

Sounds / Phonics

The Spanish alphabet is virtually the same as the English one, although the names of the letters are different. It consists of 27 letters (but only 24 sounds) and 5 diagraphs or two-letter combinations*.

Letter	Name of the letter	Phonemes
A, a	a	[a] always
B, b	be / be alta	[b] / [β]
C, c	ce	[k] / [θ] or [s] in South of Spain and Latin America
Ch, ch*	Che	[tʃ]
D, d	de	[d] / [ð]
E, e	e	[e] always
F, f	efe	[f]
G, g	ge	[g] / [χ]
H, h	hache	Silent
I, i	i / i latina	[i] always
J, j	jota	[χ]
K, k	ka	[k]
L, l	ele	[l]
LL, ll*	Elle / doble ele	[j] or [χ] or [ʃ] in Argentina-Uruguay
M, m	eme	[m]
N, n	ene	[n]
Ñ, ñ	eñe	[n]
O, o	o	[o] always
P, p	pe	[p] with tendency towards [b]
Q, q	cu	[k]
R, r	erre	[r]
S, s	ese	[s] always
T, t	te	[t] with tendency towards [d]
U, u	u	[u] always
V, v	uve / ve baja	[b] / [β]
W, w	uve doble	[w]
X, x	equis	[ks]
Y, y	i griega / ye	[i] / [j] or [χ] or [ʃ] in Argentina-Uruguay
Z, z	zeta	[θ] or [s] in South of Spain and Latin America

The diagraphs are: ch, ll, gu, qu, rr

As a phonetic language, **you read it as it's written**. Sounds easy, doesn't it? However, a few consonants could prove a bit of a challenge at first.

When you listen to Spanish, you'll hear that there are some sounds that seem unusual to English-speaking ears. Every language is different and it's good to be aware of some of the 'special' sounds of Spanish.

It helps if you think of using 'Spanish eyes' when looking at words.

Here are some more things you should know about Spanish pronunciation:

- V's and b's both have **the same sound in Spanish**. Softer than English.

bien, vale, bar, vino good, ok, bar, wine.

They sound as in "boy". Sometimes even softer, breathed through almost-closed lips.

Sometimes a letter has a different sound when you put it with a certain vowel. Mind the letters 'g' and 'c'.

- When 'g' is before 'e' and 'i' it's the same as the 'j' sound. It is like a stronger English 'h', or like in "loch". A scratchy sound from the throat.

urgente, gitano, ingeniero urgent, gipsy, engineer

Otherwise (before 'a', 'o', or 'u'), it's a hard 'g' sound , like in "gap" or "girl".

lugar, algo, guante place, something, glove

And if we want this sound for the vowels 'e' or 'i', we have to put an 'u' just after the 'g'.

guerra, guitarra war, guitar.

- Something similar happens with the Spanish 'c'. It sounds like 'th' in "thanks" or "thumb" when it comes before an 'e' or an 'i'.

gracias, cinco, cereza, doce thanks, five, cherry, twelve

Otherwise, its sound is like in English "cat, coke, curry". When you ask for the bill, 'la cuenta', notice that 'cu' is pronounced as 'cw'.

casa, coche, cuatro house, car, four

And if we want this 'k' sound (as in "kilo") for the vowels 'e' and 'i', we must not use the letter 'c', but the letters 'qu'. Thus the letter 'q' is only used with the vowels 'e' and 'i' and **always followed by the vowel 'u'. The 'u' isn't pronounced at all.**

aquí, quinto, querer here, fifth, to want

- 'Z' sounds like the 'th' in "thanks". It sounds the same as the 'c' followed by 'e' or 'i'. Because of this it is only used for the vowels 'a', 'o', and 'u'.

cerveza, azul, azúcar, zorro beer, blue, sugar, fox

- Now, watch out for the 'j' sound. It's like a 'h' in English but harder and stronger. Like 'hug', or 'loch' in English. It has the same sound as the 'g' followed by 'e' or 'i'. It can be used with the five vowels.

jamón, Julio, rojo, coraje, jirafa ham, July, red, courage, giraffe

- 'H's are totally silent, like 'hour' or 'honest' in English.

hola, hermana, hora, honesto hello, sister, hour, honest

- Double 'l' and 'y' have **the same sound in Spanish**. They sound like the English 'y' in "foyer" or "jar".

calle, amarillo, yo, yema street, yellow, I, yolk

- Finally, to sound really Spanish you've got to roll your r's. You always roll them except when a single 'r' falls between two vowels. In this case it sounds like the 'd' in "body" or the American "water".

cara, pero, cerilla face, but, match

But when it is starting the word or when you find two 'r' together, put your tongue on the roof of your mouth behind your teeth and rrrrrrrroll your **Rs!!**

regalo, terraza, pelirroja, rubio gift, terrace, red-haired, blonde

- There's a special and very Spanish letter in the alphabet, **Ñ**. The 'squiggle' - or to give it the proper name *tilde* - makes it sound like 'ny' in "onion". You must gently bite your tongue.

castaño, araña, pequeño chestnut or brown, spider, small

- The Spanish 'd' sounds much softer than the English one. Although sometimes it sounds like in "dog", it is more like the 'th' in "brother".
- The Spanish 'p' sound is closer to the English 'b' than to the English 'p'.
- The Spanish 't' sounds like in "stamp". Nearly like the English 'd'. While the English 't', as in "tea", sounds like the Spanish 'ch', as in "chocolate".
- In Spanish there is only a sound for the 's'. It is like in the English "sun".

- The language features opening question and exclamation marks, which are upside-down and compulsory:

¿Qué tal? - How are you?

¡Gracias! - Thank you!

- **Email and website conventions**

When giving an email or website address the conventions are:

• **@ arroba**, at sign

• **.** **punto**, dot

• **/ barra**, forward slash

• **- guión**, hyphen

- **Accents**

There are also a few accents to get your head around:

á, é, í, ó, ú, ü

The acute accent is used on vowels to indicate the stressed syllable of a word. If there's no accent on the final letter of a word ending in a vowel, 'n' or 's', the penultimate syllable is stressed:

carne, meat.

But if there is an accent, you stress the final syllable:

carné, ID card

Words ending in a consonant other than n or s are stressed on the last syllable

Señor, hotel

Exceptions are written with accents.