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# SOCIAL SCIENCE

## **UNIT 1. SPAIN: PHYSICAL ORGANIZATION RELIEF & RIVERS**

Exam Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## UNIT 1. SPAIN: PHYSICAL ORGANIZATION AND RELIEF

In this unit we are going to learn about:

1. Spain's localization and territory
2. Spain's autonomous communities and provinces
3. Spain's relief:
  - The Meseta and Mountain Systems.
  - Coastal relief and the archipelagos
4. Spain's Rivers.

### MY VOCABULARY

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## 1. SPAIN'S LOCATION AND TERRITORY

Spain is located in the **Northern Hemisphere**, in the south west of **Europe** occupying the majority of the Iberian Peninsula. It is formed by:

### The mainland

- The mainland of Spain is on the **Iberian Peninsula** (except Portugal), in the southwest of **Europe**. The Rock of Gibraltar (El Peñón de Gibraltar) in the south belongs to the United Kingdom. Africa is 17 kilometres from Tarifa (Cádiz) on the south coast. The sea between Spain and Africa is called Strait of Gibraltar. Spain has got borders with France (The Pyrenees form a natural border), Andorra and the Cantabrian Sea to the North; Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean to the West; Gibraltar, Morocco and the Mediterranean Sea in the South; the Mediterranean Sea is also its border in the east.

### The archipelagos

- Spain has **two** main archipelagos. The archipelago of **Las Islas Canarias (The Canary Islands)** is near the north west coast of Africa, in the Atlantic Ocean. It is made up of seven different islands and some smaller islets. The archipelago of **Las Islas Baleares (The Balearic Islands)** is in the Mediterranean Sea, near the east coast of the Peninsula. It has four main islands and some smaller islets.

### Ceuta and Melilla

- Ceuta and Melilla are the **autonomous cities** that are part of Spanish territory. They are located in the north coast of **Africa** and are bordered with Morocco.



Spain is located in the Northern Hemisphere

Spain is located in the Southwest of Europe



## 2. AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES AND PROVINCES

### AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES

The total population in Spain is approximately **47 million people**. The most populated areas in Spain are big cities as Madrid and Barcelona. Apart from these, the most populated areas in Spain are along the coast. Spain is made up of:

- 17 Autonomous communities
- 2 Autonomous cities.



N.º	COMUNIDAD	CAPITAL
1	 Galicia	Santiago de Compostela
2	 Principado de Asturias	Oviedo
3	 Cantabria	Santander
4	 País Vasco	<i>*Vitoria</i>
5	 Navarra	Pamplona
6	 Aragón	Zaragoza
7	 Cataluña	Barcelona
8	 Castilla y León	<i>*Valladolid</i>
9	 La Rioja	Logroño
10	 Comunidad de Madrid	Madrid
11	 Extremadura	Mérida
12	 Castilla-La Mancha	Toledo
13	 Comunidad Valenciana	Valencia
14	 Islas Baleares	Palma de Mallorca
15	 Andalucía	Sevilla
16	 Región de Murcia	Murcia
17	 Islas Canarias	Las palmas de Gran Canaria y Santa Cruz de Tenerife
<b>NOTA: *No tienen capital legalmente establecida</b>		

## PROVINCES

Each autonomous community is made up of one province or more (7 of the 17 autonomous communities have only one province – *uniprovincial*). Spain has 50 provinces.



### Comunidades Uniprovinciales

- 1 Cantabria
- 2 Asturias
- 3 Navarra
- 4 La Rioja
- 5 Murcia
- 6 Comunidad de Madrid
- 7 Baleares

### Comunidades Pluriprovinciales

- 1 **Galicia**  
La Coruña, Lugo, Orense y Pontevedra
- 2 **País Vasco**  
Álava, Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya.
- 3 **Cataluña**  
Barcelona, Tarragona, Lérida, Gerona
- 4 **Comunidad Valenciana**  
Castellón, Valencia, Alicante.
- 5 **Andalucía**  
Huelva, Sevilla, Cádiz, Córdoba, Málaga, Jaén, Granada, Almería
- 6 **Castilla y León**  
León, Palencia, Burgos, Soria, Segovia, Ávila, Salamanca, Zamora, Valladolid
- 7 **Castilla la Mancha**  
Guadalajara, Cuenca, Albacete, Ciudad Real, Toledo
- 8 **Aragón**  
Huesca, Zaragoza, Teruel
- 9 **Extremadura**  
Cáceres, Badajoz
- 10 **Canarias**  
Santa Cruz de Tenerife y Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

There are 3 provinces made up of islands.

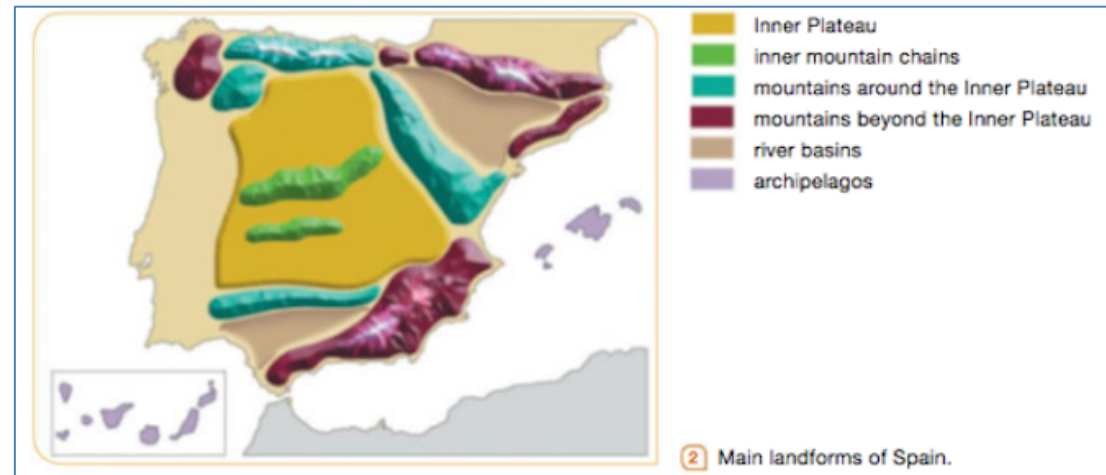
- Two of these are in **Canarias**:
  - Santa Cruz de Tenerife includes Tenerife, La Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro
  - Las Palmas de Gran Canaria includes Gran Canaria, Fuertentura and Lanzarote
- **Islas Baleares** is the third province. It's just once province consisting of:
  - Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, Formentera and some smaller islands, such as Cabrera.

### 3. SPAIN'S RELIEF

**Relief** is the shape of the landscape. Mountain relief consists of high ground and slopes. Some surfaces are flat. These are called **plains**. Plains can be **river basins** or **plateaus** depending on how high they are. These are the main characteristics of Spain's landscape:

- Mountains cover a large part of the peninsula and the archipelagos.
- There is a large plateau called the Meseta at the center of the Peninsula, surrounded by mountains.
- The coastline is generally straight with cliffs.

Spain is mainly a **mountainous** country. It includes six main landforms: The Inner Plateau; two mountain chains on the Plateau; four mountain ranges around the plateau; five mountain ranges beyond the Plateau; two river basins beyond the plateau and two archipelagos.



## THE INNER PLATEAU (MESETA) AND ITS MOUNTAIN SYSTEMS

The **Meseta** is an **area of elevated plains** or **plateaus** which covers a lot of the peninsula's interior. It is about 600 meters above sea level. It covers the **center** of the Iberian Peninsula, that is, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha, Madrid and Extremadura. The eastern part of La Meseta is higher than the western part and, for this reason, the rivers in La Meseta flow from east to west into the Atlantic Ocean. The rivers Duero, Tajo and Guadiana flow across it.

There are two major mountain systems on it: the **Sistema Central** and **Montes de Toledo**. Large rivers run through it on their way to the Atlantic.

### Sistema Central

- The **Sistema Central** is a mountain system in the centre of the Meseta. It **divides** the Meseta into two sub-plateaus. The **Northern sub-plateau** (Duero river valley) is bigger, flatter and higher than the **Southern sub-plateau** (Tajo and Guadiana river valleys). The Sistema Central includes mountain ranges over 2000 m high such as **Somosierra, Guadarrama, Gata** and **Gredos**. The highest peak is **Almanzor** (2592 m).

### Montes de Toledo

- The **Montes de Toledo** are a mountain system in the centre of the Southern sub-plateau, between the Tajo and the Guadiana river valleys. The mountains are moderate height. It includes Sierras de **Montánchez** and the Sierra Guadalupe.



## THE MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING THE MESETA

The Meseta is almost completely surrounded by four chains of mountains.

### Montes de León

- The **Montes de León** are a mountain range in the **northwest**. They separate the Plateau from the Macizo Galaico. The highest peak is the **Telero** (2188 m)

### Cordillera Cantábrica

- The **Cordillera Cantábrica** is a mountain system in the **north**. They separate the Meseta from the Cantabrian Sea. It includes the high peaks of the **Picos de Europa**. They act as a boundary between Castilla y León, Cantabria and Asturias.

### Sistema Ibérico

- The **Sistema Ibérico** is a mountain system in the **east**, separating the plateau from the Ebro depression (Ebro river basin). They run through Castilla y León, La Rioja, Aragón, Castilla-La Mancha and the Comunidad Valenciana. The main mountain ranges are the **Picos de Urbión**, **Albarracín** and **Moncayo**, which is **the highest peak**. They are over 2000 m high.

### Sierra Morena

- **Sierra Morena** is a mountain system in the **south**. It separates the Plateau from the Guadalquivir Valley. It is not a high mountain system. The main ranges are **Despeñaperros**, **Almadén**, **Madrona** and **Alcaráz**

## THE MOUNTAIN RANGES FAR WAY FROM THE MESETA

There are **five** mountain systems outside the Central Plateau:

### Macizo Galáico

- The **Macizo Galáico** is a mountain system in the northwest of the Península. The mountains are low with **rounded** peaks. The highest peak is **Peña Trevinca** (2127 m).

### Montes Vascos

- The **Montes Vascos** are a mountain range in the **north**, located between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Pirineos. The Mountains are low mountains, with **pointed** peaks. They have an uneven relief and are not in rows. The main ranges are the **Sierras of Aralar** and **Aizkorri**. The highest peak is **Aitxuri** (1551 m).

### Pirineos (Pyrenees)

- The **Pirineos** (Pyrenees) are a large mountain range in the northeast of the Peninsula. They run from the Cantabrian Sea to the Mediterranean. They form the border between France and Spain. The mountains are **very high**. The highest peak is the **Aneto** (3 414 m).

### Cordilleras Costero-Catalanas

- The **Cordilleras Costero-Catalanas** is in the northeast of the Península. They run parallel to the Mediterranean coast, from the Pirineos to the rio Ebro. The mountains are moderate in height and they include the **Montseny Range**.

### Sistema Bético

- The **Sistema Bético** lies to the southeast. It is a mountain system with two parallel ranges:
- **Cordillera Penibética**. It is close to the Mediterranean coast. **Sierra Nevada** is one of its main mountain ranges. The highest peak is the **Mulhacén**, at 3478 m, which is the highest on the Peninsula.
- **Cordillera Subbética**. It is inland and the mountains are lower than in the Cordillera Penibética. The main ranges are the **Sierra Cazorla** and **Sierra de Segura**.

## MOUNTAIN RANGES

Spain is mainly a **mountainous** country. The average altitude of the Iberian Peninsula is **600m**. The Meseta (Inner Plateau) consists of elevated plains or plateaus. The rivers Duero, Tajo and Guadiana flow across it.

MOUNTAIN RANGES IN THE MESETA		MOUNTAIN RANGES FAR AWAY FROM THE MESETA	
ACROSS THE MESETA	SURROUNDING THE MESETA	These mountain systems are <u>not connected to the Meseta</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sistema Central</u></li> <li>- Gredos</li> <li>- Guadarrama</li> <li>- Somosierra</li> <li>- Gata</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Montes de León</u></li> <li>- Teleno</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Macizo Galáico</u></li> <li>- Sierra de Trevinca</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Montes Vascos</u></li> <li>- Sierra de Aralar</li> <li>- Sierra de Aizkorri</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Montes de Toledo</u></li> <li>- Sierra de Guadalupe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cordillera Cantábrica</u></li> <li>- Picos de Europa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The Pyrenees</u></li> <li>- Aneto</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Cordilleras Costero-Catalanas</u></li> <li>- Montseny</li> <li>- Montserrat</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sistema Ibérico</u></li> <li>- Picos de Urbión</li> <li>- Moncayo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sistema Bético</u></li> <li>- Cordillera Subbética</li> <li>- Sierra de Cazorla</li> <li>- Sierra de Segura</li> <li>- Cordillera Penibética → Sierra Nevada → <b>MULHACÉN</b> (3478m) (Highest peak of the Península)</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Sierra Morena</u></li> <li>- Despeñaperros</li> <li>- Almadén</li> </ul>	<p>The highest peak of Spain is the <b>TEIDE</b> (3712m). It is a volcanic structure located in the Canary Islands (Province of Tenerife).</p>	

## THE RIVER BASINS OUTSIDE THE MESETA

A **depression** or **river basin** is a low, flat area surrounded by higher ground. It has got a river running through it. In Spain there are two large river basins outside the Meseta:

### Ebro Basin

- It is located in the northeast of the Peninsula, between the Pyrenees and the Systema Ibérico. It is a large triangular plain and the Ebro runs through it. The river deposits materials near the mouth, creating a large triangular area of land called **delta**.

### Guadalquivir Basin

- This is located in the south of the Peninsula, between Sierra Morena and the Cordillera Subbética. It is a large triangular plain and the Guadalquivir runs through it. There are very fertile marshes near the mouth of the river.



**Basin:** Flatland and lowland with rivers running across it.

## THE COASTAL LANDSCAPE AND ISLANDS

A coastline is an area where land meets the ocean or sea. It can have many different forms, such as **cap**es, **peninsulas**, **islands**, **archipelagos**, **bays** and **gulfs**. Coastlines can also have **estuaries**, **marshes** and **rías**.

Spain has about 8000 km of coastline, which is generally cliffed, although is also home to flat, sandy beaches. The coastline of the Iberian Peninsula is divided into five different sections. The **Cantabrian** coast is rocky. It has many cliffs, bays and beaches. The **Galician Atlantic** coast is high and rocky. It has many capes and *rías*. The **Andalusian Atlantic** coast is low and sandy. It has many beaches. The **Southern Mediterranean** coast has many cliffs and is rocky. The **Eastern Mediterranean** coast is low, straight and sandy.

**Cape:** A high point of land that sticks out into the sea or ocean.

**Bay** and **Gulf:** They are concavities formed by tidal erosion in the coastline of an ocean, lake or sea. The term bay usually refers to a body of water smaller than a gulf. A **cove** is a small bay.

**Ria:** A long, narrow inlet formed by the partial submergence of a river valley.

**Estuary:** Body of water in which river water is mixed with seawater.

**Marsh:** Type of wetland with soils rich in minerals.



### The Cantabrian Coast

- It extends from Estaca de Bares, in La Coruña to the border with France. It is generally **high** and **rocky**. It also has some small sandy beaches (Santander). Significant landforms are **Cape Peñas, Cape Ajo, Cape Matxitxaco, Bay of Bizcaya**.

### The Galician Atlantic Coast

- It runs from Estaca de Bares to the mouth of the Miño river which is at the border with Portugal. Its coastline is high and irregular with rocky cliffs. This coast is famous for its rías. **Rías** are river estuaries. In Galicia, the rías are divided into las **rías bajas**, in the south, and las **rías altas**, in the north. The **Finisterre Cape** and **Ria de Arousa** are located here.

### The Andalusian Atlantic Coast

- It runs from the Guadiana River to the Strait of Gibraltar. It is very **straight, sandy** and **low**. Significant landforms are **Huelva Estuary** and **Doñana marsh**.

### The Andalusian Mediterranean Coast

- It runs from the Strait of Gibraltar to Murcia. It is quite **straight**, with a mixture of **cliffed** and **flat** coast. Significant landforms are the **Gulf of Almeria** and **Cape Gata**.

### The Eastern Mediterranean Coast

- It runs from Cape Gata to Cape Creus. It has got two parts. The Murcia and Valencia coastlines are sandy and flat with some cliffs. The Catalanian coastline is uneven, rocky and cliffed, with lots of coves. Significant landforms are **Cape Palos, Cape Nao, Gulf of Valencia** and **Ebro Delta**.

## ISLAND LANDSCAPES: THE ARCHIPELAGOS

Spain has **two** archipelagos: the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands.

### The Balearic Islands

- The Balearic Islands are in the **Mediterranean Sea**. They are made up of an archipelago of **five islands**: Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, Formentera and Cabrera. Mallorca and Ibiza are joined to the Cordillera Bética under the Sea. They are mainly flat islands. Mallorca has two mountain ranges, the Sierra Tramuntana and the Sierras de Levante. The coasts are uneven and cliffed, with lots of coves.



### The Canary Islands

- The Canary Islands are in the **Atlantic Ocean** opposite the west coast of Africa. They include the islands of La Palma, La Gomera, El Hierro, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. These islands have a **volcanic origin**. Some of their volcanoes are still active. The highest peak in Spain, **El Teide** (3718 m), is in Tenerife. The coasts are rocky with cliffs and quite straight, with some long beaches.



**Archipelago:** A large group of islands.

## RIVERS

**Rivers** are large streams of fresh water that flow across the land. They form in the mountains and flow downhill into the sea, a lake or another river. The study of rivers and other bodies of water, such as seas and lakes is called **hydrography**. When hydrographers study rivers, they consider certain elements and characteristics.

## ELEMENTS

- The **source** is the place where the river begins.
- The **course** is the path it takes, and it can be divided into three sections: the **upper course**, which is the section closest to the source of the river; the **middle course**, the central sections, and the **lower course**, the section closer to the end of the rivers
- The end of the river is called the **mouth**. This is the place where the river flows into the sea, a lake or another river. A river that flows into another river is called a **tributary**.

## CHARACTERISTICS

- The **length** of a river is the distance between the river's source and its mouth.
- The **flow** is the amount of water.

## FACTORS

Rivers are determined by **climate** and **relief**.

- **Relief** affects the **length** of rivers. Rivers are short if the rise in mountains near the sea and long, when they rise in far away from the sea they flow into.
- **Climate** affects the **flow** regime of the rivers: Rivers in wet climates have abundant flow and a regular regime. Rivers in drier climates have an irregular flow regime.



Most rivers in Spain are **short** and have **irregular** flow. This is because, in general, Spain is not a rainy country.

A **watershed** is an area where all the rivers and streams flow into the same sea. The rivers that flow into the sea, for example the Ebro, are the **main rivers**. Rivers which flow into other rivers are called **tributaries**.

There are **three** watersheds in Spain. The **Atlantic watershed** in the west. The **Cantabrian watershed** in the north. The **Mediterranean watershed** in the east and south.



RIVERS		
WATERSHED	DESCRIPTION	RIVERS
<p>CANTABRIAN WATERSHED</p> <p>Flow into the Cantabrian Sea</p>	<p>It is the smallest in Spain, but its rivers <b>carry a lot of water</b>. Its rivers are very <b>short</b> and <b>steep</b>, because they start in the Cantabrian Mountains, close to the sea. This area has abundant rainfall so the rivers have <b>regular, abundant flow</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Basque Country</u>: Bidasoa, Nervión</li> <li>- <u>Cantabria</u>: Besaya, Pas</li> <li>- <u>Asturias</u>: Nalón, Narcea, Navia</li> <li>- <u>Galicia</u>: Eo</li> </ul>
<p>MEDITERRANEAN WATERSHED</p> <p>Flow into the Mediterranean Sea</p>	<p>The majority of rivers are <b>short</b> (except for the Ebro). They carry <b>little water</b> because of the low rainfall. They have irregular flow of water: less water or drought in summer, which increases in the spring and autumn.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ter</li> <li>- Llobregat</li> <li>- Ebro</li> <li>- Turia</li> <li>- Júcar</li> <li>- Segura</li> </ul>
<p>ATLANTIC WATERSHED</p> <p>Flow into the Atlantic Ocean</p>	<p>The Atlantic watershed is the largest. Its rivers are usually <b>long</b>, because they start in mountains long away from the Atlantic Ocean. The volume of water they carry <b>depends on the season</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Galicia</u>: Tambre, Ulla, Miño,</li> <li>- <u>Meseta</u>: Duero, Tajo, Guadiana</li> <li>- <u>Andalucía</u>: Odiel, Tinto, Guadalquivir.</li> </ul>

### WATER IN SPAIN'S ISLANDS

The Balearic and Canary Islands **don't have** permanent rivers because of the characteristics of the soil and because they don't receive a lot of rain. Temporary flows of water that form when it rains are called *torrentes* in the Balearic Islands and *barrancos* in the Canaries.