Problems with **gustar** and similar verbs?
Here are some (hopefully) helpful hints:

There’s a tendency to want to equate the Spanish verb **gustar** with the English verb **to like**. Unfortunately, the two verbs work very differently in terms of sentence structure. Consider viewing **gustar** in the following manner:

What does the verb **gustar** express? It expresses a positive opinion about something or someone. So, we can say: **El libro gusta.**
This is like saying **El libro es bueno.** (according to someone’s opinion)

If we say: **Los tacos gustan.**
that’s like saying **Los tacos son deliciosos.** (according to someone’s opinion)

So, **gustar** seems to mean **ser _____**, where we would fill in the blank with some positive attribute (**bueno, interesante, delicioso, bonito**, etc.); the choice of adjective depends on what we’re discussing. In other words, if we say: **La clase gusta.** we’re saying, **La clase es _____.** Logically, we would fill in the blank with something like **interesante** or **divertida**, but not **bonita**.

If we’re talking about one thing or person, then, we need the singular form of the verb (whether that verb is **ser** or **gustar**):  
- **La película es buena. / La película gusta.**
We also use the singular verb if we’re talking about an action:  
- **Surfear es divertido. / Surfear gusta.**
If we’re talking about more than one thing or person, we use the plural form of the verb:  
- **Las clases de historia son interesantes. / Las clases de historia gustan.**

Now, normally, when we express an opinion, we either implicitly or explicitly also express **whose opinion** that is. If someone says, **La historia es fascinante**, it’s pretty obvious that this is the opinion of the person/people speaking. But, if we say **La historia gusta**, it’s not clear whose opinion that is, and we almost certainly would want to include that information. So, we use words like **me, te, le, nos, les** to clarify who has that opinion.

At the same time, with **gustar** and verbs like it, we virtually always **switch the order** of the components within the sentence, so we end up with this structure:  
**person with opinion + gustar + thing/person about which/whom someone has an opinion**

Note what information is presented in each of the following sentences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person (who has opinion)</th>
<th>Gusta el libro.</th>
<th>=</th>
<th>El libro es bueno</th>
<th>I’m not expressing whose opinion this is.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>gusta el libro.</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>El libro es bueno</td>
<td>Es mi opinión.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos</td>
<td>gusta el libro.</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>El libro es bueno</td>
<td>Es nuestra opinión.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le</td>
<td>gusta el libro.</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>El libro es bueno</td>
<td>It’s his or her or your (from usted) opinion. I haven’t clarified to whom the le refers*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mi amigo</td>
<td>le gusta el libro.</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>El libro es bueno</td>
<td>It’s his opinion, and now I’ve clarified who “he” is (my friend).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For this example, it may be that I was just talking about someone, and so it’s clear to whom the le refers. For example: **Ana es mi mejor amiga. Le gusta este libro.** There, it’s clear that the le refers back to Ana.

- continued -

~ **Gustar** and Similar Verbs - D. Cabanel (2006-7) ~
Note that, like any other regular -ar verb, *gustar* has five forms (*gusto*, *gustas*, *gusta*, *gustamos*, *gustan*); however, we don't use the forms *gusto*, *gustas* and *gustamos* as much, because we would only use them if we were saying *Yo soy atractiva* (in someone's opinion); *tú eres atractivo* (in someone's opinion); *nosotros somos atractivos* (in someone's opinion).

Remember, the form of *gustar* that we end up using has NOTHING to do with the person who has the opinion, and EVERYTHING to do with the thing or person *about which* someone has an opinion. The person(s) with the opinion is/are reflected in the terms *me*, *te*, *le*, *nos*, *les*.

So, we can take any sentence with *gustar* and divide it into two unrelated components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A mí me</th>
<th>A ti te</th>
<th>A Juan le</th>
<th>A nosotros nos</th>
<th>A ustedes les</th>
<th>gusta</th>
<th>+ gusta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el libro</td>
<td>la clase</td>
<td>cocinar</td>
<td>la geografía</td>
<td>esquiar y surfear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A mí me</th>
<th>A ti te</th>
<th>A Juan le</th>
<th>A nosotros nos</th>
<th>A ustedes les</th>
<th>gustan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>las novelas</td>
<td>las matemáticas</td>
<td>los panqueques</td>
<td>las montañas</td>
<td>los deportes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of what has been said above applies as well when we present a negative opinion (*no gustar*).

Finally, there are a number of verbs that are like *gustar* in terms of how they are used structurally within a sentence. The explanations above apply to them as well. These include expressions such as: *encantar, fascinar, importar, interesar, molestar, preocupar*, as well as a number of others that you'll learn as you continue on with your Spanish studies.

Again, try to consider these in the same way that you considered *gustar* above. For example:

What does the verb *fascinar* express? It means *ser fascinante* (in someone’s opinion):

- La historia fascina. = expresses an opinion: *La historia es fascinante* →
- Fascina la historia. = more common order of components →
- Me fascina la historia. = tells whose opinion this is

What does the verb *interesar* express? It means *ser interesante* (in someone’s opinion):

- La ecología y la geografía interesan. = expresses an opinion: *La ecología y la geografía son interesantes.* →
- Interesan la ecología y la geografía. = more common order of components →
- Nos interesan la ecología y la geografía. = tells whose opinion this is

So, what do you think? *¿Te gustan los verbos como gustar o no?* 😊