

# Basic Spanish - Pronunciation

## The Spanish Alphabet

Here is the traditional Spanish alphabet. The current Spanish alphabet is made up of the letters with numbers above them, and is also sorted in that order. Please read the notes and sections below. (Blue and red letters are a part of the normal English alphabet).

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
a	b	c	ch	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	ll	m	n	ñ	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z

Further information on the examples and exceptions detailed below can be found in the International Phonetics Alphabet @ <http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.html>

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## Notes about Ñ

*N* and *Ñ* are considered two different letters. They are alphabetized as separate letters, so *Ñ* always comes after *N*, regardless of where it appears in the word. Ex: **muñeca** comes after **municipal**.

## Notes about *CH* and *LL*

*CH* and *LL* are no longer distinct letters of the alphabet. In 1994, the Real Academia Española (Spanish Royal Academy) declared that they should be treated as **digraphs** for collation purposes. Accordingly, words beginning with *CH* and *LL* are now alphabetized under *C* and *L*, respectively. In 2010, the Real Academia Española declared that *CH* and *LL* would no longer be treated as letters, bringing the total number of letters of the alphabet down to 27.

## Notes about *K* and *W*

*K* and *W* are part of the alphabet but are mostly seen in foreign derived words and names, such as karate and whiskey. For instance, kilo is commonly used to refer to a kilogram.

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## Consonants

Although the above will help you understand, proper pronunciation of Spanish consonants is a bit more complicated:

Most of the consonants are pronounced as they are in American English with these exceptions:

- **b** like the English *b* at the start of a word and after *m* or *n*. Elsewhere, especially between vowels, it is softer, often like a blend between English *v* and *b*.
- **c** before *i* and *e* like English *th* in "think" (in Latin America it is like English *s*)
- **c** before *a*, *o*, *u* and other consonants, like English *k*
  - The same sound for *e* and *i* is written like **que** and **qui**, where the *u* is silent.
- **ch** like *ch* in "cheese"
- **d** at the start of a word and after *n*, like English *d* in "under"
- **d** between vowels (even if these vowels belong to different words) similar to English *th* in "mother" (IPA: /ð/); at the end of words like "universidad" you may hear a similar sound, too.
- **g** before *e* or *i* like the Dutch *g*
- **g** before *a*, *o*, *u*, like *g* in "get"
  - The same sound for *e* and *i* is written like **gue** and **gui**, where the *u* is silent. If the word needs the *u* to be pronounced, you write it with a dieresis e.g. **pingüino**, **lengüeta**.

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- **h** is always silent (except in the digraph *ch*)
- **j** like the *h* in hotel, or like the Scottish pronunciation of *ch* in "loch".
- **ll** is pronounced like **gli** in Italian "**famiglia**," or as English *y* in "yes".
- **ñ** like *nio* in "onion" (or *gn* in French cognac).
- **q** like the English *k*; occurs only before *ue* or *ui*.
- **r** at the beginning of a word; after *l*, *n*, or *s*; or when doubled (*rr*), it is pronounced as a full trill, elsewhere it is a single-tap trill.
- **v** is pronounced like *b*, there is no distinction whatsoever between *B* and *V*.
- **x** is pronounced much like an English *x*, except a little more softly, and often more like *gs*.
- **z** like the English *th* (in Latin America, like the English *s*)

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## Vowels

The pronunciation of vowels is as follows:

- a [a] "**La Mano**" as in "Kahn" (ah)
- e [e] "**Mente**" as in "hen" (eh)
- i [i] "**Sin**" as the *ea* in "lean" (e)
- o [o] "**Como**" as in "more" (without the following 'r')
- u [u] "**Lunes**" as in "toon" or "loom" (oo)

The "u" is always silent after a g or a q (as in "**qué**" pronounced keh).

Spanish also uses the ¨ (diaeresis) diacritic mark over the vowel u to indicate that it is pronounced separately in places where it would normally be silent. For example, in words such as **vergüenza** ("shame") **orpingüino** ("penguin"), the u is pronounced as in the English "w" and so forms a diphthong with the following vowel: [we] and [wi] respectively. It is also used to preserve sound in stem changes and in commands: **averiguar** (to research) - **averigüemos** (let's research).

The y [j] "**Reyes**" is similar to the y of "yet", but more voiced (in some parts of Latin America it is pronounced as s in "vision" [ʒ] or sh in "flash" [ʃ]) At the end of a word or when it means "and" ("y") it is pronounced like i.

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## Acute accent

Spanish uses the ´ (Acute) diacritic mark over vowels to indicate a vocal stress on a word that would normally be stressed on another syllable; Stress is contrastive. For example, the word **ánimo** is normally stressed on *a*, meaning "mood, spirit." While **animó** is stressed on *ni* meaning "I cheer." And **animó** is stressed on **mó** meaning "he cheered."

Additionally the acute mark is used to disambiguate certain words which would otherwise be homographs. It's used in various question word or relative pronoun pairs such as **cómo** (how?) & **como** (as), **dónde** (where?) & **donde** (where), and some other words such as **tú** (you) & **tu** (your), **él** (he/him) & **el** (the).

A	E	I	O	U
á	é	í	ó	ú

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## Emphasis

The rules of stress in Spanish are:

1. When the word ends in a vowel or in "n" or "s" the emphasis falls on the second to last syllable.

Eg: **Mañana, Como, Dedos, Hablan.**

2. When the word ends in a consonant other than "n" or "s", the emphasis falls on the last syllable.

Eg: **Ciudad, Comer, Reptil.**

3. If the above two rules don't apply, there will be an accent to show the stress.

Eg: **Fijate, Inglés, Teléfono.**

4. **SPECIAL CASE:** Adverbs ending in *-mente*, which are derived from adjectives, have two stresses. The first stress occurs in the *adjective part* of the adverb, on the syllable where the adjective would normally be stressed. The second stress occurs on the *-men-* syllable.

Eg: **Solamente, Felizmente, Cortésmente.**