early. - Nos gusta despertarnos temprano.

We like the pictures. – Nos gustan las fotos.

Any time something is not liked, just insert a ‘no’ in front of the sentence:

I don’t like that restaurant. – No me gusta ese restaurante.

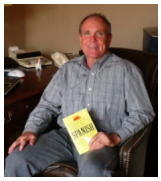
You don’t like the food? – ¿No te gusta la comida?

They don’t like the hotel. – No les gusta el hotel.

We don’t like those people. - No nos gustan esas personas.

To sum up, the person or persons (even an pet maybe) who are receiving the pleasure are pointed to by the indirect object pronoun. And, what is liked is indicated by the respective conjugated form of gustar.

Knowing how to use gustar is very handy. So really try to become familiar with it’s use and practice using it with friends or people you are in contact with day to day. I will always say, try to use all you learn about Spanish in live conversation. In Panamá, there are always opportunities to practice a few lines. If you do this as much as possible, you will improve faster than you think. Just reading, studying lessons, listening to tapes, helps a lot, but is not enough. And don’t forget to always enjoy it!


Hope this helps!

Fred