

The Spanish

Alphabet

(El alfabeto español)





Like the a in “father,” but shorter

Examples:

más

nada

casa

pasa

mañana

encantada

Note: In this presentation, all vowels will be circled.



The Spanish “b” is similar to the English “b” when initial (pronounced at the beginning of a phrase) or after the letters m or n.

Bailo con María.      el medio ambbiente

Hablan bien.      un banco

It is softer, allowing some air to pass through the lips, when intervocalic (located between vowels).

No bailo bien.      Iberia.

Note: Also see “v.”



The Spanish “c” has two distinct sounds, depending on its environment, that is, how it is located with respect to certain vowels. The next slide provides more details.

**c = k**

... before the following three vowels

casa

copa

cura

Unlike the English “k” sound, the hard Spanish c is not aspirated, that is, no air is expelled when it is pronounced.

In Spain, the “c” before e or i is pronounced “th”

**c = s**

... before the following two vowels

cero

circo

“thero”

“thirco”

# \* ch (che)

\* Until 1994, “ch” was a separate letter in Spanish, and words that began with this letter were found in a separate ch section in the dictionary after the section containing words beginning with c. It is pronounced like the English ch.

charro

chimichanga

muchacho

chica

d (de)

The Spanish “d” is similar to the English “d” but is pronounced with the tongue farther forward against the upper teeth. When initial or after the letters n or l, it is harder; when intervocalic, it is a bit softer, much like the voiced “th” sound in the English word “they.”

Daniel es mi hermano.

andar

¡Buena idea!

nada



Like the e in “they,” but without the “y” glide

es

mesa

interesante

tres

deporte

México

f (efe)

The Spanish “f” is essentially identical to the English “f.”

Fernando

flan

teléfono

frente

A large lowercase letter 'g' with a burlap texture, followed by the letters 'ge' in a serif font, all enclosed in large parentheses.

The Spanish “g” has three distinct sounds, depending on its environment. The next two slides provide more details.

**g = g in "gap"**

... before the following three vowels at the beginning of a phrase or after the letter "n".

**gato**

**gota**

**gusto**

**tengo**

In other cases, such as when intervocalic, the g is softer, somewhat like the g in *sugar*, before these three vowels.

**pagar**

**lago**

**igual**

**g = h in "harp"**

... before the following two vowels

**gemelo**  
**gitano**

h (hache)

The “h” is always completely silent.

hotel      hospital      alcohol

Hablo español.



Like the ee in “teeth” or the i in “machine,”  
but shorter

mi

libro

inteligente

niño

tímido

rico

# j (jota)

The “j” is pronounced in all cases like the “soft” g, that is, much like an h in English. In some areas, particularly Spain, the jota is pronounced more crisply, with a somewhat harsh or guttural sound.

José

jarra

hijo

atajo

A large graphic featuring a textured, golden-brown letter 'k' on the left and a golden-brown letter 'k' followed by a lowercase 'a' in parentheses on the right. The background is a solid teal color.

The “k” is a letter borrowed from Greek and is found only in words borrowed from other languages. The k is not aspirated in Spanish.

kilogramo

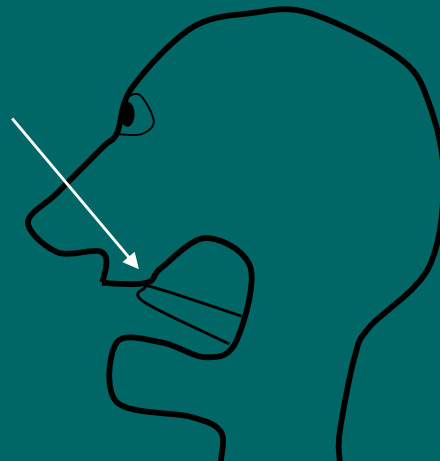
karate

whisky



The “l” is pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge as in English; however, the tongue is held straight rather than slightly curled.

alveolar ridge



lotería

Lalo

azul



(elle)



Until 1994, “ll,” like “ch,” was a separate letter in Spanish, and words that began with this letter were listed separately in the dictionary. See the next slide for more information.



The “ll” is pronounced like the English y.

calle = caye

In Spain, it was formerly pronounced as ly, and some conservative, older speakers still use this pronunciation.

calle = calye

m (eme)

The “m” is pronounced essentially like its English counterpart.

mamá

mole

amor

mensaje

n (ene)

The “n” is pronounced very much like its English counterpart.

nada

Elena

Nora

máquina

Before the consonants “b”, “p”, and “v”, the “n” is pronounced like an “m.”

un beso

un vaso

un perro

\* ñ (eñe)

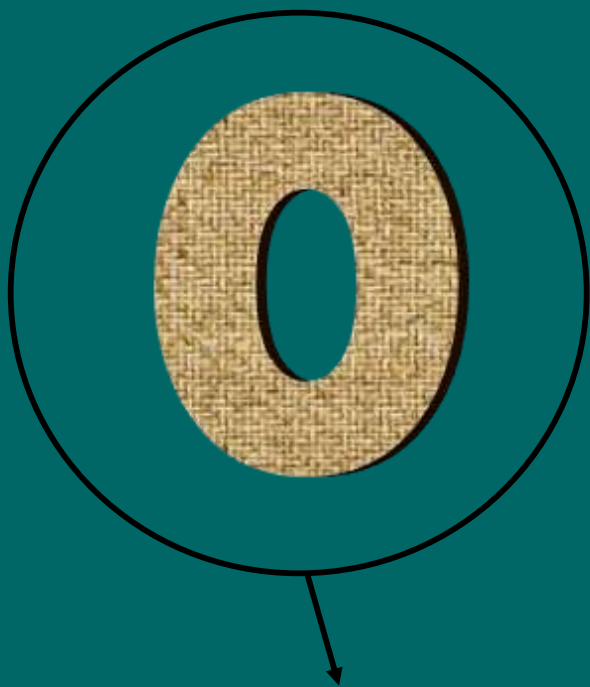
\* After the changes to the Spanish alphabet in 1994, the “ñ” is the one letter that still does not appear in the English alphabet. It is pronounced like the “ni” combination in the word *onion*.

niño

año

mañana

baño



Like the o in “hope,” but without the glide

mono

yo

perro

no

A large, stylized graphic of the letter 'p' and the letters '(pe)'. The 'p' is a tall, lowercase letter with a textured, golden-brown surface. To its right, the letters '(pe)' are enclosed in large parentheses, also with a textured, golden-brown surface. The background is a solid teal color.

The “p” is unlike the English p in that the latter is aspirated, that is, a puff of air is expelled after the lips separate. In Spanish, we hold back the air, avoiding the “pop” that is heard in English.

Pablo

pata

papá

ropa

q (cu)

The “q” is always followed by “u,” as in English, except for a few foreign words such as *Iraq*, although this word can also be spelled *Irak*, since the sound of “q” is essentially identical to that of “k.” Like the p and [k] sounds, the q is not aspirated.

queso

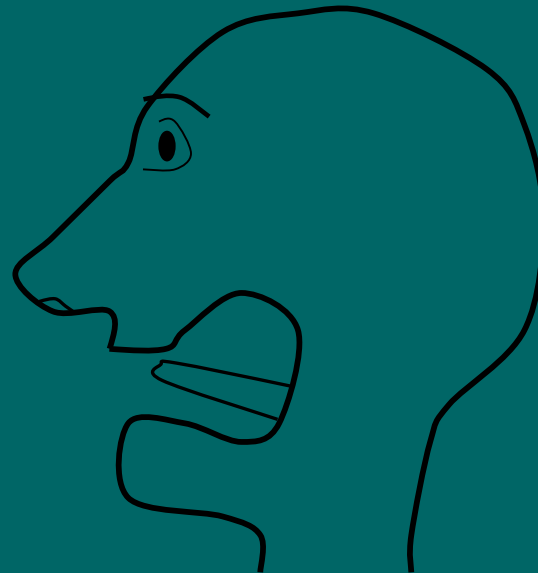
quilate

pequeño

quien

**r** (ere)

The intervocalic, embedded (that is, non-word-initial) “r” involves a single tap of the tongue against the alveolar ridge. The result is a sound much like the dd in the name “Eddie.”



Eddie

pero

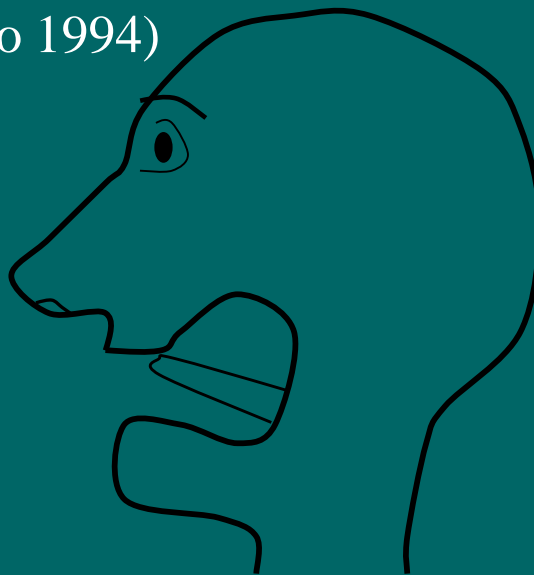
María

arena

\* rr (erre)

\* (A single letter previous to 1994)

With the “rr,” or double “r,” the tongue is positioned just as with the single “r,” except that it is held there briefly and allowed to “flap,” creating the “rolling” effect.



perro  
barrio  
derrota  
alrededor  
en realidad

Note: The single “r” is rolled more like the “rr” after l and n.  
When initial, the “r” is rolled exactly like the “rr.”

rosa  
rubio

S (ese)

The “s” is essentially like the English s in most of the Spanish-speaking world.

sí

casa

peso

sabroso



The “t” is similar to the English t except that it is, again, more dental. The tongue is brought forward against the upper teeth much as with the “d.” Like the p and [k] sounds, the t is not aspirated.

té

tamal

Tito

patata



Like the u in the name “Lulu,” but shorter

The important thing to remember about the “u” is that it has no initial “y” sound as in English. When we pronounce the word *union*, for instance, we actually say *yunion*. Leave the “y” sound off in Spanish.

unión

universidad

inusual

comunidad



In all environments, the “v” is identical in pronunciation to the “b.”

Voy contigo

envidia

Eva

lavar

Since the “b” and the “v” sound exactly alike, we often distinguish between them by one of the following methods.

**b** (be grande)  
(b de burro)

---

**v** (ve chica)  
(v de vaca)

A large, stylized letter 'W' with a woven, burlap-like texture. The letter is dark brown with a lighter brown woven pattern. It has a slight 3D effect with a dark shadow on the right side.

(doble ve)

(uve doble)

(doble u)

The “w” is a letter borrowed from English and is found only in words borrowed from other languages.

whisky

wéltér

wáter (closet)

X (equis)

The “x” is pretty much as in English.

examen

exacto

auxilio

However, in words derived from indigenous languages, it is like a “j” when intervocalic . . .

México

mixe

. . . and like an “s” when initial.

Xochimilco

# y (i griega)

The “y,” when word-final, acts as a semivowel, that is, it has a sound similar to the vowel “i.”

Voy

rey

When word-initial or intervocalic, it functions as a consonant and sounds like the y in English.

ya

rayo

Z (zeta)

The “z” has two distinct sounds, depending on geography. The next slide provides more details.

In the Americas

**Z = S**

In all cases

zapato

("sapato")

In Spain

**Z = th**

In all cases

("thapato")

Fin