

Portuguese B1

— What to Study

Level: **B1 (Threshold)** • Language: **Portuguese** • Audience: **Learners**

B1 is the level at which Portuguese becomes a tool rather than a subject. You can travel on your own, deal with most everyday problems, follow a conversation between native speakers when they speak clearly, and explain what you think and why. It is also where Portuguese shows its most distinctive grammar: the future subjunctive and the personal infinitive. This guide follows Brazilian Portuguese and points out where Portugal differs.

The Common European Framework describes B1 as being able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school and leisure; to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling; to produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest; and to describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Grammar to master

The present subjunctive. Used after expressions of wish, emotion, doubt and necessity, and after certain conjunctions.

- After *espero que, quero que, é importante que, tomara que*: *Espero que você venha*
- After *embora, para que, antes que, caso*, and with *talvez*: *Talvez eu vá amanhã*
- The irregular forms you will use most: *seja, esteja, tenha, vá, faça, possa, queira, saiba*

The future subjunctive. Almost unique to Portuguese, and constant in everyday speech. It follows *quando, se, assim que* and *enquanto* when they point to the future: *Quando eu tiver tempo, vou te visitar*; *Se você puder, me liga*. Learn it from the preterite stem: *tiveram* → *tiver*, *puderam* → *puder*, *fizeram* → *fizer*.

Hypotheses. The imperfect subjunctive with the conditional: *Se eu tivesse dinheiro, viajaria mais*. In relaxed Brazilian speech you will often hear the *imperfecto* instead of the conditional: *Se eu tivesse dinheiro, eu viajava mais*.

More past tenses.

- The *pretérito perfeito composto*, which is not the English present perfect: *Tenho estudado muito* means "I have been studying a lot lately" — a repeated or ongoing action — not "I have studied"
- The pluperfect for an earlier past: *Quando cheguei, o filme já tinha começado*

The personal infinitive. Portuguese can give an infinitive its own subject and ending: *É melhor vocês saírem cedo; Ele trouxe livros para nós lermos*. It is common, useful and has no equivalent in Spanish or English.

More structures.

- The passive with *ser*: *A casa foi construída em 1990*
- The passive with *se*, where the standard form agrees with the noun: *Vendem-se casas* — though you will often see the singular on signs
- Relative pronouns: *que*, *quem*, *onde*, and *cujo* in formal writing
- Connectors: *porém*, *entretanto*, *então*, *já que*, *enquanto*, *mesmo que*

Vocabulary areas

Aim for roughly 2,500 active words and a much larger passive vocabulary.

- Work: applications, interviews, the workplace, colleagues and conflicts
- Education and training, including the Brazilian school and university system
- Media: news, the internet, social networks
- Health and lifestyle, sport and nutrition
- Relationships, feelings and personal problems
- Travel problems: complaints, lost property, changing plans
- The environment, the city and the countryside
- Opinions, agreement and disagreement

What you should be able to do

- Handle most situations on a trip, including problems and complaints
- Describe experiences, events, hopes and plans in connected speech
- Give your opinion on a familiar topic and support it with reasons and examples
- Follow the main points of a discussion or talk in clear standard Portuguese
- Understand the main points of news items and articles on familiar subjects
- Write a personal letter or a simple formal email: a complaint, a request, an application
- Tell the story of a film or book and say what you thought of it
- Take part in a conversation on familiar topics without preparation

Common difficulties

The future subjunctive. Spanish and English speakers want to use the present after *quando* and *se*. *Quando eu chego* describes a habit; *Quando eu chegar* is about one future moment. Practise pairs like these until the difference is automatic.

Tenho feito is not "I have done". The *perfeito composto* describes something repeated or continuing up to now. For a single completed action, Portuguese uses the simple past: *Já comi*, not *Tenho comido*.

The personal infinitive. Learners avoid it and reach for a *que* clause instead. That works, but using the personal infinitive is one of the clearest signs of real progress.

Regional variety. Accents from Rio, São Paulo, the north-east and the south sound quite different, and Portugal differs again. Focus first on one standard, then widen your ear.

How to know you are ready for B2

You are ready when you can explain your opinion on a familiar topic for a few minutes without searching for basic structures, when *quando eu puder* and *se você quiser* come out without thinking, and when you can read a news article on a familiar topic and follow its main argument. If you still avoid the subjunctive in speech, spend more time at B1.

Next step

Move on to the Portuguese B2 guide, which takes you into abstract topics, argued writing and the formal written standard.

Written by GongbuLeng. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 descriptors. For a CEFR-aligned certificate at this level, see the DEPLE exam from CAPLE at the University of Lisbon (European Portuguese). Brazil's official certificate is Celpe-Bras, run by INEP.