

SPANISH PRONUNCIATION

FOCUS ON FIVE - FOCUS ON THESE FIVE COMPONENTS OF PRONUNCIATION:

① PURE VOWELS

Spanish has only five vowel sounds, represented by five letters:

- a** – pronounced ah (as in taco)
- e** – pronounced eh (as in enchilada)
- i** – pronounced ee (as in tequila)
- o** – pronounced oh (as in arrooz con pollo)
- u** – pronounced oo (as in chuurrero)



Be careful not to add closed sounds to these vowels, as we would in English:

taco = tah-coh, not tah-couw

padre = pah-dreh, not pah-dreay

Keep your vowels pure and you're halfway to sounding like a native speaker!

② DIPHTHONGS – SPECIAL VOWEL COMBINATIONS

Diphthongs are vowel combinations that include **i**, **y** or **u** sounds. These sounds combine with a pure vowel sound (or with each other) to form a single syllable. These are the Spanish diphthongs:

ya	ay	ia	ai	ua	au
ye	ey	ie	ei	ue	eu
				ui	iu
yo	oy	io	oi	uo	ou
yu	uy	iu	ui		



Unlike many English diphthongs, Spanish diphthongs are pronounced like they are written:

yuca – yuca

dios – dios

soy – soy

house – haus

ate – eit

why – wai

③ FAMILIAR CONSONANTS

Most Spanish consonants are similar to their English counterparts.

<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>
b	b or v *	k	k	s	ss
c	k before a, o, u; ss before i or e; th (as in English “think”) in Spain	l	l	t	t
d	d , or th (as in English “the”) between vowels	m	m	v	b or v *
f	f	n	n	w	w
g	g , or h before i or e	p	p	x	ks (as in “conexión”) or h (as in “México”)
h	silent in Spanish	q	k	y	y
j	h	r	r short version of a trilled “Scottish r”	z	ss , or th as in English “think” in Spain

*In most cases, Spanish **b** and **v** are pronounced identically. The sound for both is halfway between a **b** and **v** sound in English.

④ UNFAMILIAR CONSONANTS

Spanish has three consonants that we do not have in English.

- ll** closest English sounds – **y** (as in **y**es)*
j (as in **J**ack)*
zh (as in **zh**eige)*
 - ñ** closest English sound – **gn** (as in lasa**gn**a)
 - rr** closest English sound – similar to a longer trilled **Scottish r**
- ***ll** and **y** are pronounced slightly differently in different countries.

For many years, **ch** was considered a letter of the Spanish alphabet. Recently authorities have decided it is no longer to be considered a letter. **Ch** is pronounced similarly in Spanish and English (**ench**ilada, **mucho**, **much**).

⑤ VOWEL LINKING

 **This part of pronunciation keeps you from sounding like a gringo!**

When two vowel sounds follow each other in two separate words, link them!
If you do it correctly, it will almost sound like you are pronouncing one word:

¿Cómo se escribe? → **¿Cómose escribe?**
El niño es mi amigo. → **Elniñwesmi amigo.**

Get into the habit of linking your vowels and listening for it when Spanish-speakers link vowels, and you will be one step closer to sounding like a native!

Spanish may be sneaky in other areas, but luckily the pronunciation is straightforward. By applying the five concepts in this guide, you will speak fluently and with a good accent!

SPANISH SPELLING

Spanish is pronounced how it is spelled, with few exceptions.



Watch out for:

b and **v**

In Spanish, **b** and **v** are usually pronounced the same. The sound is halfway between our **b** and **v** sound in English. This can make it tricky to know which words are spelled with **b** and which with **v**. Words below marked * contain this sound. After **m** or **n**, **b** is pronounced exactly like English **b**. Words marked with ** below contain the sound **b**.

vaca* - cow

Bacardi* - brand of rum

abuelo* - grandfather

vuelo* - flight

abril* - April

avión* - airplane

también** - also

en Brasil** - in Brazil

h

In Spanish, **h** is always silent. You need to remember which words are spelled with **h**.

hola - hello

ola - wave

hijo - son

ojo - eye

alcohol - alcohol

hoja - leaf, sheet

haces - you do/make

aces - aces (as in cards)

Hugo

uva - grape

y and **ll**

These letters can make the same sound, which makes it tricky to know how some words are spelled. You need to remember which are spelled with **y** and which are spelled with **ll**.

yo - I

calle - street

Yolanda

Guillermo

ayer - yesterday

allá - over there

S, Z, and C

In Latin American Spanish, **c** (before **i** and **e**), **s** and **z** are all pronounced **ss**. In Spain and a few other parts of the world, **s** is pronounced **ss**, but **z** and **c** are pronounced **th**. When hearing Latin American Spanish, you may not know how the following words and others are spelled just from hearing them. You need to remember which are spelled with **s**, **z**, and **c**.

cien - one hundred

sien - temple of the head

hacia - towards

Asia - Asia

casa - house

caza - hunt

Gonzales

González

WRITTEN ACCENT MARKS

Accent marks are part of Spanish spelling, and help identify which syllable is stressed.

Words ending in a vowel, n, or s:

In speech, the next-to-the-last syllable is usually stressed:

casa - house

amigo - friend

eres - you are

tienen - they have, y'all have

Words ending in other consonants (not n or s):

In speech, the last syllable is usually stressed:

doctor - doctor

papel - paper

tener - to have

dormir - to sleep



These words (and some others) take a written accent when used as question words:

Qué

Quién(es)

Cómo

Cuándo

Dónde

Cuánto/a(s)

Cuál(es)

Por qué



Exceptions to the above are indicated with a written accent mark.

lápiz - pencil

mamá - Mom

dirección - address

fútbol - soccer

inglés - English

teléfono - telephone

electrónico - electronic

Bárbara

PUNCTUATION – ¿ and ¡

Spanish and English punctuation are similar, except as follows:

Spanish uses **¿** at the beginning of a question, in addition to **?** at the end: **¿Cómo te llamas?** – What's your name?

Spanish uses **¡** at the beginning of an exclamation, in addition to **!** at the end. **¡Muy interesante!** – Very interesting!