University of Chicago

Dept. of Romance Languages and Literatures

Spanish Coordinator: Janet H. Sedlar

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ACCENT RULES IN SPANISH**

**Here are the basic accent rules in Spanish:**

1. **Words ending in a vowel, -n, or -s are stressed on the next-to-last (penultimate) syllable:**  
     
   nad**a** 🡪 **NA** - da  
     
   limonad**a** 🡪 li - mo - **NA** - da  
     
   zapato**s** 🡪 za - **PA** - tos  
     
   orige**n** 🡪 o - **RI** - gen  
     
   compr**o** 🡪 **COM** - pro  
     
   est**a** 🡪 **ES** – ta
2. **Words ending in any consonant except -n or -s are stressed on the last syllable:**  
     
   docto**r** 🡪 doc - **TOR**  
     
   ciuda**d** 🡪 ciu - **DAD**  
     
   come**r** 🡪 co – **MER**

nari**z** 🡪 nar-**IZ**

españo**l** 🡪 es-pa-**ÑOL**

1. **When rules #1 and #2 above are not followed, a written accent is used to indicate which syllable should be stressed in speech:**  
     
   compr**ó** 🡪 com - **PRÓ**  
     
   est**á** 🡪 es – **TÁ**  
     
   pr**á**ctica 🡪 **PRÁC** – ti - ca
2. **Written accents are also used to differentiate between words that are pronounced the same but have different meanings or grammatical functions, for example:**

**si** – if Ex: **Si** es posible, te llamo. = If it’s possible, I’ll call you.  
**sí** – yes Ex: **Sí**, es correcto. = Yes, that’s correct.  
  
**mi** – my Ex: No es **mi** libro. = It’s not my book.   
**mí** – me Ex: ¿Me hablas a **mí**? = Are you talking to me?   
  
**el** – the Ex: **El** libro es bueno. = The book is good.  
**él** – he Ex: **Él** no quiere ir. = He doesn’t want to go.  
  
**tu** – your Ex: ¿Es **tu** libro? = Is it your book?  
**tú** - you Ex: Y **tú**, ¿qué piensas? = And you, what do you think?

**qué** (interrogative pronoun) vs. **que** (relative pronoun)

Ex: ¿**Qué** haces? = What are you doing? vs.

Ex: Es el señor **que** trabaja con mi padre. = He’s the gentleman who works with my father.

**dónde** (interrogative pronoun) vs. **donde** (relative pronoun)

Ex: ¿De **dónde** eres? = Where are you from? vs.

Ex: No sé **donde** está el libro. = I don’t know where the book is.

(etc.)

Don't think of these rules as burdensome. Rather, view them as your friends. They allow you to pronounce any Spanish word correctly.

**The tricky part about Spanish accents has to do with the fact that there are so many Spanish words with two vowels next to each other – how do you know if they count as one or two syllables? The explanations below answer that question:**

**Diptongos e hiato - Spanish Diphthongs and Hiatus**

**First, let’s get some important definitions out of the way:**

**Hiatus** - Two vowels pronounced as two distinct syllables. Ex: “c**ao**s” (KAH-ohs), “europ**eo**” (ayoo-roh-PAY-oh)

**Diphthong** - Two vowels pronounced as a single syllable. When this happens, the unstressed weak vowel has a special sound: the letter I sounds like Y (as in “yet”) and U sounds like W (as in “will”). Ex: “t**ie**ne” (TYEH-nay), “ag**ua**” (AH-gwah)

**Also, let’s clear something up about the letter “u”:**

**The letter U** - When “u”'s purpose in a word is to make a preceding “g” hard rather than soft, as in “g**u**erra” (GAIR-ah) or “se**gu**ir (say-GEAR),” it does not count as a vowel and thus the above rules do not apply.

* Spanish vowels are divided into two categories: **strong vowels** (A, E, O) and **weak vowels** (I, U). To pronounce Spanish correctly, you need to understand strong and weak vowels and how they affect pronunciation. (*Helpful hint: The easiest way to remember which vowels are strong and weak is to think of the weak vowels as “you” (u) and “I” (i). The rest are strong*.)

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| **1.** | **Two strong vowels** |  | |
|  | Pronounced as a hiatus (that is, each vowel counts as its own syllable) with normal rules of word stress  EX: empl**ea**do (em-play-AH-do), estér**eo** (es-TER-ay-oh), europ**eo** (ayoo-roh-PAY-oh), imperm**ea**ble (eem-pair-may-AH-blay) |
|  | | | |
| **2.** | **Strong vowel + weak vowel** (most common) |  | |
|  | Pronounced as a diphthong (that is, vowels squished together into one syllable) with emphasis on the strong vowel.  EX: ab**ie**rto (ah-BYER-to), **au**stral**ia**no (ow-strah-LYAH-noh), b**ai**le (BYE-lay), estud**io**so (es-too-DYOH-soh), f**ue**rte (FWER-tay), ingen**uo** (een-HEN-woh) |
|  | | | |
| **3.** | **Two weak vowels** | | |
|  | Pronounced as a diphthong with emphasis on the second vowel.  EX: s**ui**zo (SWEE-soh), c**ui**dado (kwee-THAH-though), c**iu**dad, (syooh-THATH) |  | |
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| **4.** | **Exceptions** | |  |
|  | When the pronunciation of a word does not follow these rules, an [acute accent](http://www.elearnspanishlanguage.com/pronunciation/acuteaccent.html) is placed on the stressed vowel.  EX: asiático (ah-see-AH-ti-koh), frío (FREE-oh),  natación (nah-tah-SYOHN), patriótico (pah-tree-OH-tee-koh), policía (poll-ee-SEE-ah), televisión (tel-eh-vee-SYOHN) | |
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