

Pronunciation & the Rules for Accent Marks

Have you noticed that English-speakers tend to change vowel sounds to produce an "accent"? For instance, in the South, a "Sprite" becomes a "Sprahite"; in New York a "soda" becomes a "soder", in Western Pennsylvania an "orange" becomes an "arng".

In Spanish, the vowels remain constant and it is the consonants that vary: Castillian Spanish-speakers use the "theta" sound for Ci, Ce and Z - it sounds like the "th" in the word "tooth". So in Madrid, the word zapatos sounds like `thah-PAH-tos'.

In Argentina and Uruguay, y and ll sound like the "zh" in rouge and garage, instead of the "y" sound used everywhere else. We will be learning standard Latin American Spanish in this course. Just keep in mind that you will hear regional differences among Spanish speakers.

Vowels

There are only five vowels in Spanish, and they are always pronounced in the same manner.

A (ah as in "father")	E (eh as in "egg")	I (ee as in "police")	O (o as in "vote")	U (u as in "flute")
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The **O** is always long **O** (as in the English word "vote"). The long **O** is often the hardest vowel to keep straight. To practice keeping your vowel sounds clear, listen in the audio exercises to how the speakers pronounce words, and imitate their pronunciation carefully. Remember, there are no silent vowels. Cine is a two-syllable word: CI-ne ("SEE-neh")

The three rules of pronunciation covering accent marks and basic word stress:

Rule #1: Words that end in S, N or a vowel are stressed on the next to last syllable.

For example:

es-tu-di-AN-te	PE-rros	pro-fe-SO-ra	re-Pi-tan
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Rule #2: Words that end in all other consonants (not S or N) are stressed on the last syllable.

For example:

bo-rra-DOR	re-LOJ	pa-RED	es-pa-ÑOL
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Rule #3: Words that do not obey the first two rules require an written accent mark on the stressed syllable.

For example:

es-cri-BÍO	po-li-CÍ-a	lec-CIÓN	LÁ-piz
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Vowel Grouping

There are two ways to categorize types of vowels:

Grouping 1: How vowels relate to other vowels

<i>Strong vowels</i>	<i>Weak vowels</i>
A, E, O	I, U

Grouping 2: How vowels relate to consonants (this is covered on the [Alphabet Page](#))

<i>Strong vowels</i>	<i>Weak vowels</i>
A, O, U	I, E

We're going to focus on Grouping #1 -How vowels relate to other vowels

Pairing vowels together will affect how a vowel is pronounced:

Strong vowels each count as a separate syllable and are voiced equally (pronounced as a separate syllable):

vi-de-o	ta-re-a	al-mo-ha-da* *remember the "h" is silent!
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However, a weak and a strong vowel count as one vowel sound and glide together.

This single sound is called a "diphthong".

sue-gra	far-ma-cia	i-dio-ta	oi-ga	Mau-ri-cio
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In a diphthong the stronger vowel will carry the stress and be pronounced louder. The weak Spanish **u** takes on an English **w** sound while the weak Spanish **i** will take on an English **y** sound.

When two weak vowels make a diphthong the stress rests on the second of the two weak vowels.

cuídado	viuda
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Any variation in pronunciation from these rules requires a written accent:

- The Stress should be on the second Weak vowel but isn't: **flúido**
- The Stress should be on the Strong vowel but isn't: **leído** **baúl**

Accents marks also determine meaning.

Accent marks change word meanings as much as changing any other letter would. When you see a one-syllable word wearing an accent mark, you know that there is another identical word but without the accent mark that means something completely different:

si without an accent mark means "if" vs. sí with an accent mark which means "yes"	el without an accent mark means "the" vs. él with an accent mark which means "he"	tu without an accent mark means your vs. tú with an accent mark which means "you"
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All Interrogatives (question words) have accent marks

