

THE ALPHABET

The Vowels

As a beginner in the language, your first step is to learn what Spanish sounds like. Fortunately, you don't have to pronounce everything correctly in order to be understood. Not only are people generally forgiving, but in reality there aren't that many differences between the two sound systems. In fact, you'll need to remember only *five* sounds to speak well enough to be understood. These are the vowels, and unlike their English equivalents, each one is pronounced the way it is written. Read each letter aloud and follow the corresponding pronunciation guide.

a (<i>ah</i>)	as in yacht
e (<i>eh</i>)	as in met
i (<i>ee</i>)	as in keep
o (<i>oh</i>)	as in open
u (<i>oo</i>)	as in tool

Accent Marks

Any part of a word with an accent mark (´) needs to be pronounced LOUDER and with more emphasis (i.e., *María*) (*mah-´ree-ah*). If there's no accent mark, say the last part of the word louder and with more emphasis (i.e., *Beatriz*) (*beh-ah-´trees*). For words ending in a vowel, or in **n** or **s**, the next to the last syllable is stressed. (i.e., *Fernando*) (*fehr-´nahn-doh*).

Look! Some words change meaning if you drop the accent mark:

yes	sí (<i>see</i>)	if	si (<i>see</i>)
how	cómo (<i>´koh-moh</i>)	I eat	como (<i>´koh-moh</i>)
give	dé (<i>deh</i>)	from	de (<i>deh</i>)
what?	¿Qué? (<i>keh</i>)	that	que (<i>keh</i>)

The Sounds of Spanish

Los Sonidos del Español (*loh soh-'nee-dohs dehl eh-spah-'nyohl*)

Now, let's learn how to pronounce all the other letters. Remember, each letter has its own unique sound.

NOTE: In the learning guides for this class, a dash (-) denotes separate, distinct syllables. A middle dot (·) indicates that the parts of the word are blended together rapidly.

Don't worry about whether or not you roll your "r's" perfectly. What is important is to learn as many words as possible so that you can put them together in sentences and communicate.

Spanish letter	English sound	Examples	Write it here
a	ah	<u>A</u>na ('ah-nah)	_____
ai	i/y	<u>J</u>aime ('hi-meh)	_____
au	ow/ah·oo	<u>A</u>ugusto (ow-'goos-toh)	_____
b	b	<u>B</u>eatriz (beh-ah-trees)	_____
c	(before e or i) s	<u>G</u>raciela (grah-see-'eh-lah)	_____
	(elsewhere) k	<u>C</u>arlos ('kahr-lohs)	_____
ch	ch	<u>A</u>rchibaldo (ahr-chee-'bahl-doh)	_____
d	d	<u>D</u>avid ('dah-veed)	_____
e	(as in let) eh	<u>E</u>lena (eh-'leh-nah)	_____
ei	(as in day) ay	<u>R</u>einaldo (ray-'nahl-doh)	_____
er	(as in air) ehr	<u>F</u>ernando (fehr-'nahn-doh)	_____
eu	you/eh·oo	<u>E</u>ugenio (eh-oo-'heh-nee-oh)	_____
f	f	<u>F</u>ederico (feh-deh-'ree-koh)	_____
g	(before e or i) h	<u>G</u>eofredo (heh-oh-'freh-doh)	_____
	(elsewhere) g	<u>G</u>regorio (greh-'gohr-ee-oh)	_____
h	silent	<u>H</u>ugo ('oo-goh)	_____
i	ee	<u>I</u>sabel (ee-'sah-behl)	_____
j	h	<u>J</u>osé (hoh-'seh)	_____
k	k	<u>K</u>enia ('keh-nee-ah)	_____
l	l	<u>L</u>ucas ('loo-kahs)	_____
ll	y	<u>G</u>uillermo (gee-'yehr-moh)	_____
m	m	<u>M</u>aría (mah-'ree-ah)	_____
n	n	<u>N</u>icolás (nee-koh-'lahs)	_____

ñ	(as in canyon) n·y	España (<i>ehs-‘pahn-yah</i>) Spain	_____
o	oh	Olivia (<i>oh-‘lee-vee-ah</i>)	_____
oi, oy	oy	Moisés (<i>moy-‘sehs</i>)	_____
p	p	Pedro (<i>‘peh-droh</i>)	_____
q	k	Quintín (<i>keen-‘teen</i>)	_____
r	(slightly rolled) r	Rosa (<i>‘roh-sah</i>)	_____
rr	(heavily rolled) rr	Inglaterra (<i>een-glah-‘teh-rrah</i>) England	_____
s	s	Samuel (<i>sah-moo-‘ehl</i>)	_____
t	t	Tomás (<i>toh-‘mahs</i>)	_____
u	oo	Urbano (<i>oor-‘bah-noh</i>)	_____
ua	wah/ oo·ah	Gualterio (<i>gwahl-‘tehr-ee-oh</i>)	_____
ue	weh/oo·eh	Manuela (<i>mahn-‘weh-lah</i>)	_____
v	v	Vincente (<i>vee-‘sehn-teh</i>)	_____
w	v	Washington (<i>‘vah-sheeng-tohn</i>)	_____
x	k-s/s	Maximiliano (<i>mahk-see-mee-lee-‘ah-noh</i>)	_____
y	y/ee	Nueva York (<i>‘nweh-vah York</i>)	_____
z	s	Zacarías (<i>sah-kah-‘ree-ahs</i>)	_____

More Information

Más Información (*mahs een-fohr-mah-see-‘ohn*)

Several words in English are spelled the same in Spanish, and they usually have the same meaning. But, watch out! They are not pronounced the same!

chocolate	(<i>choh-koh-‘lah-teh</i>)
color	(<i>koh-‘lohr</i>)
final	(<i>fee-‘nah</i>)
idea	(<i>ee-‘deh-ah</i>)
natural	(<i>nah-too-‘rahl</i>)
terror	(<i>teh-‘rrohr</i>)
hot dog	(<i>‘oht-dohg</i>)

Rules

Las Reglas (*lahs 'reh-glahs*)

Stressed Syllables:

- Any part of a word with an accent mark (´) needs to be pronounced LOUDER and with more emphasis (i.e., *María* (*mah-'ree-ah*)).
- If there's **no accent mark**, say the **last** part of the word louder and with more emphasis (i.e., *Beatriz* (*beh-ah-'trees*)).
- For words ending in a **vowel**, or in **n** or **s**, the **next to the last syllable** is stressed. (i.e., *Fernando* (*fehr-'nahn-doh*)).

The letter 'c':

'C' before 'i' or 'e' is pronounced /s/. Elsewhere, 'c' is pronounced /k/.

The letter 'q':

Just as in English, 'q' is always joined with the letter 'u'. The letter 'u' is silent. The letter 'q' is pronounced /k/.

The letter 'g':

'G' before 'i' or 'e' is pronounced /h/. Elsewhere, 'g' is pronounced /g/.

The letter 'h':

'H' is always silent.

The vowel sounds:

Try to memorize the vowel sounds.

a = *ah* as in yacht **e** = *eh* as in let **i** = *ee* as in see **o** = *oh* as in open **u** = *oo* as in rule

Punctuation:

The upside down exclamation point (**¡**) and question mark (**¿**) are found at the beginning of sentences and must be used when you write in Spanish.

Articles:

In Spanish, the names for people, places, and things are either masculine or feminine, and so have either **el** (*ehl*) or **la** (*lah*) in front. **El** and **la** mean "the." Generally, if the word is masculine/ends in the letter 'o' there's an **el** in front; i.e., **el cuarto** (*ehl 'kwahr-toh*), **el niño** (*ehl 'nee-nyoh*). Conversely, if the word is feminine/ends in an 'a' there's a **la** in front; i.e., **la mesa** (*lah 'meh-sah*), **la persona** (*lah pehr-'soh-nah*). Words not ending in either an 'o' or 'a' need to be memorized; i.e., **el amor** (*ehl ah-'mohr*), **la luz** (*lah loos*). When you are referring to more than one item in Spanish, the words **el** and **la** become **los** (*loh*s) and **las** (*lah*s), respectively. **Un** (*oon*) and **una** (*'oo-nah*) mean "a" or "an." **Unos** (*'oo-noh*s) and **unas** (*'oo-nah*s) mean "some" or "a few." Use the word **un** or **unos** in front of masculine words. Use the word **una** or **unas** in front of feminine words.

Check Your Learning

Read the following words aloud, and then guess at their meanings. Don't forget that each letter needs to be pronounced the way it was introduced earlier.

amigo	<i>(ah-'mee-goh)</i>	_____
burro	<i>('boo-rroh)</i>	_____
Cinco de Mayo	<i>('seen-koh deh 'mah-yoh)</i>	_____
escuela	<i>(eh-'skweh-lah)</i>	_____
español	<i>(eh-'spah-'nyohl)</i>	_____
estudiante	<i>(eh-stoo-dee-'ahn-teh)</i>	_____
excelente	<i>(ehk-seh-'lehn-teh)</i>	_____
Feliz Navidad	<i>(feh-'lees nah-vee-'dahd)</i>	_____
problema	<i>(proh-'bleh-mah)</i>	_____
professor	<i>(proh-feh-'sohr)</i>	_____
televisión	<i>(teh-leh-vee-see-'ohn)</i>	_____
tortilla	<i>(tohr-'tee-yah)</i>	_____

More Practice

In the world of education, there are occasions when the best way to communicate is through the written word. In those cases, you may have to depend on your spelling skills in Spanish. Fortunately, the language is spelled the way it is pronounced. So, if you know your alphabet in Spanish, you are in pretty good shape.

With your table group, try practicing these letters aloud. Take turns saying each letter until you reach the end of the Spanish alphabet:

a (<i>ah</i>)	f (<i>'eh-feh</i>)	l (<i>'eh-leh</i>)	p (<i>peh</i>)	u (<i>oo</i>)
b (<i>beh</i>)	g (<i>heh</i>)	ll (<i>'eh-yeh</i>)	q (<i>koo</i>)	v (<i>veh</i>)
c (<i>seh</i>)	h (<i>'ah-cheh</i>)	m (<i>'eh-meh</i>)	r (<i>'eh-reh</i>)	w (<i>'doh-bleh-veh</i>)
ch (<i>cheh</i>)	i (<i>ee</i>)	n (<i>'eh-neh</i>)	rr (<i>'eh-rreh</i>)	x (<i>'eh-kees</i>)
d (<i>deh</i>)	j (<i>'hoh-tah</i>)	ñ (<i>'eh-nyeh</i>)	s (<i>'eh-seh</i>)	y (<i>ee-gree-'eh-gah</i>)
e (<i>eh</i>)	k (<i>kah</i>)	o (<i>oh</i>)	t (<i>teh</i>)	z (<i>'seh-tah</i>)

Now, with your table group, take turns spelling each of your group member's name aloud.

