**THE SPANISH ALPHABET**

**a** a **n** ene

**b** be **ñ** eñe *[say enye]*

**c** ce **o** o

**ch** che **p** pe

**d** de **q** cu

**e** e **r** ere

**f** efe **rr** erre

**g** ge **s** ese

**h** hache **t** te

*[don’t say “h”]*

**i** i **u** u

**j** jota **v** uve/ve

*[has “h” sound]*

**k** ca **w** doble u

*[foreign letter] [foreign letter]*

**l** ele **x** equis

**ll** elle **y** i griega

*[Greek i]*

**m** eme **z** zeta

***[28 Spanish letters; 2 foreign letters]***

**PRONUNCIATION**

The sounds of Spanish are never exactly like the sounds of English. To learn to speak Spanish really well, you must imitate a good model.

**Vowel Sounds**

**A** in Spanish is always pronounced like the *o* in *pop* or the *a* in *cha-cha-cha*. Make it short and open.

*papa, pasa, cama, pala, sala, mapa, mala, masa, fama*

**E** in Spanish is usually about half way between the *e* in *met* and the *a* in *mate*. You can come very close to the Spanish *e* by saying the English *may*, *day*, *they* very quickly, before the *ay* gets its full value.

*me, de, se, te, mete, pese, mesa, pesa, teme, tema, yema*

**I** in Spanish is always like the *ee* in *see*. Remember: Smile when you say an *i* in Spanish!

*si, mi, ti, fina, mina, tina, tinta, misa, pisa, lisa, linda*

**O** The long *o* as in the English word *hope* is really a diphthong, that is, a combination of two vowels:  *o-u*. Notice how your lips move forward to say *oo* at the end of such words as *no*, *go*, *so*, *oh*. The Spanish *o* is a short, pure sound that corresponds only to the first half of the long English *o*. Your lips shouldn’t move.

*no, con, son, tono, mono, polo, como, tomo, monto, pronto, bola, cola, goma, pinto, sino, fino*

**U** in Spanish is again a short, pure sound like the *u* in fluid, or like a very short version of the *oo* in *coo*.

*fumo, sumo, luna, cuna, puro, seguro, nulo, mulo, bula*

**Y** is both a consonant and a vowel. When it stands alone, or at the end of a word, it is pronounced just like the Spanish *i* (*ee*). In all other cases, *y* is a consonant, just like the English *y*.

*y, rey, buey*

*ya, yo, mayo, cuyo, tuyo, suyo, suya*

**Consonant Sounds**

**H** is the only silent letter in the Spanish language. It appears quite often at the beginning of words, and sometimes, inside the word.

*hotel, hospital, hombre, hambre, hongo, hondo, honor, hay, hasta, ahora, ahoga*

**LL** is pronounced in Spain like the *lli* in *million*. In Latin America it usually sounds like the *y* in *yes*.

*millón, caballo, pollo, gallo, gallina, sello, llamo, llego, lloro*

**Ñ** is pronounced like the *ny* in *canyon*, or like the *ni* in *union*. The little curved line above the *n* is called a *tilde*, and stands for a second *n* that used to appear in Latin or in old Spanish.

*año, daño, niño, niña, paño, puño, caña, riña*

**S** in Spanish is almost always soft, very close to the *ess* in *professor*.

*casa, música, museo, presente, presidente, peso, pesa, rosa, pasa, masa, cosa, posa, confuso*

**Z** is pronounced in Latin America like the *s* in *sick*. In Spain it is pronounced like the *th* in *thick*.

*zona, zapato, caza, mozo, perezoso, pozo, comienzo, azúcar, azul*

**C** When *c* comes before an *e* or an *i*, it is pronounced just like the Spanish *z*: that is, *s* in Latin America, *th* in Spain.

*nación, principal, mece, precio, necio, cero, cinco, celos, cielo*

In all other positions, *c* is hard, like the *c* in *cup*, *cat*, *cake*.

**J** The Spanish *j* has no equal in English. It is formed far back in the throat, like the German *Ach*...! It is a harsh, raspy sound.

*jabón, jota, jarabe, jamón, mojo, dijo, Méjico, Tejas, lejos, dejo, traje, junio, julio*

**G** The Spanish *g* is pronounced just like the *j* when it comes before an *e* or an *i*.

*general, generalmente, giro, gitano, dirige, gente, gesto, genio*

In all other circumstances, the *g* in hard, close to the English *g* in *gum*.

*goma, gota, lago, digo, dígame, tengo, tenga, hago, haga, pongo, ponga*

Notice that the *u* is not pronounced in the group *gui* or *gue*. The *u* just serves to keep the *g* hard.

*guitarra, guerra, distingue, guía, guión*

**B** and **V** There is no difference at all in the pronunciation of *b* and *v* in Spanish. The English *v* does not exist in correct Spanish. If a word begins with *b* or *v*, say *b*.

*barco, barba, barbero, bote, voto, vamos, venga, vaya*

When *b* or *v* appears between two vowels, it is pronounced more softly, and in a rather special way. Start to say a real *b*, but at the last moment, don’t quite close your lips all the way.

*nube, nave, andaba, hablaba, cabo, cubo, tuvo, subo, cabe, sabe, ave, savia, sabio, hube, estuve*

**T** in Spanish is quite different from the English *t*. If you place the back of your hand close to your mouth when you say *t* in English, you will feel a slight breath come out. In Spanish *t* does not have that slight breath following it. To get the Spanish sound, just put your tongue against your upper teeth, and make sure that you feel or hear no breath come out after the *t*.

*tanto, tanta, tío, tía, tinto, tinta, mito, pito, manto, santo, vista, cinta, total, tetera, título, tentar, tiempo, tiento, tema, tienda, tener, tomar, teñir, tender*

**D** There are several ways of pronouncing the *d* in Spanish, and those ways depend on the position of the *d* in the word or in the group of words. At the beginning of the word or of a group of words, *d* is pronounced like the *t*, but is voiced.

*dígame, donde, doy, das, da, damos, dais, dan, directo, dirijo, duro*

The same *d* sound is heard after *n* or *l*.

*cuando, dando, caminando, andando, diciendo, indio, hallando*

In most other cases, and particularly between two vowels, the Spanish *d* is close to the voiced English *th*, as in *mother*.

*nada, cada, todo, modo, codo, yodo, hallado, hablado, comido, tenido, andado, caminado, vivido, bebido, Estados Unidos*

And at the end of a word, the *d* is like a *th*, but very soft.

*libertad, sociedad, universidad, fraternidad, verdad, bondad, unidad, maldad*

**QU** The combination *qu* appears in Spanish only before an *e* or an *i*, and is pronounced like the English *k*. This *u* is not sounded at all.

*que, quiero, quito, aquí, quien, quienes, tequila, queso, toque, enfoque, bloque*

[Incidentally, the letter *k* does not really belong to the Spanish alphabet, and appears only in a few words of foreign origin, such as *kilo*, *kilómetro*, etc.]

**X** When *x* appers in Spanish between two vowels, it sounds very much like a hard *g* followed by a soft *s*. In other words, the Spanish *exacto* has no *eggs* in it. Say *egsacto*, *egsamen*.

*exactamente, examen, éxodo, éxito, exorbitante*

[There is one exception: In the words *México* and *Texas*, also spelled *Méjico* and *Tejas*, the *x* is pronounced like the *j*.]

When *x* appears before a consonant, the Spaniard usually pronounces it like *s* (extra -- *estra*). The Latin American generally keeps the normal *x* sound.

*extra, extraordinario, extraño, explicar, extranjero, extremo*

**R** The Spanish **r** is entirely different from the English **r**. It is formed by placing your tongue gently against the front upper part of your mouth, and letting it bounce against the roof as a breath comes out. *Remember above all that your lips should never move when you say an r in Spanish.*

Here is a good trick for learing to say the *r*. Say the word *butter* (or *budder*, *rudder*, etc.) over and over again very rapidly: *butterbutterbutterbutterbutter*, etc.

*cara, para, moro, toro, pero, cero, curo, puro, mira, lira, pera, cera, aro, faro, claro, dar*

*andar, hablar, caminar, robar, comer, beber, meter, perder, decir, pedir, dormir, tener, repetir, despedir, sentir, ceder*

**RR** The double *r* (*rr*) is a separate consonant in Spanish. It is pronounced like the single *r*, but with much more force. Instead of having the tongue bounce only once against the roof of the mouth, it bounces two, three, or even four times, giving the effect of a trilled *r*.

*pero, perro; caro, carro; cero, cerro; para, parra; coro, corro; mira, mirra; tiara, tierra; era, yerra; ahora, ahorra; barrera, carrera; hierro, cierro; barra, garra; gorra, porra*

When a word begins with *r*, it is pronounced as if it began with *rr*.

*rico, roca, rato, rima, rey, reina, real,*

*realidad*

**Diphthongs**

A diphthong is any combination of two vowels involving *u* or *i*. [Remember: *u* and *i* are weak, and everyone else is strong!] The two vowels are pronounced rapidly one after the other, and together they form one syllable, unless a written accent mark breaks them up.

*bueno, buenos días, Buenos Aires, Cairo; veinte, treinta; fui, fuiste, ruido, cuido; siento, viento, cielo, hielo; cuando, cuales; causa* (cow-sa)*, pausa; heroico*

*[Pronunciation section excerpted from Usted y yo by Zenia Sacks Da Silva, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, copyright 1975]*

**IMPORTANT FACTS TO REMEMBER**

**1. Spanish vowel sounds NEVER vary. They are pronounced as follows 100 per cent of the time:**

**a = ah, e = a; i = ee; o = o; u = oo**

**2. There are four Spanish consonants which are not separate consonants in English: ch, ll, ñ and rr.**

**3. The Spanish consonants ñ and rr never appear as the first letter in a word.**

**4. Except for ll and rr, the only letter in Spanish which doubles is c, and this happens rarely.**

**5. Accent marks appear only over vowels and indicate you must raise your voice on that vowel sound. The “i” is not dotted with an accent.**