

Portuguese A1

— What to Study

Level: **A1 (Breakthrough)** • Language: **Portuguese** • Audience: **Learners**

A1 is the point where Portuguese stops being a flow of nasal sounds and becomes a language you can survive in. This guide follows Brazilian Portuguese, the variety spoken by most of the world's Portuguese speakers, and points out where Portugal differs. You are not aiming for fluency. You are aiming to handle predictable, concrete situations — introducing yourself, ordering food, asking where something is — with a patient speaker who is willing to slow down.

The Common European Framework describes A1 as being able to understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at satisfying concrete needs; to introduce yourself and others; to ask and answer questions about personal details such as where you live, people you know and things you have; and to interact simply provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Everything below serves that description. If a grammar point does not help you do one of those things, it is not an A1 problem yet.

Grammar to master

Nouns, gender and articles. Every Portuguese noun is masculine or feminine. Learn nouns with their article — *o livro, a casa, o problema, a mão*.

- Definite and indefinite articles: *o / a / os / as, um / uma / uns / umas*
- Articles combine with prepositions: *do, da, no, na, ao, pelo, pela* — *Moro no Brasil, Venho da Espanha*
- Plurals, including *-ão*, which has three possible plurals: *pão → pães, mão → mãos, avião → aviões*

The present tense.

- Regular *-ar, -er* and *-ir* verbs: *falar, comer, partir*
- The irregulars you cannot avoid: *ser, estar, ter, ir, fazer, poder, querer, dizer, vir*
- The near future with *ir* plus the infinitive: *Vou viajar amanhã*

Ser, estar and ficar. *Ser* for identity, origin, profession and permanent characteristics; *estar* for temporary states and location; and *ficar* for where buildings and places are: *Onde fica o banco?*

Pronouns and address.

- *você* for "you", with the same verb form as "he" or "she": *Você fala inglês?*
- *a gente*, meaning "we" in everyday speech, also with that verb form: *A gente vai à praia*

- *o senhor* and *a senhora* for polite address
- Possessives: *meu, minha, seu, sua, nosso*; and *dele* and *dela* to make "his" and "her" clear — *o carro dela*

Sentence building.

- Negation with *não* before the verb: *Não entendo*
- Questions by intonation, and with question words: *quem, o que, onde, quando, como, quanto, por que*
- Adjective agreement, usually after the noun: *uma casa bonita*
- *gostar de*, always with *de*: *Eu gosto de café*
- *Tem* for "there is" in everyday Brazilian speech — *Tem um mercado aqui perto* — and *há* in writing

Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 500 to 800 words you can actually retrieve, not recognise — each noun with its article. Depth in these areas beats breadth across topics you will not use.

- Greetings, farewells and courtesy formulas: *oi, bom dia, boa tarde, tchau, obrigado / obrigada, por favor, com licença*
- Personal information: name, age, origin, nationality, languages, phone number, email
- Family and relationships
- Professions and workplaces
- Physical description and basic personality adjectives
- The home: rooms, furniture, everyday objects
- Food and drink, meals, ordering in a café or restaurant
- Numbers 0 to 100, prices, telling the time, days, months, dates
- Colours and clothing
- The city: shops, public buildings, directions, public transport
- Daily routine and free-time activities
- Weather and seasons

What you should be able to do

Treat this as the real exit test for the level. Grammar you cannot deploy in these situations is not yet learned.

- Introduce yourself and give your personal details, and ask someone else for theirs
- Spell your name aloud and understand a spelled name
- Describe your family and where you live

- Say what you do for work or study
- Order food and drink and ask what something costs
- Ask for and follow simple directions
- Talk about your daily routine and what you like and dislike
- Fill in a form with your personal data
- Write a short message, postcard or simple personal introduction
- Understand slow, clearly articulated speech on these familiar topics

Common difficulties

Nasal sounds. *Pão, mãe, bom, sim*: the air goes partly through the nose, and changing the vowel can change the word. Imitate recordings rather than reading the spelling.

Letters that change sound. In much of Brazil, *t* and *d* before an *i* sound become "tch" and "dj": *tia* sounds like "tchia", *dia* like "djia". Final *-e* often sounds like *i*, and final *-o* like *u*.

Obrigado or obrigada. The word agrees with the speaker, not the listener: men say *obrigado*, women *obrigada*.

If you speak Spanish. Portuguese will feel easy to read and hard to understand when spoken. Watch the false friends: *polvo* is octopus, *esquisito* means strange, and *rato* is a mouse.

Brazil and Portugal. Grammar is largely shared, but pronunciation, some vocabulary and forms of address differ. Portugal uses *tu* far more, says *autocarro* and *comboio* where Brazil says *ônibus* and *trem*, and puts object pronouns after the verb more often. Choose one variety to speak and learn to recognise the other.

How to know you are ready for A2

You are ready when you can hold a slow, simple conversation about yourself and your immediate surroundings without rehearsing it first, and when the present tense of the common irregular verbs comes out without hesitation. If spoken Portuguese still sounds like one long word, spend more time listening at A1 before moving on.

Course hour estimates for each level vary widely; treat any figure you see as a rough scale, not a target.

Next step

Move on to the Portuguese A2 guide, which brings in the past tenses so you can talk about what already happened.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A1 descriptors. For a CEFR-aligned certificate at this level, see the ACESSO exam from CAPLE at the University of Lisbon (European Portuguese). Brazil's official certificate is Celpe-Bras, run by INEP.