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How many vowels in the spanish alphabet

Mobile Introduction: Spanish is a Romance language and part of the Indo-European language family. It is closely related to Italian and Portuguese. Spanish is a major language, with up to 400 million native speakers in Spain, Latin America and the USA. Alphabet: Spanish uses the Latin alphabet. The vowels can take an acute accent, and there is the additional letter ñ. When spelling English words or writing them from the teacher's dictation, beginning Spanish students may make mistakes with the English vowels a, e, i. The consonants h, j, r, y may also cause trouble, since they have significantly different names in Spanish. The English writing system itself causes no particular problems to Spanish learners. Beginners, however, may be tempted to punctuate questions or exclamations as follows, since this is how it is done in Spanish: ¿What is your name? / ¡What a goal! Punctuation of direct speech may also be a problem because quotation marks are not used in Spanish. Phonology: The phonological system of Spanish is significantly different from that of English, particularly in the aspects of vowel sounds and sentence stress. These differences are very serious obstacles to Spanish learners being able to acquire a native-English-speaker accent. Coe (1987) says: "European Spanish speakers, in particular, probably find English pronunciation harder than speakers of any other European language." Spanish has 5 pure vowels and 5 diphthongs. The length of the vowel is not significant in distinguishing between words. This contrasts with English, which has 12 pure vowel sounds and 8 diphthongs ("but see below). The length of the vowel sound plays an important role. It is not surprising, therefore, that Spanish learners may have great difficulty in producing or even perceiving the various English vowel sounds. Specific problems include the failure to distinguish the sounds in words such as ship/sheep, taught/tot, fool/full or cart/cat/cut. Producing English consonant sounds is not so problematic for many Spanish learners, but difficult enough! They may have problems in the following aspects: failure to pronounce the end consonant accurately or strongly enough ; e.g. cart for the English word card or brish for bridge or thing for think problems with the /v/ in words such as vowel or revive difficulties in sufficiently distinguishing words such as see/she or jeep/sheep/cheap the tendency to prefix words beginning with a consonant cluster on s- with an /s/ sound; so, for example, school becomes eschool and strip becomes estrip the swallowing of sounds in other consonant clusters; examples: next becomes nes and instead becomes irstead. Spanish is a syllable-timed language*. When Spanish speakers transfer the intonation patterns of their mother tongue into English, which is a stress-timed language, the result may sometimes be barely comprehensible to native English speakers. This is because the meaning or information usually conveyed in English by the combination of stress, pitch and rhythm in a sentence is flattened or evened out by the Spanish learner.* See this Language Log page for a more nuanced discussion of the prosody of Spanish. Grammar - Verb/Tense: Although Spanish is a much more heavily inflected language than English, there are many aspects of verb grammar that are similar. The major problem for the Spanish learner is that there is no one-to-one correspondence in the use of the tenses. So, for example, a Spanish learner might incorrectly use a simple tense instead of a progressive or a future one: She has a shower instead of She's having a shower; I help you after school instead of I'll help you after school. Problematic for beginners is the formation of interrogatives or negatives in English. The absence of an auxiliary in such structures in Spanish may cause learners to say: Why you say that? / Who he saw? / Do you saw him? / I no see him. / I not saw him. Grammar - Other: Spanish word order is generally Subject-Verb-Object, like English. However, Spanish allows more flexibility than English, and generally places at the end of the sentence words that are to be emphasised. This may result in non-standard syntax when Spanish learners speak or write English. There are numerous other minor differences in the two languages that may result in negative transfer. Here are a few examples. The way that things are done in Spanish can be inferred from the mistake in English: Do you have sister? It's not easy learn English. Where's my pencil? Have you seen him? I am more tall than my brother. Was snowing when I got up. She took off the glasses. Vocabulary: Due to shared Latin influence English and Spanish have many cognates, and the corresponding collection of false friends, such as eventual (English translation > possible) or particular (English translation > private). Since the Latin-derived words in English tend to be more formal, the Spanish student will benefit when reading academic text. He or she may sound too formal, however, if using such words in everyday spoken English. Conversely, phrasal verbs, which are an essential aspect of colloquial English, are difficult for Spanish learners and may obstruct listening comprehension. Long noun groups such as the standard language classroom teacher-student interaction pattern, commonly found in academic English text, are troublesome for Spanish speakers, whose language post-modifies nouns. Miscellaneous: Spanish has a strong correspondence between the sound of a word and its spelling. The irregularity of English in this respect causes predictable problems when Spanish learners write a word they first meet in spoken language or say a word first met in written language. A specific problem concerns the spelling of English words with double letters. Spanish has only 3 double-letter combinations cc, ll, rr. English, in comparison, has 5 times as many. Spanish learners often reduce English double letters to a single one, or overcompensate by doubling a letter unnecessarily, for example hopping for the present participle of hope. Reference: Coe, N. in Swan, M. & Smith, B. Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems. (1987) Cambridge University Press.View the sources of the information on this page * The assertion that English has 8 diphthongs applies to standard British English pronunciation (also called Received Pronunciation). [Click for a brief discussion of diphthongs in Standard American English]. Understanding the difference between Spanish and English vowels is vital to know how to produce the Spanish vowel sounds correctly and reduce your accent since Spanish is a vocalic language. These are the main differences between English and Spanish vowels:1. Vowels are the most important part of the wordIn Spanish, the most important part of a word are the vowels (vocalic language), while in English, consonants are more important (consonantal language). This means that we tend to vocalize, even when we speak in another language. Have you noticed how strong is the Spanish accent when we speak English?We don't have the schwa sound, that you probably use when you speak Spanish. This is a very common mistake when pronouncing the Spanish vowels. 2. Spanish has only 5 vowels sounds Hit the play button and you'll see the biggest difference between English and Spanish vowels (note that Ricky's accent isn't a typical Spaniard accent at all). English has at least 11 vowel sounds -and even more, depending on the dialect- while Spanish has only 5.(In some regions, like in Murcia, they have more than 5 vowel sounds, but these 5 are common to all the Spanish dialects).You only need to learn these 5 vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u).They always sound the same way. There's only one sound for each vowel: the letter A sounds /a/ and the letter O sounds /o/. Always.No headache.3. Spanish vowels sound different from English vowelsYou may think that some of the Spanish vowels sound the same as in English but actually, they aren't.Here you can see 4 common pronunciation errors and how to avoid them.In the image below, you can see the articulation point of Spanish vowels (blue) and English vowels (very light orange).None of the Spanish vowels sound the same as in English. Even /i/ and /u/ sounds are different, although sometimes they may sound similar.That's why we normally have such a terrible accent when we speak in each other's language.4. Spanish vowels are always shortThe English language has long and short vowels.In Spanish, the vowels are always short, as in pop.So the fourth difference between Spanish and English vowels is that Spanish vowels are pronounced faster. In approximately, half the time compared to an English vowel (100 to 260 milliseconds in English vs 160 milliseconds in Spanish).5. Your mouth is tenser when pronouncing Spanish vowelsAbove all when pronouncing Spanish vowelsAbove all when pronouncing rounded vowels (o, u).Pronouncing Spanish requires lots of tension and lots of training.When pronouncing English vowels your mouth is generally more relaxed because its articulation point is usually closer to the centre of your mouth. A Vietnamese friend used to have muscle pain in her mouth after speaking Spanish for a while. She used to say that attending her Spanish course was like going to a gym for mouths.¡So warm up your mouth muscles before you strat practicing your Spanish! 6. Spanish vowels are pureEnglish speakers tend not to pronounce unstressed vowels or to pronounce them with a neutral sound -schwa or hesitation sound-, like in brother.In Spanish, this sound doesn't exist. The Spanish vowels are as different as possible from each other. In the image below the distance between them represents how different they are.Spanish vowels aren't a mix of different vowels -like French Ö, which sounds something between /e/ and /o/. Spanish vowels sound pure -and extremely exaggerated so don't be ashamed of exaggerating your pronunciation! you want to nail Spanish pronunciation, you should practice with a native speaker. Non-natives might be great teachers, but many of them have quite a strong accent and, if you learn from them, you'll pronounce Spanish just like they do and, consequently, you'll keep that "guiri" accent you have right now. Language learning content created and curated by the LanGo team to help our students and community members discover, learn, and speak their target language. Flamenco Beach, Culebra, Puerto Rico. One of the most important aspects of Spanish pronunciation is mastering the vowels. In some ways, learning to pronounce the vowels of Spanish may be easier than those of other languages since Spanish has only five pure vowels and fourteen diphthongs. For some, especially English speakers, it may be challenging to condense down to only five vowel sounds, considering there are roughly fourteen or more vowel sounds in many varieties of American English (only five vowel letters, but fourteen distinct sounds or phonemes). Let's begin by delving into the pronunciation of each Spanish vowel to better understand what is happening and to hopefully help those who wish to improve their pronunciation. Afterwards, I will examine Spanish diphthongs in depth and hiatuses (vowels in separate syllables), which will help explain differences in pronunciation. Because without los sonidos vocálicos, diptongos, y hiatos, Spanish speakers wouldn't be able to communicate effectively or be understood with ease. Phonology of Spanish VowelsAs previously mentioned, Spanish has five main vowel sounds: /a, e, i, o, u/. Let's next discuss the position of the tongue, the roundness of the lips, and the position of the jaw in the pronunciation of these vowels. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) / El Alfabeto Fonético Internacional (AFI) diagram shows the Spanish vowels (Español) in red circles and the English vowels (Inglés) in blue circles and red circles on the right. The diagram demonstrates the limited vowels used in Spanish compared to English. Figure 1: IPA symbols for Spanish and English vowels. The first vowel, /a/, is a low, front, and open vowel which describes how this vowel is formed in the mouth. "Low" refers to how the position of the tongue is low and flat in the mouth. "Front" pertains to how the tongue is forward in the mouth, not retracted or in the middle of the mouth. "Open" describes the position of the lips and mouth which are not closed nor rounded. Like all Spanish vowels, the /a/ sound is shorter than its English counterpart in words like gato ('cat'), manzana ('apple'), anaranjado ('orange'), araña ('spider'). Compare it to the English /a/ in words like "father", "body", and "start", where the vowel is slightly longer. Listen to the short /a/ sound in these words. One fun way to practice the vowel /a/ is to try repeating some popular tongue-twisters, trabalenguas, like this one:Angélica andabaasustada al anochecer.Pero como amanecióya Angélica no está asustada.Translation: Angelica was walking / Scared (frightened) at dusk / But as she woke up / Now she was not scared.Not only can trabalenguas provide you with pronunciation practice, but they can help you improve your vocabulary skills by encouraging you to look up unknown words. Here is a helpful website for more Spanish tongue-twisters. Our second vowel in Spanish is /e/. This is a mid-closed, front, and unrounded vowel. The mouth will be slightly closed when forming this vowel and the lips will be separated. One's tongue should be forward in the mouth. Some words with the /e/ vowel include: español ('Spanish'), arete ('earring'), hablé ('I spoke'), esmoquin ('tuxedo'), elefante ('elephant'), este ('east'/'this'), desde ('from'), nene ('little boy'). The third vowel I will explore is /i/ which is a high, front, and unrounded vowel. By "high," linguists refer to the tongue moving to a higher position in the mouth. The mouth is also nearly closed, and the lips are stretched out to the sides rather than rounded. Some words with the /i/ sound in Spanish include increíble ('incredible'), identificar ('to identify'), chiquita ('girl'), dividir ('to divide'). This sound is similar to the English /i/ in words like "free", "we", and "heat".When it functions as a vowel, the Spanish letter makes an /i/ sound, as in the word soy ('I am') which will form an [oi] diphthong (which will be discussed later). This letter, when in word-final position, will always make an /i/ sound. Also, the letter is always silent will not interrupt the formation of a diphthong or an hiato. An example of this occurrence would be zanahoria ('carrot') where the sounds /a _o/ form an hiato. I will explore hiatus in depth in a later section. The vowel /o/ is a back, mid, closed and rounded vowel. Your lips must be rounded in order to properly form this vowel, and the lips remain rounded throughout the vowel's pronunciation. The tongue is pulled back into the mouth when forming this sound. Some examples of words with /o/ include: oso ('bear'), mariposa ('butterfly'), reloj ('clock'), hablo ('I speak'), habló ('He/She spoke'), último ('last'), mono ('monkey'). The fifth and final Spanish vowel that I'll examine, /u/, is a closed, back, and rounded vowel. The lips are rounded in the formation of this vowel and the mouth is mostly closed (not completely), and the middle of the tongue is arched back in the mouth. Some examples of /u/ would be the words uniforme ('uniform'), uvas ('grapes'), uña ('nail'), mundo ('world'), ayuda ('help'), azúcar ('sugar'). Sometimes, however, the letter will produce no sound at all, and this ability makes it distinct from all other vowels. These "mute " instances will only occur in the following letter combinations: que, qui, gue, and gui. Some example words are shown below in Figure 2 to help demonstrate the mute : Figure 2: Mute vowel with que/gui and gue/gui. Listen to the pronunciation of these words below. As can be seen from the examples above, the letter is mute, and only the following vowel is pronounced. In the case of guitarra ('guitar'), one would pronounce that word [gitara]. With another example like parque ('park'), one would pronounce that as [parke]. The only other letter which can produce a [ki] or [ke] syllable in Spanish aside from these combinations would be , which occurs only in words of foreign origin (palabras extranjeras) like kilo or kilómetro. In the case of the letter (u con diéresis), one will pronounce the /u/ within the combinations. Some examples are shown below in Figure 3. Figure 3: Pronunciation of /u/ in güe/güi. Listen to these example word below. Weak vs. Strong VowelsIn Spanish, vowels are considered either strong or weak. The strong vowels, vocales fuertes, are /a/, /e/, /o/, or any accented vowel. The weak vowels, vocales debiles, are /i/ and /u/ when unaccented. Weak vowels are also called "closed vowels" (vocales débiles se llaman "cerradas"), while strong vowels are also called "open vowels" (vocales fuertes también se llaman "abiertas"). One can further distinguish between vowels /i,u/ with a written accent mark (tilde), referred to as tónicas, which will form a hiato (also known as a hiatus), and those weak vowels without an accent mark, called átonas, which form a diphthong when next to a strong vowel. Figure 4 shows the formula for forming diphthongs and hiatos. Spanish Diphthongs (Diptóngos) To form a diphthong, you must combine a weak vowel and strong vowel together into a single syllable.There is an exception to this rule when accented vowels are involved. An accented weak vowel becomes strong and therefore breaks the diphthong apart. For example, the word pio ('cheep', the sound a bird makes) breaks the /i+/o/ diphthong and has two syllables, since the e is accented; in contrast, the word premio ('prize'), which has the /i+/o/ vowels will form a diphthong [jo] in the final syllable, since the accent is not present over the weak vowel. Another example would be the word baúl ('trunk'), where the accented weak vowel stops the diphthong from forming; in contrast, one can examine the word pausa ('pause') which will form a /a+u/ diphthong. When a weak vowel has an accent mark and doesn't form a diphthong, this situation is called an hiato, which I will discuss below. A general spelling rule would be that weak vowels are more commonly accented than strong vowels. As previously mentioned, two strong vowels will not form a diphthong either; they will form a hiato as in the word leo ('I read'). When a word containing a diphthong requires an accent mark (based on rules of accentuation), the tilde (accent mark) will fall on the strong vowel because if the accent were to fall on the weak vowel, it would no longer be a diphthong. An example would be the word cantáis (vosotros form: you [plural] sing'). Note: you will see this happen often in the vosotros form. Another example: piénsalo ('she/he thinks about it'). If the word contains two weak vowels and needs to have an accent mark (based on rules of accentuation), then the second vowel will receive the tilde. Ejemplos: cuidalo ('take care of him/it') [kvidalo]. Possible Diphthong Combinations The tables in Figure 5 below provide examples of diphthong combinations in Spanish. These tables start with the /i/ and /u/ vowels since they are the two weak vowels and will produce more diphthongs than any other vowels. The last three tables include examples of strong vowels combined with one of the two weak vowels and sample words of those diphthongs. Figure 5: Diphthong vowel combinations, examples, and translations. You can listen to the examples for each vowel series below.HiatosWhen two strong (a.k.a. open) vowels (/a/, /e/, /o/) are next to each other in a word, it forms what is called a hiatus or hiato. Each vowel would be separated into its own distinct syllable and would not be blended together as can be seen with diphthongs.The formula for hiatos is:Table 1 below, I have listed more examples and vowel combinations to demonstrate the different vowel hiato combinations. Table 1. Hiatus vowels (vocales hiatos). You can listen to these examples below. Examine the examples and syllable structure in Table 2 to closely see how the following examples will form hiatos. Remember that an accented weak vowel paired with a strong vowel will also form an hiato. Table 2: Hiatus syllable structure. Listen to the example words to hear the syllable structure of hiatos. Some words above, like geografía, contain two hiatos, one with two strong vowels /e/ and /o/ at the beginning of the word and another with /i/ and the final /a/ due to the accented /i/ vowel. Recognizing accented weak vowels will help your pronunciation since you can distinguish whether the vowels will be joined or separated when saying them aloud. As can be seen above, with diphthongs or hiatuses, the consonant /h/ will not hinder their formation.Rising/Falling IntonationIntonation refers to the pitch of the speaker's speech. Rising intonation refers to pitch increasing and falling refers to speech that is decreasing. You may have noticed intonation patterns when asking a question in Spanish. Consider the intonation patterns indicated by the blue arrows in the following examples:Listen to the rising and falling intonation in these examples here.For Spanish diphthongs, moving from a weak vowel to a strong one will result in rising intonation. Diphthongs beginning with a strong vowel and moving toward a weak vowel will result in falling intonation. This is shown in Figure 6. Figure 6: Falling and rising intonation within diphthongs. Flat intonation can also exist in Spanish. There will be flat intonation vowels only when the weak vowels are blended together: either i→u OR u→i. Words like viuda or ciudad have flat intonation. Another example of this would be the words muy [muɣ] ('very'), sucio [susio] ('dirty'), and voy [voj] ('I go') where the first is a flat intonation diphthong, the middle word has rising intonation, and the latter is a diphthong with falling intonation. Spanish Triphthongs (Triptóngos) An easy way to think about triphthongs and diphthongs is that they blend vowel sounds together. Triphthongs are three vowels together which are pronounced within one syllable. This occurs when a strong vowel is surrounded by weak vowels as in the formula below:The examples in Table 3 below show some common triphthong vowel combinations. Table 3: Triphthong vowel combinations. You can listen to these examples of triphthongs here.As the table demonstrates, the weak vowels (/u/ and /i/) need to surround the strong vowel in order to form a triphthong. If a triphthong needs an accent mark due to the rules of accentuation, the strong vowel (open vowel) is the one that will be accented. If any of the weak vowels are accented, they will form a diphthong instead. For example: sabías/implicuías will form diphthongs instead of triphthongs. In sum, diphthongs and triphthongs will unite vowels together and hiatos will separate the sounds. Hopefully, by seeing the patterns of weak and strong vowels in proximity to each other, your pronunciation in Spanish can improve. Be sure to practice speaking these words aloud to yourself and practice with a conversation partner. Vowels are essential to every word in Spanish, as in many languages, and are vitally important to improving your pronunciation. ¡Buena suerte con su práctica! For more Spanish practice, join our workshops and group classes as well as our language social events at LanGo and in the DFW area. You can also follow us on social media!

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