

## DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN GIVEN NAMES AND SURNAMES

Distinguishing between given names and surnames is perhaps the biggest problem in Spanish name extraction for three reasons:

First, a Latin American can have any number of given names and surnames. In the following examples, the surnames are in boldface:

Mario Saenz  
 Rafael Heliodoro Valle  
 José María del Carmen **Herrera**  
 José **Gonzalez** Campo  
 Fernando **Ortiz** y **Fernandez**  
 Leticia María Guerrero  
 Francisco **Fernandez** del **Castillo**  
 Oscar **Miró** Quesada y de la **Guerra**  
 Carlos **Pardo-Manuel** de Villena y **Jiménez**

Second, some common names, such as Martín, Rodrigo, and Santos, can be both given names and surnames. Many

names beginning with a particle—*de, del, de la, de las, or de los*—can be surnames or parts of given names.

Third, before about 1750 many people did not have surnames. However, virtually all Spaniards did have surnames which were recorded in the parish registers.

Therefore, you cannot automatically assume that a person's last name will be his surname. For example, if all you know about a person is that his name is Pedro de la Cruz, you cannot be sure if **de la Cruz** is his surname or part of his given name.

However, you can be sure that the words **de la Cruz** go together. Whenever any of the particles mentioned above are part of a name, they and the following name make up a unit. Fortunately, you will know more about the people whose names you extract than just their names.



## Guidelines for Distinguishing Between Given Names and Surnames

To determine if a name is a given name or a surname, consider the following:

### Time Period

If the person lived about or before 1770, the name is most likely a given name. After 1770, it is most likely a surname. As a rule, the earlier the date, the greater likelihood there is that the name is a given name.

### Parish Location

Information from the register itself may give you a clue as to the kind of area in which the parish was located. For example, if most of the children christened were born on *la hacienda* ("a large ranch"), you know the parish was in a rural, cattle-raising area. But you may have to do additional research in an encyclopedia, gazetteer, or atlas to answer this question.

In the more populated and urban areas, people were more likely to have surnames. In rural areas, mining areas, Indian villages, and small towns, they were more likely to have just given names.

### Other Entries

If the priest recorded surnames for most people in the parish, probably the name in question is also a surname.

### Racial Designation

Records before 1821 usually indicated a person's race. Spaniards, criollos, and mestizos were of the higher social classes and were more likely to have surnames. Indians, Negroes, and those of mixed races (other than mestizos) were more likely not to have surnames.

### Titles

A title, such as *don* or *doña*, indicates high social position, and hence the probability that the person had a surname.

### Father's Name

If, for example, the groom is Juan de Jesus and his father is Francisco Xavier, it is likely that all of the names are given names. If, however, the groom's father's name is Francisco de Jesus, *de Jesus* is probably a surname.

### Godparent's Names

If the godparents have titles or obvious surnames, the other individuals in the entry probably have surnames.

### Name Endings

During the Moorish occupation of Spain, it was common to change or drop the last letter of a given name and add *ez*, which meant "of" or "son of," making the given name a surname. For example:

Given Name	Surname
Hernando + ez	= Hernandez
Martin + ez	= Martinez
Lope + ez	= Lopez
Gonzalo + ez	= Gonzalez

### Proper Nouns

Many times proper nouns were used as surnames. For example:

Ríos — Rivers	Robles — Oaks
Casas — Houses	Rivera — Creek
Montaña — Mountain	Huerta — Orchard

### Localities

Localities *without* qualifiers such as *de* were often used as surnames. This was especially true of the Spaniards, who, when coming to the New World, used their place of origin as their surname. For example José from the city of Cordoba would become José Cordoba.

Some given names often appear in combination, usually to distinguish between saints of the same name. The list of combined given names in Appendix A may help you tell given names from surnames. For example, if you saw the name **Tomás de Aquino**, you might think **de Aquino** was Tomás's surname unless you knew that the whole name was a combination given name.

Often it is impossible to say beyond any doubt that a certain name is a given name or a surname. If after weighing all the evidence you still cannot reach a conclusion, consider all the names to be given names.

### Self-Evaluation

Examine the information below. Place a slash between each person's given name(s) and surname(s), for example, Juan/Gomez. You may use the Appendix or whatever reference tools you have available.

- Child: Joseph  
Father: Andres Delgado  
Mother: Ana Fernandez  
Date: 23 April 1650  
Race of child and parents: Spaniards  
Location of parish: small town  
Godparents: Captain Alonso Muñoz and Antonia Ramíres
- Child: José Gabriel  
Father: Nicolas Thomás  
Mother: Francisca Thomasa  
Date: 18 March 1820  
Race of child and parents: mestizo  
Location of parish: mining area  
Paternal grandfather: José María  
Maternal grandfather: Christoval de la Cruz  
Godparents: José Antonio and María Juliana
- Groom: Juachín de la Luz  
Father: Salvador Vincencio  
Mother: Francisca de Mesa  
Date: 30 April 1744  
Race of groom and parents: Indian  
Location of parish: Indian village  
Godparents: Salvador Péres and María Ygnacia

### Answers

Child: Joseph/ Father: Andres/Delgado Mother: Ana/Fernandez Godparents: Alonso/Muñoz, Antonia/Ramíres

2. Child: José Gabriel/ Father: Nicolas Thomas/ Mother: Francisca Thomasa/ Godparents: José Antonio/, María Juliana/

3. Groom: Juachin de la Luz/ Father: Salvador Vincencio/ Mother: Francisca de Mesa/ Godparents: Salvador/Péres, María Ygnacia