

VAMOS ACADEMY · VAMOSPANISH.COM

PASOS DE TANGO

ARGENTINE CULTURE, TANGO AND RIOPLATENSE SPANISH

Student guide

Private 1-on-1 online course · 4 weeks · 20 hours · Level A2 or higher

You choose your times, Monday to Friday, between 08:00 and 22:00 Argentina time ·
US\$419

A Spanish language course about tango. It does not include dance lessons.

Book: go.vamosspanish.com/online/?course=voc-tango

Course page: vamosspanish.com/online-spanish-classes/argentine-spanish-course/

Free level test: go.vamosspanish.com/level-test

Questions? Write to us on [WhatsApp](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/00299a00000000000000000000000000), call 1-888-808-1242 or e-mail
online@vamosspanish.com

HOW THE COURSE WORKS

¡Bienvenido! Welcome to Pasos de Tango.

- **Format:** private 1-on-1 online classes with your Vamos Academy teacher.
- **Length:** 4 weeks, 20 hours, 5 hours a week.
- **Schedule:** you choose your class times between 08:00 and 22:00 Argentina time.
- **Level:** A2 or higher.
- **The plan:**
 - Week 1: Speak like Buenos Aires (voseo, che, lunfardo, city life)
 - Week 2: Tango from the inside (history, Gardel, Piazzolla, the milonga)
 - Week 3: Table and street (mate, asado, fútbol, feriados, customs)
 - Week 4: Stories (a text, a film clip, and your final project)
- **Final project:** a short presentation called "Mi día en Buenos Aires" or a short tango lyric you write yourself.
- **Certificate:** a Vamos Academy certificate of completion when you finish the course. It is not a licence or an official certification.
- **Homework:** about 20 to 30 minutes after each class.
- **Music:** listen through official sources only (licensed streaming services, official artist or label channels, public radio). This guide does not include any song lyrics; the lyrics inside are original practice texts written by Vamos Academy.

Questions? Write to us on [WhatsApp](#), call 1-888-808-1242 or e-mail online@vamospanish.com

VOSEO CHEAT SHEET

In Buenos Aires people use **vos** instead of **tú**. Everyone understands tú, but vos is what you will hear and what sounds natural.

Present tense: take the infinitive, drop the -r, add -s, and stress the last syllable.

Infinitive	Tú (other countries)	Vos (Buenos Aires)
hablar	hablas	hablás
comer	comes	comés
vivir	vives	vivís
ser	eres	sos
ir	vas	vas
tener	tienes	tenés
querer	quieres	querés
poder	puedes	podés

Infinitive	Tú (other countries)	Vos (Buenos Aires)
venir	vienes	venís
decir	dices	decís
dormir	duermes	dormís
pensar	piensas	pensás

Tip: with vos there is **no stem change** (querés, not quieres).

Affirmative commands: drop the -r and stress the end.

Infinitive	Tú	Vos
hablar	habla	hablá
comer	come	comé
venir	ven	vení
decir	di	decí (decime = tell me)
poner	pon	poné
salir	sal	salí
tener	ten	tené
ir	ve	andá
mirar	mira	mirá

Negative commands: standard forms (no hables, no vengas) are always correct. In casual speech you will also hear no habléis, no vengás.

Past tense: same as tú: vos hablaste, comiste, fuiste, tuviste.

Pronouns: vos (subject and after prepositions: con vos, para vos), te (object: te quiero), tu/tus and tuyo (possessive).

Plural: always **ustedes**, for friends and strangers. Vosotros is not used.

Sound tip: in Buenos Aires "ll" and "y" sound like "sh" in English "show" (or the "s" in "measure"): yo, calle, lluvia, playa.

LUNFARDO GLOSSARY (80 WORDS)

Lunfardo is the slang of Buenos Aires. It grew in the port and the conventillos, mixing Spanish with Italian dialects, other immigrant languages and wordplay. Many words came into everyday speech, and tango lyrics are full of them. *(old)* = mainly heard in classic tangos today. *(vesre)* = syllables reversed.

1. **afanar:** to steal
2. **al pedo:** for nothing, doing nothing (casual, a bit rude)

3. **al toque**: right away
4. **atorrante**: rascal, lazy bum
5. **bacán**: rich, posh person (old)
6. **bancar**: to support, to put up with
7. **bardo**: mess, trouble
8. **berretín**: obsession, whim
9. **birra**: beer
10. **bondi**: bus
11. **boliche**: nightclub; small bar or shop (old)
12. **boludo**: idiot; between close friends, "mate" (use with care)
13. **bronca**: anger
14. **buena onda**: good vibes, nice person
15. **bulín**: bachelor's room (old)
16. **cana**: police; estar en cana = to be in jail
17. **catrera**: bed
18. **chabón**: guy
19. **chamuyar**: to sweet-talk
20. **chamuyo**: smooth talk
21. **chanta**: phony, show-off
22. **changa**: odd job
23. **cheto**: posh
24. **chorro**: thief
25. **copado**: cool, great
26. **cotorro**: room, small flat (old)
27. **curro**: scam, racket
28. **de una**: sure, absolutely
29. **engrupir**: to fool
30. **escabio**: alcohol, drinking
31. **fané**: worn out, faded (old)
32. **feca**: coffee (vesre of café)
33. **fiaca**: laziness
34. **fulero**: ugly, bad
35. **garpar**: to pay (vesre of pagar)
36. **gil**: fool
37. **gotán**: tango (vesre)
38. **groso**: great, impressive
39. **guita**: money
40. **jermu**: wife, woman (vesre of mujer)

41. **junar**: to look at, to see
42. **laburar**: to work
43. **laburo**: job
44. **lorca**: heat (vesre of calor)
45. **macana**: blunder; ¡qué macana! = what a pity
46. **malevo**: tough guy, villain (old)
47. **mango**: peso, money
48. **manyar**: to eat; to understand
49. **mersa**: tacky
50. **mina**: woman, girl (colloquial)
51. **mishiadura**: poverty, being broke (old)
52. **morfar**: to eat
53. **morfi**: food
54. **morochito/morocha**: dark-haired person
55. **mufa**: bad mood; bad luck
56. **ortiva**: killjoy; snitch
57. **papusa**: pretty girl (old)
58. **pebete/pebeta**: kid (old)
59. **percanta**: woman (old)
60. **plantar**: to leave, to run off; piantado = crazy
61. **pibe/piba**: kid, young person
62. **pilcha**: clothes
63. **pinta**: looks; tener pinta = to be good-looking
64. **piola**: clever, cool
65. **posta**: the truth; for real
66. **pucho**: cigarette
67. **quilombo**: mess, chaos
68. **rajar**: to leave fast; to fire someone
69. **re**: very (re lindo = really nice)
70. **tachero**: taxi driver (tacho = taxi)
71. **tamango**: shoe (old)
72. **tordo**: doctor
73. **trucho**: fake
74. **vento**: money (old)
75. **viejo/vieja**: dad/mum; los viejos = parents
76. **yeta**: bad luck, jinx
77. **yirar**: to wander around
78. **yuta**: police

79. **zabeca**: head (vesre of cabeza)

30. **zafar**: to get by, to get away with it

And of course, **che**: hey! (to call someone's attention). It is so typical that Ernesto Guevara got his nickname from it.

THE MILONGA: ETIQUETTE AND DANCE VOCABULARY

This course teaches you the words and codes of the milonga so you can understand and enjoy it. It does not teach you to dance.

What is a milonga? A milonga is a tango dance event. The same word also names a lively music style and its dance. A **práctica** is a more relaxed session where people practise.

The codes

1. **Cabeceo and mirada**: traditionally, people invite with a look and a small nod from across the room, not by walking up to a table. A nod back means yes; looking away means no, with no hard feelings.
2. **Tanda**: music is played in sets, usually of 3 or 4 songs. You normally dance the whole tanda with the same partner.
3. **Cortina**: a short piece of non-tango music between tandas. It is the moment to thank your partner and leave the floor.
4. **"Gracias"**: saying gracias in the middle of a tanda usually means "I'll stop here".
5. **Ronda**: couples move counterclockwise around the floor. Do not overtake or go against the flow.
6. **No teaching on the floor**: correcting a partner during a milonga is considered rude.
7. **Short chats**: it is normal to talk a little between songs in a tanda, but not while dancing.
8. **Respect the room**: follow the organiser's rules, dress neatly and enjoy the music.

Dance vocabulary

Spanish	English
el abrazo (abierto / cerrado)	the embrace (open / close)
el eje	axis, balance
la caminata	the walk
la salida	opening step
el ocho (adelante / atrás)	figure eight (forward / back)
el giro	turn
la parada	stop
la sacada	displacement
el boleó	whipping leg movement
el gancho	hook

Spanish	English
el cruce	cross
la pausa	pause
la marca	lead signal
conducir / seguir	to lead / to follow
la pista	dance floor
el musicalizador	DJ
sacar a bailar	to ask to dance

Useful phrases: ¿Bailamos? (Shall we dance?) · ¡Qué linda tanda! (What a lovely set!) · ¿Quién es la orquesta? (Which orchestra is this?) · Gracias, fue un placer. (Thank you, it was a pleasure.)

ORIGINAL PRACTICE LYRICS WITH NOTES

These three short lyrics were written by Vamos Academy in tango style for this course. They are not real tango lyrics.

Practice lyric 1: "El feca de la esquina"

Cayó la tarde en el barrio, el feca ya se enfrió, la mina que yo esperaba por otra esquina rajó. Me quedé con mi pucho y la bronca de un gil, mirando cómo el bondi se llevaba mi abril.

Line notes:

- *Cayó la tarde*: evening fell, a classic tango image.
- *feca*: coffee (vesre of café). *se enfrió*: got cold.
- *mina*: woman (colloquial).
- *rajó*: left fast, ran off.
- *pucho*: cigarette.
- *bronca*: anger. *gil*: fool. The singer calls himself a fool, very typical of tango.
- *bondi*: bus.
- *mi abril*: my April, a metaphor for youth or a love that is gone.

Practice lyric 2: "Laburo y milonga"

Toda la semana al laburo, sin un mango en el bolsillo, pero el sábado me pongo la pilcha con más brillo. Vos sabés, piba, que en la pista se me olvida la mishiadura: un abrazo, un bandoneón y una noche que no dura.

Line notes:

- *laburo*: work, job.

- *sin un mango*: without a peso, broke.
- *pilcha*: clothes; *con más brillo*: the shiniest.
- *Vos sabés*: voseo for "you know". *piba*: girl, young woman.
- *pista*: dance floor.
- *mishiadura*: poverty (old lunfardo).
- *abrazo*: the tango embrace.
- *una noche que no dura*: a night that does not last, the bittersweet joy of the milonga.

Practice lyric 3: "Carta al barrio"

Te escribo desde otro puerto, barrio de calles de adoquín, extraño el mate de mi vieja y el potrero hasta el confín. ¿Te acordás, pibe, del almacén, de la radio y la vereda? Hoy junaba una foto vieja y el corazón se me enreda.

Line notes:

- *otro puerto*: another port; the writer lives abroad, a theme of distance and return.
- *adoquín*: cobblestone.
- *mi vieja*: my mum (affectionate).
- *potrero*: street football pitch; *hasta el confín*: to the very edge.
- *¿Te acordás?*: voseo for "do you remember?". *pibe*: kid, boy.
- *almacén*: corner grocery; *vereda*: pavement.
- *junaba*: I was looking at (lunfardo *junar*).
- *se me enreda*: gets tangled, an image of nostalgia.

Try it: write two more lines for any lyric, using one lunfardo word and one vos form.

CULTURE CARDS (1): MATE AND ASADO

MATE

- **What:** an infusion of yerba mate leaves, drunk from a gourd (the mate) through a metal straw (the bombilla), with hot water from a termo.
- **The ritual:** one person, the **cebador**, prepares and serves. Each person drinks the whole mate and hands it back to the cebador, who refills it for the next person.
- **Codes:** do not move or stir the bombilla. Say **gracias** only when you do not want any more. The water should be hot but not boiling.
- **Amargo or dulce:** bitter (no sugar) or sweet. When it loses flavour it is **lavado**.
- **Say it:** ¿Querés un mate? · Cebame uno. · Está lavado, cambiemos la yerba.

ASADO

- **What:** grilled meat, and much more: a long social gathering, often on Sundays, with family or friends.
- **The asador** controls the fire (**brasas** from leña or carbón) and the timing.

- **Typical order:** chorizo and morcilla first, often as **choripán**, then achuras, provoleta, and the main cuts: **tira de asado** and **vacío**. With **chimichurri** and salads.
- **Codes:** at the end everyone applauds: **¡Un aplauso para el asador!** Bring something (drinks, dessert, salad) if you are invited.
- **Say it:** ¿Cómo te gusta la carne? Jugosa, a punto o bien cocida.

CULTURE CARDS (2): FÚTBOL, FERIADOS AND BARRIOS

FÚTBOL

- **Passion:** your **cuadro** (team) is part of who you are. Common question: **¿De qué cuadro sos?**
- **The superclásico:** Boca Juniors (La Bombonera stadium, in La Boca) vs River Plate (El Monumental, in Núñez).
- **La Selección:** world champions in 1978, 1986 and 2022. Big names: Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi.
- **Words:** hinchas (fans), hinchada (fans together), cancha (stadium), golazo, gambeta (dribble), potrero (street pitch).
- **Tip:** football rivalry is serious fun. Ask, listen and enjoy, and be careful with jokes about someone's team.

FERIADOS (selected national holidays)

Date	Holiday
Movable (Feb/Mar)	Carnaval
24 March	Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia
2 April	Día del Veterano y de los Caídos en la Guerra de Malvinas
1 May	Día del Trabajador
25 May	Revolución de Mayo (1810)
20 June	Día de la Bandera (Manuel Belgrano)
9 July	Día de la Independencia (1816)
August (movable)	Paso a la Inmortalidad del General San Martín
12 October (movable)	Día del Respeto a la Diversidad Cultural
20 November (movable)	Día de la Soberanía Nacional
8 December	Inmaculada Concepción
25 December	Navidad

On patriotic dates people often eat **locro**, **empanadas** and **pastelitos**, and wear the **escarapela**. Some dates move to make a long weekend (**fin de semana largo**). Dates can change by decree, so check the official calendar each year.

BARRIOS

- **San Telmo:** cobblestones, antiques and the Sunday street fair on Calle Defensa; tango in squares and bars.
- **La Boca:** the colourful street Caminito, the port history and La Bombonera.
- **Palermo:** parks, cafés, restaurants and nightlife.
- **Recoleta:** elegant avenues and the famous Recoleta Cemetery, where Eva Perón is buried.
- **Abasto and Almagro:** Gardel's neighbourhood, with the Museo Casa Carlos Gardel.
- **Boedo:** a barrio linked to classic tango poets and old cafés.

Everyday customs: one cheek kiss to greet, even between men among friends · dinner at 21:00 or later · long **sobremesa** after meals · **facturas** and **medialunas** for merienda · **ñoquis** on the 29th of each month (some put money under the plate for luck) · **Día del Amigo** on 20 July.

TANGO TIMELINE AND LISTENING LIST

Short timeline

- **Late 1800s:** tango grows in the port neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, mixing habanera, candombe, milonga and immigrant music.
- **1917:** "Mi noche triste" sung by Carlos Gardel, often seen as the start of the tango-canción (sung tango with a story).
- **1935:** Gardel dies in a plane crash in Medellín, Colombia, and becomes a legend.
- **About 1935 to 1955:** the golden age, with big orchestras such as Juan D'Arienzo, Carlos Di Sarli, Aníbal Troilo and Osvaldo Pugliese.
- **1950s to 1990s:** Astor Piazzolla (1921 to 1992) creates nuevo tango, mixing tango with classical music and jazz.
- **2009:** UNESCO adds tango to the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, shared by Argentina and Uruguay.
- **11 December:** Día Nacional del Tango, the birthday of Carlos Gardel and of Julio De Caro.

Listening list (titles only, no lyrics) Listen through licensed streaming services, official artist or label channels, or public radio.

Title	Music / lyrics	Year
El choclo	Ángel Villoldo	1903
La cumparsita	Gerardo Matos Rodríguez	1917
Mi noche triste	Samuel Castriota / Pascual Contursi	1917
A media luz	Edgardo Donato / Carlos César Lenzi	1924
Caminito	Juan de Dios Filiberto / Gabino Coria Peñaloza	1926
Milonga sentimental	Sebastián Piana / Homero Manzi	1931
Cambalache	Enrique Santos Discépolo	1934
Mi Buenos Aires querido	Carlos Gardel / Alfredo Le Pera	1934
Volver	Carlos Gardel / Alfredo Le Pera	1934

Title	Music / lyrics	Year
Por una cabeza	Carlos Gardel / Alfredo Le Pera	1935
El día que me quieras	Carlos Gardel / Alfredo Le Pera	1935
Malena	Lucio Demare / Homero Manzi	1942
Naranja en flor	Virgilio Expósito / Homero Expósito	1944
La yumba	Osvaldo Pugliese	1946
Sur	Aníbal Troilo / Homero Manzi	1948
Adiós Nonino	Astor Piazzolla	1959
Balada para un loco	Astor Piazzolla / Horacio Ferrer	1969
Libertango	Astor Piazzolla	1974

Listening log: for each song, write the title, the orchestra or singer, one word you understood, and how it made you feel.

FINAL PROJECT TEMPLATE: "MI DÍA EN BUENOS AIRES"

Speak for 5 to 8 minutes. Use vos when you talk to your listener, at least 8 lunfardo words, and at least 3 culture topics from the course.

1. Para empezar (30 seconds)

- Hola, che. Les cuento cómo sería mi día perfecto en Buenos Aires.
- My name, where I am from, why I love Argentina: ____

2. A la mañana

- Me levanto a las __ **y tomo un** __ con medialunas en _____.
- Tomo el colectivo / el subte hasta _____.

3. Al mediodía

- Almuerzo en __. **Pido** _____.
- Paseo por el barrio de __, **porque** _____.

4. A la tarde

- Hora de la merienda y del mate: _____.
- Voy a la cancha / a una feria / a un museo: _____.

5. A la noche

- Ceno tarde, a las __, **en** _____.
- Termino la noche en una milonga: miro la ronda, escucho una tanda de _____.

6. Para terminar

- Lo que más me gusta de Buenos Aires es _____.
- Si vos venís conmigo, te recomiendo que _____.
- ¿Alguna pregunta?

Checklist: ☐ vos forms ☐ 8 lunfardo words ☐ past or future time phrases ☐ 3 culture topics ☐ practised aloud 3 times

Option B: write your own tango lyric. Two stanzas of 6 to 8 lines. Include a place in Buenos Aires, a memory (imperfect tense), a feeling of nostalgia, 4 lunfardo words and one vos form. Use the practice lyrics on page 5 as models.