

## Pronunciation Guide for Spanish

Spanish is a phonetic language that is easy to pronounce.

1. **Vowels** always have the same sound.

a – ah  
e – ay  
i – ee  
o – oh  
u – oo

## 2. Consonants

No consonants are doubled except c and also n in compound words. Each must be separately and distinctly sounded, and they belong to different syllables.

For example:

lección (lesson) -- layk-see-OHN (Americas) or layk-theeon-OHN(Spain)

acción (action) – ahk-se-OHN or ahk-thee-OHN

ennoblecer (to ennoble) – ain-no-blay-SER or ain-no-blay-THAYR

innumerable ( innumerable) – een-noo-may-RAH-blay

Double consonant sounds that used to be letters of the alphabet –  
ch (cha-cha-cha), ll (caballo - cah-BAH-yo), and  
rr (more trill than single r) represent one letter.

b, d, p, t – same as in English, but **softer**. Letters b and v are barely distinguishable.

c – as in English – sound of k before a, o, u,  
and sound of s (Americas) and th (Spain), before e, i

g – as in English, hard sound (but softer) before a, o, u, and  
sound of h before e, i, as in helicopter and heel

To achieve hard g-sound with e and i, the letter u is placed before either letter.

For example:

guitarra (guitar) – gee-TAH-rrah, and guerra (war) – GAY-rrah

To pronounce the letter u and e, or u and i after g, a **diaeresis** “ is placed over the letter u -- as in vergüenza (shame) and pingüino (penguin.)

h – always silent except in foreign words, such as hamburguesa (hamburger)

j – always as in sound of h in English

k – no k in Spanish, except in foreign words – The k sound before a, o, u is achieved with c, and with e and i, qu is used.

For example:

qué (what) and quién (who) \*See rules of stress to explain accents.

ñ– pronounced as ni plus any vowel – for example: piña - pinia, niño - ninio

x – always same sound as x in English

y – as in year, when before a vowel,

and as ee, when y stands alone and means “and” in Spanish,

or when it comes after a vowel

For example:

rey (king) – RAY-ee, but reyes (kings) – RAY-yays

z – **never** as z-sound in English (zebra), rather the same sound as the soft c – sound of s (Americas) and th (Spain), before all five vowels – a,e,i,o,u.

For example:

Surnames that end in -ez, such as Pérez, González and Rodríguez all end with the s or th sound, depending if in the Americas or Spain.

Also, please note that in surnames that end in -ez, the -ez means “son.” Pérez is Peterson, González is Gonzalo’s son, etc. Therefore, **never** stress the last syllable of -ez of a surname because the stress is on the name, and not on “son.”

\*See rules of stress to explain the accents on these surnames.

### 3. The general rule for stress in Spanish is:

In words ending with a vowel, stress is placed on the penultimate syllable.

In those ending in a consonant, stress is placed on last syllable, except words ending in s or n. Verbs can end in vowels, and s and n, so the stress has to remain the same in all forms of the verb.

In words not following these rules, the vowel in the stressed syllable must be marked with **the acute accent** ´.

Accents never alter the sound of the vowel, but only mark the stress of the syllable.

For example:

papá (father) and papa (potato) and Papa (Pope)

azúcar (sugar) - remember, no zzz sound, only s or th.

\*Accents can also be used to distinguish two words that are alike, but have different meanings.

For example:

qué (what?) and que (that) – and also, quien (who) the conjunctive, and quién (who?)