

The Ultimate Guide to Spanish Pronunciation



The Ultimate Spanish Pronunciation Guide

Reading words in Spanish is one thing, but learning how to pronounce them so that others can understand what you are saying, is an entirely different game.

In this Guide, we will go over the fundamentals to get you started on the right path with Spanish pronunciation, so you can hit the ground running and continue to improve as you practice. Before each section, you will find a link to a video where you will be able to listen to the pronunciation of words so you can play, pause, rewind and practice on your own as much as needed.

In fact, many of the most common questions I get from my students are related to the pronunciation of Spanish words, and that is why I decided to create this resource; The Ultimate Guide to Spanish Pronunciation.

As a note, this guide focuses on the Spanish spoken in Mexico (I am a native speaker) and it can be used to improve your pronunciation so that Spanish speakers from all over the world can understand what you're saying. Because, much like British and American English, the different versions of Spanish around

the globe share the same core structure and have minor variations in terms of pronunciation and regional words.

In this Guide, you will find phrases and examples related to many of the most common questions that English speakers face when it comes to Spanish pronunciation.

If you still have a question about pronunciation after reading it, please share it in the comments section at the end of this page so I can answer it and others can learn from your inquisitive mind as well.

So, How Does this Guide Work?

First, we will go over the foundations, including the vowels and the alphabet in Spanish.

After that, we will dive deeper into the pronunciation of letters and words that are challenging for most students; and at the end, we will answer common questions English speakers often have about Spanish pronunciation.

Ready to get started? It's time. Uno, dos, ¡tres!

How to Pronounce the Vowels in Spanish (Las Vocales)

Just like in English, there are 5 vowels in Spanish.

For two of them, “o” and “u”, the pronunciation is relatively similar when compared to English, but for the other 3 (a,e,i) the pronunciation is quite different, and in some cases they sound like a different vowel in English.

Because of this, it is important to make a clear distinction between each vowel, in order to learn these fundamentals right from the start.

As a note, each vowel in Spanish only has one sound.

So, once you learn how to pronounce a vowel, there’s no need to worry about sound variations, as it is often the case in English.

How to pronounce A in Spanish



Let's begin with the letter A, which in Spanish is pronounced as “ah.” It actually sounds very similar to the way you pronounce the A in the English words “far” or “father.”

Here are a few common words that include the A in Spanish:

- El Agua (Water)
- Aquí (Here)
- El amigo (Friend)
- Ahora (Now)
- Antes (Before)

A few Common Mistakes to avoid...

Now let's review a few common mistakes English speakers often make when they are just getting started with Spanish.

This is useful because you will become aware of these tendencies, so you can spot them as they show up when you're speaking Spanish, and gradually phase them out with practice.

There is no need to worry about making these common mistakes, because almost everyone makes them. If you find yourself making any of these mistakes, it only means you are a perfectly normal human being who is making progress and learning Spanish. So don't even worry about it.

Instead of seeing them as mistakes, I suggest you see them as a path that everyone goes through at some point. See them as small challenges you are in the process of overcoming.

If you notice them, it only means you're actually practicing and getting better every minute you do it. Remember, speaking Spanish is a skill, just like swimming or riding a bicycle. It's not hard, it's just a matter of practice.

Pay attention to the A in Spanish...

So, one common tendency of native English speakers, is to pronounce the A in Spanish using a sound that sounds a little like “eh” instead of “ah” because they are used to the English pronunciation of the A.

However, It is important that you pronounce it as “ah” because the English pronunciation that sounds like “eh”, actually resembles the pronunciation of a different vowel in Spanish, the vowel E, and this can be confusing for Spanish speakers who are trying to understand what you're saying. I don't want to confuse you here between A and E, what you need to remember is that the letter A in Spanish is pronounced “ah” and other pronunciations can be confusing for native Spanish speakers.

An easy way to make sure you remember the right pronunciation, is to imagine yourself visiting an Amish Mexican Dentist, and imagine this tall and funny **Amish Mexican** Dentist asking you to open your mouth and say “**AAAH**”

Just imagine this: “The **Amish Mexican** Dentist says **AAAH**”

This unusual mental image of an Amish Mexican Dentist, asking you to say “AAAH” will help you remember how to pronounce the A, which is the first letter in the word “Amish”, and it is pronounced “Ah” in Spanish.

How to pronounce E in Spanish



Now, let's take a look at the pronunciation of the E in Spanish.

The easiest way to remember how to pronounce it correctly is to imagine there is a letter H after the E in English, so it sounds like “eh”, which is similar to the way it is pronounced in the English words “elephant” or “electronic”.

One important note about the E, is that if you use the English pronunciation while pronouncing words in Spanish, native

Spanish speakers may think you are referring to a different vowel, the I, which in Spanish is pronounced as a short “ee”.

Here are a few examples that use the vowel E in Spanish:

- La escuela (School)
- El equipo (Team)
- La estrella (Star)
- El elefante (Elephant)
- Especial (Special)

A simple way to memorize the right pronunciation of the vowel E in Spanish, is to imagine the following mental image as you listen to loud music in your mind:

“The **E**lephant is dancing **E**lectronic Music in **B**arcelona”

This unusual mental association, will help you remember how to pronounce the E in Spanish.

How to pronounce I in Spanish



It's time to take a look at the third vowel, the letter "i", which in Spanish is pronounced as a short double "ee" in English.

Here are a few examples that use the vowel I in Spanish:

- La iguana (Iguana)
- El iglú (Igloo)
- Igual (Equal)
- Imaginar (To imagine)
- Imán (Magnet)

A fun way to remember how to pronounce the vowel I in Spanish, is to think of this unexpected situation:

“**Three** Iguanas build an **Igloo**”

This unexpected mental image, will help you memorize the correct pronunciation of the vowel I in Spanish.

Review of the First 3 Vowels in Spanish



As you may have noticed by now, the first 3 Spanish vowels have pronunciations that may at first seem confusing for native English speakers, because they sound a little similar to other vowels in English.

- A in English, sounds a little like E in Spanish, which is pronounce “eh”
- E in English, sounds a little like I in Spanish, which is pronounce “eeh”
- I in English, sounds a little like A in Spanish, which is pronounce “ah”

In order to avoid this confusion, and to make sure you memorize the correct pronunciations of the first three vowels in Spanish, imagine a colorful mental picture inspired by this phrase (think of bright colors, smells and sounds. Imagine it as vividly as possible):

“Art Energizes Iguanas”

This simple mnemonic (a fun memorization tool) showcases the pronunciation of the first three vowels in Spanish at the beginning of each word.

By creating a mental picture of how **“Art Energizes Iguanas”** remembering the correct pronunciation of each one of the first 3 vowels in Spanish will be much easier (and almost unavoidable!).

Now, let's take a look at the two vowels we haven't covered yet. Don't worry, they are fairly similar to their English counterparts, so it will be even easier.

How to pronounce O in Spanish



Let's begin with the O, which in Spanish is pronounced as a short "oh", just as if you added the letter H after the O. Similar to the way it sounds in the English word "Omaha".

Here are a few examples in Spanish:

- El oso (Bear)
- El ojo (Eye)
- El oro (Gold)
- Once (Eleven)
- El oeste (West)

A simple way to remember the correct pronunciation of the vowel O in Spanish, is to create a mental picture inspired by this phrase (include as many sounds and smells as possible):

“The **O**racle of **O**maha loves to eat **t**ortillas”

By picturing Warren Buffet (the famous investor from Omaha) eating a famous Mexican dish, it will be easy to associate the sound of the first letters of Oracle, and Omaha, with the pronunciation of the vowel O in Spanish.

How to pronounce U in Spanish



Now, let's look at the last vowel, the letter U, which in Spanish is pronounced as a short "ooh". This sound is very similar to the pronunciation of the "oo" in English but a little shorter.

Here are a few examples that include the U in Spanish:

- Único (Unique)
- Uno (One)
- La uña (Fingernail)
- La unidad (Unit)
- El último (Last)

A few common mistakes to avoid...

As an additional note, many native English speakers often pronounce the U in Spanish in a way that sounds a little similar to the pronunciation of the U in English, when it is included in words such as “cute”. This is actually a very common mistake, so just keep it in mind so you can avoid it when talking Spanish.

Let’s take a moment to review a list of Spanish words that include the vowel U, which are often mispronounced in Spanish by native English speakers:

- Pelicula (Movie) is often pronounced as “peh-lee-keeuh-lah” instead of “pelicula”
- Nuclear (Nuclear) is often pronounced as “neeuh-cleh-ar” instead of “nuclear”
- Ciudad (City) is often pronounced as “see-eeuh-daad” instead of “ciudad”
- Peculiar (Peculiar) is often pronounced as “peh-keeuh-lee-aar” instead of “peculiar”

This is not a big deal, so don’t worry too much about it. It’s just a common tendency that you may encounter at some point. By being aware of it, overcoming this common challenge will be much easier.

An Easy Way to Remember the Correct Pronunciation of Vowels in Spanish

Let's go back to our iguana phrase for a moment in order to add the pronunciation of the last two vowels, so it is easy to remember the pronunciation of the five vowels in Spanish.

Just like before, try to imagine a mental image that is as colorful, smelly and loud as possible using the following phrase for inspiration:

“Art Energizes Iguanas On Umpa loompas”

As we mentioned before, the initial letters of each one of the first five words of this phrase will help you remember the right pronunciation for the five vowels in Spanish: A, E, I, O, U.

That was easy, huh?

Spanish Alphabet Pronunciation

In a nutshell, the alphabet in Spanish is similar to the alphabet in English, plus one additional letter, the “ñ” which looks like the “n” with a “tilde” on top that looks like a little hat.

The Spanish alphabet has 27 letters and 5 digraphs, which are pairs of letters used to represent a distinct sound.

The 5 digraphs are:

- ch
- ll
- gu
- qu
- rr

Now, let’s go over the pronunciation of the letters in the Spanish alphabet, one by one.

Ready?

¡Aquí vamos! (Here we go!)

A - How to Pronounce A in Spanish:



In Spanish, A is pronounced as “ah” and it always has the same sound.

Here are a few examples:

- **A**brir - To open
- **C**aminar - To walk
- El **A**migo - friend
- El **A**vión - Airplane
- La **C**ama - Bed

B - How to Pronounce B in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “B” is known as “Be” which is pronounced “beh”, as in the word “best.”

Depending on where you are, you may also hear a few alternative names for the B in Spanish such as:

- b grande (big b)
- b larga (long b)
- b alta (tall b)
- b de burro (b as in “burro”)

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English

- Ba - “bah”
- Be - “beh”
- Bi - “bee”
- Bo - “boh”
- Bu - “buh”

Here are a few examples (some of them have “el” or “la” to let you know they are masculine or feminine nouns):

- El **ba**ño - Bathroom
- El **beb**é - Baby
- La **bicicleta** - Bicycle
- El **beso** - Kiss
- **Buscar** - To search

C - How to Pronounce C in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “C” is known as “Ce” and pronounced as “ceh”, as in the word “cell”

When the C is next to the vowels A,O and U, it is pronounced using a strong sound that resembles the pronunciation of K in English.

In most countries, when it is next to the vowels E and I, it is pronounced similar to the way the S sounds in English, as in “seh” and “sih”

However, In Spain the pronunciation of C next to the letters E and I, sounds a little like the English “th” used in the word “thermal”

To keep things simple, we will use the pronunciation used in Latin America, which resembles the S in English.

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English

- Ca - “kah”
- Ce - “ceh”
- Ci - “cee”
- Co - “koh”
- Cu - “kuh”

Here are a few examples:

- **C**aminar - To walk
- **C**errar - To close
- El **c**ilindro - Cylinder
- **C**omer - To eat
- El **c**uerpo - Body

D - How to Pronounce D in Spanish:



In Spanish, “D” is known as “De” which is pronounced “deh”, as in the word “desk”.

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English

- Da - “dah”
- De - “deh”
- Di - “dee”
- Do - “doh”
- Du - “duh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Dar** - To give
- **Decir** - To say
- El **dinosaurio** - Dinosaur
- **Dormir** - To sleep
- El **dueño** - Owner

E - How to Pronounce E in Spanish:



In Spanish, the vowel “E” is pronounced as “eh” and it always has the same sound.

Here are a few examples:

- Especial - Special
- El estadio - Stadium
- Empezar - To begin
- Electricidad - Electricity
- Europa - Europe

F - How to Pronounce F in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “F” is known as “efe” which is pronounced “eh-feh”, as in the word “effective.” Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English

- Fa - “fah”
- Fe - “feh”
- Fi - “fee”
- Fo - “foh”
- Fu - “fuh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Fácil** - Easy
- **Femenino** - Feminine
- La **fiesta** - Party
- **Fotografía** - Photograph
- **Fuerza** - Strength

G - How to Pronounce G in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “G” is known as “Ge” which is pronounced as “heh”, relatively similar to the first part of the word “help.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English (Soft G sound):

- Ga - “gah”
- Gue - “geh”
- Gui - “gee”
- Go - “goh”
- Gu - “guh”

Here are a few examples:

- Ganar - To win
- Miguel - Michael
- Guillermo - William
- El amigo - Friend
- Guapo - Handsome

However, the letter G can also have a “harsh” sound for the vowels E and I when the letter “u” is not placed between the g and the vowels e or i:

Spanish - English (Harsh G sound):

- Ge - “he-eh”
- Gi - “hee”

Here are a few examples:

- Gelatina - Jello
- Girar - To turn

H - How to Pronounce H in Spanish:



In Spanish, “H” is known as “hache” which is pronounced: “ah-cheh”, relatively similar to the first part of the word “achievement”

That’s the actual name of the letter, but, when used in words; the pronunciation of the H should be omitted, as if it didn’t exist. Unless, it is next to a C, as in the word “Chocolate.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English

- ha - “ah”
- he - “eh”
- hi - “ee”
- ho - “oh”
- hu - “uh”

Here are a few examples:

- **H**acer - To do
- **H**embra - Female
- **H**imalaya - Himalaya
- **H**ogar - Home
- **H**umano - Human

I - How to Pronounce I in Spanish:



In Spanish, “I” is pronounced as “ee”, as in the word “Iguana”

Here are a few examples:

- Iguana - Iguana
- Imán - Magnet
- Igual - Equal
- Importante - Important
- Imaginar - Imagine

J - How to Pronounce J in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “J” is known as “jota” and it is pronounced as “joh-tah.” Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English (Soft G sound):

- Ja - “hah”
- Je - “heh”
- Ji - “hee”
- Jo - “hoh”
- Ju - “huh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Jalar** - To pull
- **Jefe** - Boss
- **Jirafa** - Giraffe
- **José** - Joseph
- **Judío** - Jewish

K - How to Pronounce K in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “K” is known as “Ka” and it is pronounced as “kah”, as in the word “karate.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ka - “kah”
- Ke - “keh”
- Ki - “kee”
- Ko - “koh”
- Ku - “kuh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Kansas** - Kansas
- **Kenia**- Kenya
- **Kilogramo** - Kilogram
- **Koala** - Koala
- **Kuala Lumpur** - Kuala Lumpur

L - How to Pronounce L in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “L” is known as “ele” and it is pronounced as “eh-leh”, as in the word “electricity.” Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- La - “lah”
- Le - “leh”
- Li - “lee”
- Lo - “loh”
- Lu - “luh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Lavar** - To wash
- **Levantarse** - To get up
- **Limpiar** - To clean
- El **lobo** - Wolf
- La **luz** - Light

M - How to Pronounce M in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “M” is known as “eme” and it is pronounced as “eh-meh”, as in the word “emergency.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ma - “mah”
- Me - “meh”
- Mi - “mee”
- Mo - “moh”
- Mu - “muh”

Here are a few examples:

- La **Mamá** - Mother
- **Mejorar** - To improve
- **Minimalista** - Minimalist
- **Mover** - To move
- **Música** - Music

N - How to Pronounce N in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “N” is known as “ene” and it is pronounced “eh-neh”, as in the word “energy.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English (Soft G sound):

- Na - “nah”
- Ne - “neh”
- Ni - “nee”
- No - “noh”
- Nu - “nuh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Nada** - Nothing
- **Necesitar** - To need
- **Nieve** - Snow
- **Novedad** - Novelty
- **Nuevo** - New

Ñ - How to Pronounce Ñ in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “Ñ” is known as “eñe” and it is pronounced (more or less) “eh-nee-eh.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ña - “ñah”
- Ñe - “ñeh”
- Ñi - “ñee”
- Ño - “ñoh”
- Ñu - “ñuh”

Here are a few examples:

- La caña de pescar - Fishing rod
- La piñata - Piñata
- El niño - Boy
- Pequeño - Small
- Extraño - Strange

O - How to Pronounce O in Spanish:



In Spanish, the vowel “O” is pronounced as “oh” and it always has the same sound.

Here are a few examples:

- **Ordenar** - To order
- **Camino** - Road
- **Ostión** - Oyster
- **El oso** - Bear
- **El coco** - Coconut

P - How to Pronounce P in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “P” is known as “pe” and it is pronounced “peh”, as in the word “pelican.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Pa - “pah”
- Pe - “peh”
- Pi - “pee”
- Po - “poh”
- Pu - “puh”

Here are a few examples:

- El pan - Bread
- El pescado - Fish
- La pieza - Piece
- Posible - Possible
- La puerta - Door

Q - How to Pronounce Q in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “Q” is known as “cu” and it is pronounced as “cuh”

When it is next to the vowels A, O and U, the Q has a sound that resembles the “k” in English. However, finding words with these sounds is fairly unusual.

The most common uses of the Q are the ones where it is next to the vowels E and I. Nonetheless, you need to place the vowel “U” between the Q and these 2 letters, so that it sounds like “keh” (ke) and “kee” (ki.)

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Qa - “cah”
- Que - “keh”
- Qui - “kee”
- Qo - “coh”
- Qu - “cuh”

Here are a few examples:

- Aqua - Aqua (color)
- **Qué** - What
- **Quién** - Who
- **Quiero** - I want
- **Quora** - Quora

R - How to Pronounce R in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “R” is known as “erre” and it is pronounced as “ehrr-eh”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ra - “rah”
- Re - “reh”
- Ri - “ree”
- Ro - “roh”
- Ru - “ruh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Rata** - Rat
- **Refrigerador** - Refrigerator
- **Risa** - Laughter
- **Robot** - Robot
- **Rusia** - Russia

S - How to Pronounce S in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “S” is known as “ese” and it is pronounced as “eh-seh.”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Sa - “sah”
- Se - “seh”
- Si - “see”
- So - “soh”
- Su - “suh”

Here are a few examples:

- **Saber** - To know
- La **serpiente** - Snake
- **Silbar** - To whistle
- **Solo** - Alone
- **Subir** - To go up

T - How to Pronounce T in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “T” is known as “te” and it is pronounced as “teh”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ta - “tah”
- Te - “teh”
- Ti - “tee”
- To - “toh”
- Tu - “tuh”

Here are a few examples:

- Tamaño - Size
- La tecnología - Technology
- El **t**iburón - Shark
- **T**odo - Everything
- **T**ubo - Tube

U - How to Pronounce U in Spanish:



In Spanish, the vowel “U” is pronounced as “uh” and it always has the same sound.

Here are a few examples:

- **Unico** - Unique
- **Uva** - Grape
- **Usar** - To use
- **Ubicación** - Location
- **Subir** - To go up

V - How to Pronounce V in Spanish:



In Spanish, the “V” is known as “uve” and it is pronounced as “uh-veh”

Depending on where you are, you may also hear a few alternative names for the V in Spanish such as:

- v chica (small v)
- v pequeña (small v)
- v corta (short v)
- v de vaca (v as in cow)

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Va - “bah”
- Ve - “beh”
- Vi - “bee”
- Vo - “boh”
- Vu - “buh”

Here are a few examples:

- El **v**alor - Value
- La **v**entana - Window
- **V**ivir - To live
- **V**olar - To fly
- **V**ulnerable - Vulnerable

W - How to Pronounce W in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “W” is known as “doble u” and it is pronounced as “doh-bleh uh”

Note: In Spain, it is known as “doble uve”

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Wa - “wah”
- We - “weh”
- Wi - “wee”
- Wo - “woh”
- Wu - “wuh”

In Spanish, the W is not used very often, and it is usually found in words that come from English, German or Eastern languages like Korean or Chinese.

In the Spanish words that come from other languages, the W sometimes is pronounced as b, u, or a sound that is similar to “guh”

With words or names that come from **German**, the W is pronounced as “b” as in:

- Wolframio (Bohlfrah-mee-oh) - Wolframium (the chemical element also known as Tungsten)
- Wagner (Bahg-nehr) - Wagner (the musician)

In the case of words that come from **English**, the W is...

pronounced as “u” when it acts as a syllable, as in:

- Newton (“nee-uh-tohn”) - Newton

pronounced as “guh” when it is next to a vowel, as in:

- Waterpolo (“guh-ah-tehr-poh-loh”) - Waterpolo
- Wafle (“guh-ah-fleh”) - Waffle

When the words that have W in Spanish come from **Eastern Languages**, such as Korean or Chinese, the W is pronounced as “guh”, as in:

- Wu (guh) - Wu
- Taiwán (tah-ee-guh-ahn) - Taiwan

X - How to Pronounce X in Spanish:



The letter “X” is known as “equis” and it is pronounced as “eh-kees”

In Spanish, this letter usually has a pronunciation that resembles the sound of K and S together and it sounds like “ks”, just like it does in English, as in the words:

- Éxito - Success
- Exuberante - Exuberant

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Xa - “xah”
- Xe - “xeh”
- Xi - “xee”
- Xo - “xoh”
- Xu - “xuh”

However, there are times when it has a sound that resembles the J in Spanish.

The most important examples of this pronunciation are:

- México - Mexico
- Texas - Texas

There are occasional examples of words with indigenous origins where the X in Spanish can have a pronunciation that resembles the sound of “sh” in English. However, they are unusual so you can think of them as “honorary exceptions.”

Here are a few examples:

- Xcaret is pronounced as “sh-cah-reht” (An Ecological Amusement park near Cancún)
- Xel-Ha is pronounced as “shehl-hah” (Another Ecological Amusement park near Cancún)
- Xola is pronounced as “sho-lah” (A subway station in Mexico City)

Y - How to Pronounce Y in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “Y” is known as “ye” and it is pronounced “yeh”, and in some places, it is still known as “y griega”, a previous name it used to have.

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Ya - “yah”
- Ye - “yeh”
- Yi - “yee”
- Yo - “yoh”
- Yu - “yuh”

Also, there is an alternative pronunciation in the cases where the letter Y is written by itself (no vowels) so it means “and” in Spanish. In that case, it is pronounced as a short “ee”

Here are a few examples:

- **Ya** - Already
- **Ayer** - Yesterday
- La **yema** - Yoke
- El **coyote** - Coyote
- La **yugular** - Jugular

Z - How to Pronounce Z in Spanish:



In Spanish, the letter “Z” is known as “zeta” and it is pronounced as “zeh-tah”

In most Latin American countries, the letter Z is pronounced similar to the way the S is pronounced in English.

However, In Spain the Z is pronounced similar to the way “th” sounds in English, as in the word “Thomas”

To keep things simple, we will use the Latin American pronunciation in this Guide.

Next to the five vowels in Spanish, this is what the approximate pronunciation sounds like, using English as a reference:

Spanish - English:

- Za - “zah”
- Ze - “zeh”
- Zi - “zee”
- Zo - “zoh”
- Zu - “zuh”

Here are a few examples:

- El **z**apato - Shoe
- **Z**en - Zen
- La **enz**ima - Enzyme
- El **abra**zo - Hug
- El **azú**car - Sugar

FAQ and Common Problems with Spanish Pronunciation:

Let's take a moment to go over a few common questions that will make things easier along the way when it comes to the pronunciation of letters and words in Spanish.

How to Pronounce Common Diphthongs in Spanish

As we mentioned before, pronouncing the vowels in Spanish can be a challenge for native English speakers.

Sometimes, one vowel in Spanish may sound like a different vowel in English, and things get confusing quickly.

Well, when it comes to having vowels next to each other, known as “diptongos”, things can get even more confusing and that is why we will go over the sound of common diphthongs in Spanish.



I'll do my best to keep things simple here, lets begin...

First of all, we need to be aware of the fact that in Spanish, there are 2 kinds of vowels:

- Strong vowels, known as “vocales abiertas” which are: a, e, o
- Weak vowels, known as “vocales cerradas”, and they are: i, u

An easy way to remember which vowels are strong and which are weak is to imagine the following scenario as vividly as possible:

“**A strong Elephant Opened the Door**”

If you look at this phrase carefully, you will see that all the vowels in it, are strong vowels, including the initial vowel of the first 4 words, except for the word “strong” which doesn’t start with a vowel, and is there to help you remember the concept of “strong” vowels.

By the way, “strong vowels” are known as “vocales abiertas” (which means “open vowels”), and that is why the elephant “opened” the door. He did it to reinforce the idea. Yeah, I know, he is such a nice elephant!

In Spanish, los **diptongos** are pairs of vowels and we can find them in 2 main cases:

1. A diptongo formed by a strong and a weak vowel next to each other. A few examples are:
 - El **ap**lause - Applause
 - Estad**ou**nidense - American citizen
 - **Su**ave - Soft
2. A diptongo formed by 2 “weak vowels” that are next to each other. As in these examples:
 - La **ci**udad - City
 - El **ru**ido - Noise
 - **Cu**idar - To take care of

In a large majority of cases, the strong vowel is the dominant one in a diptongo, and it is pronounced with a little more emphasis.

In the few cases, when the weak vowel is the one with the stressed pronunciation, you will see a written accent on top of the weak letter, so there is not much need to worry about it.

In summary, if you see a “diptongo” with no accent, stress the strong vowel in that syllable.

If you want to practice your Spanish, and learn more about diptongos, you can check section 2.1 on RAE’s website: [Diptongos en La Real Academia Español de la Lengua](#)

There is one additional factor that often makes this topic a little difficult for native English speakers at first, and that is the interaction between vowels and consonants in English, and how that affects the way vowels are pronounced depending on the consonants that are next to them.

In English, the vowel E sounds different in these 2 words: technology and elephant. It is the same case with the A in these 2 words: sample and bar.

This is a subtle shift that happens automatically and sometimes even unconsciously, and it is hard to break when you first start speaking Spanish.

However, Spanish is easier than English when it comes to pronunciation. Vowels are always pronounced the same way, and most letters follow structured and predictable pronunciation patterns.

So, don't worry about all this. As you practice, your brain will learn how to pronounce each letter and it will all get easier over time.

However, it is particularly important that you listen to native Spanish speakers often; even if it is on TV, radio, movies or podcasts so that your brain gets to practice and absorb the sounds and pronunciations of words in Spanish.

Now that we have covered the basics, it's time to get our hands dirty and review a few common examples that are often problematic for native English speakers. There's no need to memorize them and get it all perfect, just become aware of them so you can be proactive when you stumble upon these scenarios:

Diphthongs with A



The most common problem native English speakers face with the diptongos that start with A, is that they tend to use the English pronunciation of the letter A, and that resembles the pronunciation of the letter E in Spanish.

So, instead of saying “aeronave” (ah-eh-roh-na-veh) they say something that sounds more like “ehronave” (eh-roh-nah-veh)

To prevent this, make sure you open your mouth a little more and make a more nasal sound, that sounds more like “ah” and less like “eh.” Here are a few examples:

Examples of Diphthongs with A:

ae

- La **a**eronave - Aircraft
- La infra**a**estructura - Infrastructure
- El ma**a**estro - Teacher

ai

- El **a**ire - Air
- El **a**ile - Dance
- El ma**a**íz - Corn

ao

- El **a**os - Chaos
- El fara**a**ón - Pharaoh
- La contra**a**oferta - Counteroffer

au

- El **a**utor - Author
- La **a**usa - Cause
- **A**ustralia - Australia

Diphthongs with E



When it comes to the pronunciation of diptongos that have the letter E in them, the biggest challenge for native English speakers is avoiding to pronounce the E as it is done in English.

So, instead of pronouncing it as a double e, try to pronounce it as “eh” to go from “ree-ahl” to “reh-ahl.”

Examples of Diphthongs with E:

ea

- Real - Real
- Desear - To wish
- Teatro - Theater

ei

- Aceite - Oil
- Freír - To fry
- Reino - Kingdom

eo

- Leonardo - Leonardo
- Reorganizar - Reorganize
- León - Lion

eu

- Europa - Europe
- Eufemismo - Euphemism

Diphthongs with I



Examples of Diphthongs with I:

ia

- El **viaje** - Trip
- La **criatura** - creature
- **Austria** - Austria

ie

- La **piedad** - Mercy
- **Viena** - Vienna
- El **hielo** - Ice

io

- El avión - Airplane
- Los labios - Lips
- El patriota - Patriot

iu

- La viuda - Widow
- La ciudad - City

Diphthongs with O



Examples of Diphthongs with O:

oa

- La **cocoa** - Cocoa
- La **canoa** - Canoe
- La **toalla** - Towel

oe

- El **poema** - Poem
- El **roedor** - Rodent

oi

- Heroico - Heroic
- Estoico - Stoic

ou

- Estadounidense - American

Diphthongs with U



Examples of Diphthongs with U:

ua

- El agua - Water
- Actuar - To act
- Evaluar - To evaluate

ue

- El hueso - Bone
- Grueso - Thick

ui

- Cuidar - To take care of
- Fluido - Fluid
- El ruido - Noise

uo

- Antiguo - Antique
- Monstruo - Monster

The Pronunciation of H in Spanish

This is easier than most people think.

In Spanish, there is no need to pronounce the letter H, so you can pretend it is not even there. Or as they say in Spanish “la H es muda” (the h is mute.)

However, since many of the words that begin with H in Spanish, also begin with H in English, native English speakers often struggle with the “nonexistent” pronunciation of this evasive letter.

One way to accelerate the process (by applying the 80/20 Principle) is to practice and memorize some of the words that begin with H which are also commonly used in everyday conversations.

Here's a list of common words that begin with H in Spanish:

Words in Spanish with “ha”



Examples of words with “ha”

“ha” - This is the third person conjugation of the verb “haber”, and means “he has.”

Sometimes it is pronounced as “h-ah” by English speakers but it should sound more like “ah”, as in the phrase “él ha trabajado” (he has worked.)

“hay” - This one means “there is” or “there are.” Sometimes English speakers pronounce it as “hah-ee” but it should sound more like a shorter version of “eye” in English. For example, “there is no problem” in Spanish that would be “no hay problema.”

“hacer” - This word means “to do” and it is often pronounced as “hah-cehr” by native English speakers but it should sound more like “ah-sir” in English.

Here's an example: “I am going to do my homework” in Spanish that is: “voy a hacer mi tarea.”

“hablar” - This one means “to talk” and it is often pronounced as “hah-blaar” but there is no need to pronounce the initial H. Here's an example: “I need to talk to you” in Spanish that would be: “necesito hablar contigo.”

Words in Spanish with “he”



Examples of words with “he”

“he” - This is used as an auxiliary to conjugate verbs and it means “I have”, as in the phrase “yo he caminado” (I have walked.)

Sometimes, native English speakers pronounce it as “h-eh” but it should sound more like “eh.”

An example would be: “I have bought a watch” and in Spanish that would be: “he comprado un reloj.”

“**helicóptero**” - This is an example of a word in Spanish that looks very similar to its English counterpart.

I’m pretty sure you have already guessed what this word means, but just in case, I’m going to tell you. It means “helicopter” (Yeah! BIG surprise, huh?) and it should be pronounced as “eh-lee-cop-teh-ro” making sure not to pronounce the initial H.

Words in Spanish with “hi”



Examples of words with “hi”

“**hijo**” - This word means “son” and it should be pronounced as “ee-hoh” as in the phrase: “you are a good son” which translates to Spanish as: “eres un buen hijo.”

“**hilo**” - This one means “thread” and in Spanish, it sounds like “ee-loh.”

Words in Spanish with “ho”



Examples of words with “ho”

“**hola**” - This word means “hello” and it should be pronounced as “oh-lah.”

“**hotel**” - It obviously means “hotel” but it should be pronounced “oh-tehl” forgetting about the initial H of the English word.

“hoy” - This simple word means “today” and it is sometimes pronounced as “hoh-ee” by beginners. However, it should be pronounced as “oh-ee” in Spanish. Just make sure not to pronounce the initial H and you’ll be fine.

Here's an example: “today is a great day” in Spanish that would be: “hoy es un gran día.”

Words in Spanish with “hu”



Examples of words with “hu”

“**humor**” - This is often a problematic word for English speakers because it is written just like its English counterparts. For this one, besides forgetting about the initial H, make sure to pronounce the letter U as “uh” and not “ee-uh.”

Here is an example: “I have a good sense of humor”, which translates as: “tengo buen sentido del humor.”

“**humo**” - This one looks similar to the previous word but it actually means “smoke” in Spanish.

Just like the previous word, forget about the initial H and pronounce it like this: “uh-moh.”

Here's an example: “there is a lot of smoke” in Spanish that would be: “hay mucho humo.”

The one time when the H does have A sound



If the letter H is next to a C in Spanish, on the right side of it; then it acquires a sound similar to the “ch” in the English word “Chocolate”

On all other occasions, pretend the H is not even there.

A Few Problematic words with H in Spanish:



Finally, I want to emphasize a few words in Spanish with H that are particularly problematic for many of my students. They are often words that are similar to their English counterparts, and this makes things a little more difficult when it comes to getting the pronunciation right. Here are the words:

Spanish - English

- Habitat - Habitat
- Habitar - To inhabit
- Habitación - Room
- Hospital - Hospital
- Hotel - Hotel

The pronunciation of B and V in Spanish



The short answer is:

Both B and V are pronounced the same way in Spanish, as a regular b in most cases.

If you are just getting started and you prefer to keep things simple. That's all you need to know for now. Move on to the next letter.

The longer answer...

On the other hand, If you have been studying Spanish for a while, and you want to improve your pronunciation so you sound more like a native, here are a few guidelines that will help you move forward:

As we just said, the B and V in Spanish are pronounced the same way.

However, there are 2 pronunciations for both of them:

- The “b oclusiva”, that we will call “strong b” (Example: “bueno” - good)
- and a “b aproximante”, that we will call “soft b” (Example: “saber” - to know)

At this point, you may be thinking something like...“Great Miguel, thanks! 2 Pronunciations, got it!”

But wait! Not so fast.

How do you know when to use each pronunciation?

That comes next...

The letter B or V is pronounced as a Strong B when...

- it is the **first letter in a sentence** (Example: “**B**uenos días” - Good morning)
- it is placed **after the letter M** (Example: “camb**i**ar” - to change)
- When is it **preceded by the letter N**, even if it is in a different word (Example: Un **b**uen día - A good day)

That’s the whole thing, but let’s make it even easier...

Simplified V & B Shortcuts:

If you want to keep things simple, just follow these 2 guidelines:

- If the letter B or V is the first letter of a sentence, pronounce it as a strong B (even if it's just 1 word)
- If the letter B or V is not the first letter of a sentence, pronounce it as a soft B

That's it. That will work 90% of the time, and nobody will even notice the 10% that is not perfect.

If you happen to run into your high school Spanish professor, and he or she notices a pronunciation that falls within this 10%, tell him (or her) that I said it's OK, that you have my blessing. He or she will back off immediately, don't worry =)

Why am I telling you this?

So you stop worrying about being perfect, and getting the perfect pronunciation at all times.

RELAX! Just make it work, and practice as much as possible. That's how you improve.

If you are so worried about not saying things perfectly, and because of this, end up not practicing, that's when you are in trouble.

It will all be alright. Your brain will adjust and improve over time. Don't worry about it, just practice and have fun! =)

Now, let's go over a few examples (pay attention to the highlighted letters):

Strong B

- **B**uenos días - Good morning
- Voy a **camb**iar la música - I'm going to change the music
- Que tenga un **buen** día - Have a nice day

Soft B

- Quiero **prob**ar los tacos - I want to taste the tacos
- Estoy **bien**, gracias - I'm fine, thank you
- ¿Cuánto **cue**sta esta **beb**ida? - How much is this drink?

Strong V

- **V**oy a caminar al parque - I am going to walk in the park
- **Ve**o que estás mejor - I see you are doing better
- Quiero comprar un **vide**ojuego - I want to buy a video game

Soft V

- Quiero **ver** una película de comedia - I want to see a comedy film
- ¿Cómo **va** a pagar su compra? - How are you going to pay your purchase?
- ¿Cuándo **vamos** a comer? - When are we going to eat?

That's all for now. Let's move on to the next letter.

The pronunciation of G in Spanish



The pronunciation of the letter G in Spanish is similar to English in most cases, except for a couple of exceptions for the letters E and I.

There are 2 sounds for the G in Spanish:

- The habitual soft pronunciation G has in English, as in the word “gaga”
- The harsh g sound that resembles a sound of the H in the word “heart”

In fact, the harsh sound I just mentioned is the same sound used to pronounce the J in Spanish.

In most cases, the G has the soft sound you're used to, but as I said before, the problem comes when the letter G is used next to the vowels E and I. In those cases, the pronunciation of G follows these simple guidelines:

Pronunciation of the letter G next to E and I (Soft G or Harsh G?)

Harsh G sound:

When the G is next to E and I, the G has a harsh sound that resembles the letter H in heart (the same as the J in Spanish)

Examples:

- **Gel** - Gel
- **Gilberto** - Gilbert

Soft G sound (the usual one):

When there is a “u” between the G and the letters E or I, the G has a soft sound, as in “gaga” and the “u” is not pronounced.

Examples:

- **Miguel** - Michael
- **Guillermo** - William

The following chart summarizes the pronunciation guidelines for the G:

Soft G sound:	Harsh G sound:
ga	
gue	ge
gui	gi
go	
gu	

What about güe and güi? Are those German words, or is that Spanish?

It's Spanish. There are not many words that require this, but you should know about it.

As we just mentioned, when the G is next to the vowels E and I, it can have 2 different pronunciations.

First, a harsh one that is similar to J in Spanish, as in GE and GI

and a Soft one, when it is next to the other vowels.

But, what about the words where you need to pronounce the "U" between the G and E, or the G and I; such as "penguin" in Spanish?

Well, in that case you use the “diéresis” which is the name in Spanish for those 2 little dots on top of the U.

Whenever they are present, the letter U between the G and E, or G and I, actually does sound like a U.

Here are a few examples:

- El pingüino - Penguin
- Vergüenza - Shame
- Bilingüe - Bilingual

The G next to consonants

Additionally, whenever you find the letter G next to other consonants (as in the cases of gr, and gl) it will have a soft sound, similar to “ga”

Here are a few examples:

- Gratis - Free
- Gracias - Thank you
- Global - Global

An Easy way to Remember how to Pronounce the letter G:

Here is an easy mnemonic that will help you remember which vowels require a harsh G sound when they are not accompanied by the letter “u”:

“Genghis Khan was a harsh Gentleman”

The underlined sections will help you remember which letters require a harsh pronunciation for the G in Spanish when they are not accompanied by the letter “u”.

The pronunciation of “Q” in Spanish



The “Q” in Spanish is generally used next to the vowels E or I and in these cases, it is always accompanied by the letter U next to it.

However, in these cases, the letter U next to the Q is not pronounced and this can sometimes be confusing for native English speakers.

I must admit that, as a native Spanish speaker, even I think this is confusing and it is something that caused me a lot of trouble when I was a little boy in elementary school.

In general terms, whenever you see the letter Q in Spanish, just pronounce it as if it were a K in English and ignore the letter U next to it.

Unless, the Q and U are next to the vowels A or O, which are very rare.

An example in Spanish would be the word “**quorum**”, which as in English, refers to the number of members of a group required to be present to make a decision.

Another example is the word “**aqua**” which is often used to refer to a color that is a combination of light green and light blue.

This type of words are so rare in Spanish, that I can't even remember any other examples.

The pronunciation of “J” in Spanish



The letter J in Spanish is always pronounced the same way. It sounds like a harsh version of the sound the H makes when it is next to a vowel in English, as in the word “her” but with a stronger sound.

Many native English speakers tend to pronounce the J in Spanish, using a soft sound that resembles the English pronunciation, as in the words “Jeff” or “John”.

However, this can be confusing for native Spanish speakers because that sound resembles the pronunciation of the “LL” and “Y” in Spanish.

An easy way to master the J in Spanish, is to practice the pronunciation of commonly used words. Here are a few examples...

Common words that include J in Spanish:

Ja

- El **jabón** - Soap
- **Jalar** - To pull
- **Japón** - Japan

Je

- El **jefe** - Boss
- **Jesús** - Jesus

Ji

- La **jirafa** - Giraffe

Jo

- **José** - Joseph
- **Jorge** - George
- La **joya** - Jewel

Ju

- El **juez** - Judge
- El **jugo** - Juice
- **Junio** - June

The pronunciation of “LL” in Spanish:



The pronunciation of “LL” in Spanish, which is known as “doble ele”, is relatively similar to the English pronunciation of the “J” in the word “Jessica”.

However, native English speakers often tend to pronounce it as an “L” and it is important that you avoid this.

This happens commonly with words that have a “ll” followed by the vowel “a” in the middle or at the beginning of a word.

The most common mistake happens with the word “tortilla”, which is often pronounced as “tohr-tee-lah” but should sound more like “tohr-tee-yah”

Here are a few other common examples:

- Me **llamo** Carolina - My name is Caroline
- **Llegar** - To arrive

- **Llover** - To rain
- El **gallo** - Rooster

- La **lluvia** - Rain
- **Lluvioso** - Rainy

As an additional note, there are a few places, like Argentina and regions of Uruguay; where the “LL” is pronounced with a sound that is more similar to “sh” in English.

For example, using this pronunciation the word Pollo (poh-yoh), would sound more like “pollo” (poh-sho)

However, most countries follow the pronunciation guidelines we just covered, so don’t worry about it. Just be aware of it in case you ever run into a chicken stand run by Argentineans, or need an autograph from Lionel Messi, the soccer superstar from Argentina.

Just choose one, keep it simple and move on.

The pronunciation of “Y” in Spanish:



There are two ways to pronounce the “Y” in Spanish:

- 1- It is pronounced as a short “ee” in English when...
 - When it is by itself, and it is used as the conjunction “and” as in “esto y aquello” (this and that)
 - When it is the last letter in a word such as “estoy en casa” (I am home)

2- When it is next to a vowel, it is pronounced similar to the way the J sounds in the word “Jessica” (which is, similar to the LL in Spanish)

A few examples include:

- **Ya** sé - I know
- Quiero que me apoyes - I want you to support me
- **Yo** estoy aquí - I am here
- Voy a caminar - I am going to walk
- Hoy es un buen día - Today is a beautiful day
- Él y ella son amigos - Him and her are friends

As an additional note, there are a few places, like Argentina; where the Y is pronounced as “sh” but in most places it sounds like a soft J when the word Jessica is pronounced in English.

Just keep it simple and practice as often as possible.

Comparing the pronunciation of H, G, J, LL and Y

The Spanish pronunciation of the letters H,G, J, LL and Y is often problematic for native English speakers.

Sometimes, the Spanish pronunciation of H,G, J, LL and Y, can resemble the pronunciation of other letters in English.

Because of this, the pronunciation of these letters often becomes a problem for many of my students.

In this section, we will review how to pronounce them, and we will compare them in order to make things easier.

Spanish Pronunciation Chart of H,G, J, LL and Y:

H	G		J	LL	Y
"The H is mute"	Soft G	Harsh G	"In Spanish, J sounds like a "harsh h" in English"	"LL sounds like "J" in "Jessica"	2 Pronunciations: "ee" as conjunction or at the end of a word, and "English J" next to a vowel
ha	ga		ja	lla	ya
he	gue	ge	je	lle	ye
hi	gui	gi	ji	lli	yi
ho	go		jo	llo	yo
hu	gu		ju	llu	yu

Here is a simple mnemonic sentence to help you remember a few of the pronunciations that are often problematic for native English speakers (imagine it as vividly as possible. Including colors, sounds and smells):

Henry is mute and **G**enghis Khan is a harsh **g**entleman with a small **h**eart of **j**elly

Let's break it down,

The first section, "**H**enry is mute" will help you remember that the H (the first letter in the name "Henry") is MUTE in Spanish (la H es muda)

The second section, "**G**enghis Khan is a harsh **g**entleman" will remind you that when the G is next to E and I, it needs a "harsh G" pronunciation (as in "**harsh G**-entleman)

The third section, "a small **h**eart of **j**elly" will remind you that the J in Spanish, sounds like a "short H" (as in **small H**-eart), also, that the Y in Spanish (the last letter in the word "Jelly") can sound like J in English, as in the initial part of "Jelly" and also as "ee" in English, just like the last section of the word "Jelly."

I know that's a convoluted one, but give it a try. It's a creative way to memorize these problematic pronunciations.

Just picture the scene in your mind, with as many colors, smells and sounds as possible and it will be easier to remember.

What's with the deal with the 2 dots on top of the “u” some words have in Spanish?



Finally, let's go over something that is relatively uncommon, but that you may encounter sometimes.

An example of this, is the word for penguin: Pingüino.

Do you notice those two dots on top of the letter “u”?

They are known as a “diéresis” in Spanish, and it is used for words in which the letter “u” between the “g” and the vowels “e” and “i” is required to sound like an actual “u”.

Here are a few more examples that use a “diéresis”:

- Bilingüe - Bilingual
- La vergüenza - Shame
- El pingüino - Penguin

The Pronunciation of the C, K, S, Z in Spanish

It's time to look at the next set of letters, C, K, S & Z. The pronunciations of these letters share similarities, which make them easy to review and memorize.

The Pronunciation of C in Spanish

The letter C in Spanish is pronounced similar to the way it sounds in English in most countries around the world.

When the C is followed by the vowels A, O, U, it has a hard sound that sounds similar to a K, as in the English word “car.”

In most countries, when the C is followed by the vowels E or I, it has a softer sound that resembles the letter S, similar to the pronunciation of the word “cell phone” in English.

A couple of examples of this pronunciation include: “cerro” (hill) and “cilindro” (cylinder)

However, it is a different case in Spain where the letter C, followed by E or I is pronounced like “th” in English, as in the word “Think”. A couple of examples of this pronunciation are: “cerro” (hill) and “cilindro” (cylinder.)

These differences are not a big deal, so don't worry. Just be aware of them and let your brain take care of the rest as you practice.

Although there are people in Spain that pronounce the C as a “z” in English, most countries around the world pronounce it

similar to the way the “S” sounds in English. Don't worry too much about this kind of details, your brain will adjust as needed depending on where you are and who you are talking to. It's just a matter of practice.

An easy way to remember these pronunciations is to imagine the following scene (imagine it as vividly as possible):

COmbine a **CU**p of **CA**rrots and **CE**lery with **CI**nnamon

In summary,

In Spanish, the C...

- sounds like a K when followed by the vowels a,o,u
- sounds like S when followed by e and i

Here are a few words with C in Spanish:

- La **ca**sa - House
- El **ca**rro - Car
- El **ca**mino - Road

- El **ce**pillo - Brush
- El **ce**ntró - Center
- La **ce**bolla - Onion

- El **ci**rculo - Circle
- El **ci**lindro - Cylinder
- La **ci**udad - City

- La **co**mida - Food
- **Co**mprar - To buy
- **Co**cinar - To cook

- **Cu**idar - To take care of
- La **cu**chara - Spoon
- El **cu**chillo - Knife

The Pronunciation of K in Spanish



There is not much that needs to be said here. In practical terms, the pronunciation of K in Spanish, is similar to the way it is pronounced in English.

It is a bit shorter, and less air exits your mouth as you say it; but it is practically the same.

Here are a few examples:

- El **K**arma - Karma
- **K**enia - Kenya
- El **K**ilogramo - Kilogram
- El **K**oala - Koala

The Pronunciation of S in Spanish



The pronunciation of the letter S in Spanish, is similar to way it is pronounced in English. It's a little shorter, but it's almost the same.

Let's look at a few examples:

- **Saber** - To know
- **Seguir** - To follow
- **Sí** - Yes
- **Solo** - Alone
- La **subscripción** - Subscription

The Pronunciation of Z in Spanish



The pronunciation of “Z” in Spanish, is generally similar to the pronunciation of “S” in English all over Latin America.

In Spain, it is pronounced similar to the “th” in English, as in the word “Think” in words like “Zapato.”

So, in summary. Just keep things simple and pronounce the “z” the way Latin Americans do it, like an “s”. Don’t worry too much about it, and you’ll be fine. Your brain will adjust as needed as you practice.

Here are a few words with “Z” in Spanish:

- El **z**apato - Shoe
- La **z**ona - Zone
- **Z**urcir - to mend clothes

This is how the pronunciation of the letters in this group relate to each other:

Sounds like a “K”

- Ca
- Co
- Cu

Sounds like an “S”

- Ce
- Ci
- Za
- Ze
- Zi
- Zo
- Zu

The Pronunciations of D, T, R & RR

The pronunciation of D in Spanish:



Although there are slight differences between certain cases, in practical terms, the pronunciation of D in Spanish is similar to the pronunciation of D in English.

Here are a few examples:

- **Dar** - To give
- **Daño** - Damage
- **Tienda** - Store

- **Dedo** - Finger
- **Idea** - Idea
- **Debate** - Debate

- **Distancia** - Distance
- **Dinosaurio** - Dinosaur
- **Dinero** - Money

- **Donar** - Donate
- **Dormir** - Sleep
- **Doctor** - Doctor

- **Dueño** - Owner
- **Dulce** - Sweet
- **Duplicar** - Duplicate

The Pronunciation of T in Spanish:



There are minor differences between the pronunciation of the letter “T” in Spanish and English, but they are practically the same.

Now, take a look at the following words that include the letter “T” in Spanish:

- **También** - Also
- **Estar** - To be
- **Entrar** - To enter

- **Tiempo** - Time
- **Tienda** - Store
- **Tipo** - Type

- **Tener** - To have
- **Temporal** - Temporary
- **Terminar** - To finish

- **Tú** - You
- **Tuyo** - Yours
- **Tulipán** - Tulip

How to Pronounce the R in Spanish

Learning how to pronounce the R in Spanish is important because there are words that are very similar to each other, and it is the pronunciation of the “r” that allows us to differentiate between them.

Here are a couple of examples:

Expensive and car – “caro” (expensive) and “carro” (car)
Zero and hill – “cero” (zero) and “cerro” (hill)

However, you shouldn’t worry too much about this because even if you don’t get it perfect, the context of each sentence will help the other person understand what you are talking about most of the time.

So, don’t stress about it, just have fun!

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that there are two different “R” sounds in Spanish.

A strong “R” that sounds like this: carro
And a soft “R” that sounds like this: caro

The strong “R” sound is pronounced in 3 main circumstances:

- When a word begins with the letter “R”
- Whenever you see a “double r” in a word
- Whenever the letter “R” follows the letters L,N or S.

To remember this last one, just imagine this as vividly as possible (feel afraid if possible):

“A few lions purr as they pronounce the Spanish R”

Just remember the word “lions”, remove the vowels, and you get L,N,S; the letters after which a single “r” has the “strong r” pronunciation in Spanish.

A few examples are:

- Realidad - Reality
- Correr - To run
- Sonreír - To smile

In the case of “sonreír” (to smile), the “r” follows the letter “n”, and according to the “L, N, S Rule” we just mentioned, it should have a “strong r” pronunciation.

What about the “soft R”?

That is easy, whenever you see the letter “r” in a situation that doesn’t fall within the three cases I just mentioned, you can pronounce it as a soft R.

As I said before, don’t worry too much about these rules. Over time, your instinct will tell you when to pronounce a “soft r” and a “strong r.”

Shortcuts to learn the Pronunciation of the Spanish R:

Now, let's make things easier. Here is a simplified version of these rules that will work most of the time:

- If a word begins with "R", pronounce it as a "strong R"
- If a word has a "double R" pronounce it as a "strong R"
- If a word has a "single R" that is not at the beginning of a sentence, pronounce it as a "soft R"

That's it, that will work most of the time.
Don't worry about getting it perfect, just keep moving forward.

So, we have talked about the cases where the "R" is pronounced as a "soft r" and a "strong r", but, how do you actually pronounce them?

That's next.

How to Pronounce the R in Spanish:



The pronunciation of the soft R in Spanish is very similar to the pronunciation the “D” and the “Double T” have in English when they are between vowels.

We can find an example of this in the word “butter” and “coder”.

Pay attention to the way the “double t” and the “letter d” are pronounced in those words and keep that in mind. Butter, coder.

Now, use that to pronounce words that have a “soft r” pronunciation in Spanish. For example:

- Caro - Expensive
- Cero - Zero
- Yo quiero - I want

It's that easy.

Here is something that will help you remember:

Imagine a group of **Spanish** coders who “r” eating **soft** butter.

The words “coders” and “butter” are examples that include the pronunciation of the “soft r” in Spanish.

Listen to them: coder, butter.

These words will help you remember how to pronounce the “Soft R” in words like: “caro”, “cero”, “quiero.”

How to Roll your R in Spanish

Now, let's look at the pronunciation of the "Strong R"

This is a bit more challenging but it is easier than most people think. You just need to find the right technique and practice a little.

Actually, this is not an instinctive sound like "ma" or "pa" which are sounds most children make when they are very little all over the world.

The strong R in Spanish is a sound that needs to be learned and practiced.

It's hard to explain how to roll your R's with text, so I made this video to make things easier:



Shortcuts to Understand how to Pronounce the Stress of words in Spanish



In Spanish, most words have one “stressed syllable” which is pronounced with a little more emphasis.

This is important because in some cases, there are words that are written the same way, but are pronounced differently because of the stress in one syllable.

However, you shouldn't worry too much about pronouncing words perfectly, because the context of a sentence will help others understand what you are trying to say.

For example,

- Papa - Potato
- Papá - Father

These are two words that look similar but have different pronunciations and different meanings.

Although you don't want to call someone's father a potato by mistake, even if you actually got to do it, the other person will be able to understand what you're saying based on the context of your sentence, such as:

¿Puedes llamar a tu "papa" y pedirle que compre leche?
Can you call your "potato" and ask him to buy milk?

From that sentence, it would be fairly easy to understand that "papa" (potato) was probably meant to be Papá (father.)

It is important that you understand this, but don't stress about it. Just practice as much as possible. People will understand what you mean and you will improve as you go.

How to Pronounce the Stress of words when you read them...

All words in Spanish have a syllable with a stressed pronunciation. Even if you don't see it.

When you read a word that has a written accent, it is easy to know which syllable should be stressed as you read it out loud.

However, not all words have a written accent. So, in those cases, how do you know how to pronounce them?

In this section, we will go over a few simple guidelines that will make it easier for you to know how to pronounce the stress of words in Spanish.

Accent Pronunciation Shortcut 1: If you see a written accent mark, stress the syllable that has it.

Here are a few examples:

- La **Mamá** - Mom
- El **Papá** - Dad
- El **á**rbol - Tree
- El murci**é**lago - Bat

Accent Pronunciation Shortcut 2: If you see a word with NO accent marks, and it DOES NOT end with n,s or a vowel; then, you stress the pronunciation of the last syllable on the right.

Here are a few examples (the highlights correspond to the highlighted syllables):

- Pensar - To think
- Desarmador - Screwdriver
- Densidad - Density

Accent Pronunciation Shortcut 3: If you see a word with NO accent marks, and it DOES end in n,s, or a vowel, then you stress the second to last syllable, starting from the right.

Here are a few examples:

- Hablan - They speak
- Camas - Beds
- Casa - House

Although there are a few exceptions that are not covered by these shortcuts, they will work for a large majority of words commonly used in Spanish.

Now, those shortcuts will make things much easier for you, and they are fairly streamlined and simple. But let's make it even easier by using the 80 / 20 Principle to focus on the most important things that produce the most results. To do this, we will focus and simplify even further.

Super Streamlined Accent Pronunciation Shortcuts:

- If you see a written accent in a word, stress that syllable
- If a verb in infinitive ends with R and DOES NOT have a written accent, stress the last syllable on the right.
- For all the other words, stress the second to last syllable if there is no accent and the word ends with a vowel, or the letters N or S.

These simplified guidelines are not designed to help you pass a test or to make sure you are 100% right all the time. They are designed to be easy to learn and remember so you can practice and learn more as you go.

The point of all this is, give up the need to be perfect and allow yourself to make playful mistakes as you practice. Learning Spanish is only a matter of persistence, and every mistake you make, gets you closer to your goal. They are only proof that you are working to get better and move forward. So, just practice often, and your brain will take care of the rest.

Finally, let's go over a few common pronunciation patterns and common questions related the pronunciation of accents and stressed syllables that you will encounter often in everyday Spanish.

1- Words that end in “cion”

Generally, most words that end in “cion” will have a written accent on the last syllable on the right.

A few common examples are (bold letters show the stressed pronunciation):

- **Canción** - song
- **Decisión** - decision
- **Emoción** - emotion

2- Verbs in infinitive

Unless they have a written accent, most verbs in infinitive will have a stressed syllable on the last syllable.

Here are a few common examples:

- **Hablar** - To talk
- **Comer** - To eat
- **Decir** - To say

3- Why is it that the word for “yes” in Spanish (sí), sometimes has an accent and sometimes doesn't (si)?

Because they are 2 different words.

- To say “**yes**” in Spanish, you say “**sí**”, with an accent.
- To say “**if**” in Spanish, you say “**si**”, without an accent

4 - Why is it that the words “tu” and “el” sometimes have an accent, and sometimes don’t?

The short answer is: because it depends on what you are trying to say.

él vs el

In Spanish, “**el**” without an accent, means “**the**” and is used for singular masculine nouns.

For example:

- **El** dinero está en la mesa - The money is on the table
- **El** avión no ha llegado todavía - The airplane has not arrived yet
- **El** teclado está sucio - The keyboard is dirty

On the other hand, “**él**” with an accent, means “**he**” and it is used as a personal pronoun.

Here are a few common examples:

- **Él** es mi amigo - He is my friend
- **Él** es el mejor chef de México - He is the best chef in Mexico
- No sé quien es **él** - I don’t know who he is

tú vs tu

It is a similar story with “tu” and “tú.”

In Spanish, “**tú**” means “**you**” the second person of singular as in “tú eres inteligente” - “you are intelligent,” and “**tu**” means “**your**”, as in “ese es tu problema” - “that is your problem.”

5- Why does the word for “what” in Spanish (qué) sometimes has an accent and sometimes doesn’t?

Good question, this is something that troubles many native Spanish speakers in everyday life.

In Spanish, if you want to express the idea of “what” when ask a question, or making an exclamatory statement, you need to use “qué” with an accent.

Here are a few examples:

- ¿**Qué** quieres comer? - **What** do you want to eat?
- ¿**Qué** buscas? - **What** are you looking for?
- ¡**Qué** bonita casa! - **What** a beautiful home!

If it is used as a conjunction, you write it as “que” without an accent (it often means “that” or “what”), to say things like these:

- ¿Cuál es el **que** te gusta? - Which is the one **that** you like?
- Eso es lo **que** pasó - That is **what** happened
- Busco algo **que** no sea muy caro - I am looking for something **that** is not too expensive

6- Why does the word for “por qué” in Spanish sometimes has an accent and sometimes doesn’t?

It’s because they are 2 different words.

“Por qué” means “why”

“porque” means “because”

Here are a couple of examples:

- ¿Por qué has llegado tarde? - Why did you arrive late?
- Porque había mucho tráfico - Because there was a lot of traffic

That's it...

I hope you found this Spanish Pronunciation Guide to be useful.

Please share this document with 3 of your friends so they can also learn more Spanish and improve their pronunciation.

If you want to continue learning Spanish, you can find more resources over here:

<http://spanishforyourjob.com/>

¡Gracias!