

Pronunciation Guide to Castilian Spanish

The following pronunciation guide is excerpted from the six volumes of *Canciones de España—Songs of Nineteenth-Century Spain*, edited by Suzanne Rhodes Draayer, Scarecrow Press, 2003, 2005, 2007.

The great Spanish explorers brought with them the Castilian language and pronunciation from the Castille region of Spain to the “New World” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just as British English underwent tremendous changes in vocabulary and pronunciation in its colonies, the Spanish language experienced the same evolution. When singing the vocal literature of Latin America, Latin American pronunciation or Standard American Spanish (SAS) is proper, but when singing the vocal literature of Castilian Spain, Standard European Spanish (SES) is necessary. The determining factor is the place of education of the poet.

Letter in Alphabet	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) Symbol	Placement in Text	Spanish Example	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) Transcription	Pronunciation Example
a	a	all positions	casa	'ka.sa	similar to a in father
ai, ay	aj	all positions	vainilla hay	baj.'ni.ʎa aj	lie
au	au	all positions	caudillo	kau.'ði.ʎo	count
b	b	initial in phrase or sentence (after a breath)	brazos	'bra.θos	brave
	b	following m	emblema un beso	ɛm.'blɛ.ma um 'bɛ.sɔ	emblem
	β	in all other cases	debajo	dɛ.'βa.xo	none in English—soft b with lips lightly touching
c	θ	preceding e, i	impaciencia	im.pa.'θjɛn.θja	thank
	k	preceding a, o, u, & consonants	clamor	kla.'mɔr	call
cc	kθ	always	acceso	ak.'θɛ.sɔ	none in English—k as in call, θ as in thank

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ch	tʃ	in all positions	chiquitita	tʃi.ki.'ti.ta	chili
d	d	initial in phrase or sentence (after a breath)	dios donde	djos 'dɔn.de	dog
	d	after l or n	bendito	bɛn.'di.tɔ	dog
	ð	within phrases, except after l or n	no digas	nɔ 'ði.ɾas	there
e	ɛ	all positions	responde	rɛs.'pɔn.de	set
ei, ey	ɛj	all positions	reino ley	'rɛj.nɔ lɛj	no English equivalent—ɛ as in set and i as in sleep
eu	ɛu	all positions	reunir	rɛu.'nir	no English equivalent—ɛ as in set and u as in food
f	f	all positions	flores	'flo.rɛs	flowers
g	g	initial in phrase or sentence (after a breath) or following a nasal consonant	gusto	'gus.tɔ	grey
			tengo sangre	'tɛŋ.gɔ 'saŋ.gre	finger
	ɣ	preceding e & i	gitano	xi.'ta.nɔ	no English equivalent—Ger. Bach
			seguidilla de gracia	se.xi.'ði.ʎa ðɛ 'ɣra.θja	no English equivalent—soft g sound

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gue	gɛ	always	guerra	'gɛ.rɾa	get
gui	gi	always	guiño	'gi.ɲo	geese
güe	gwe	always	vergüenza	ber.'ɣwen.θa	segue (but with open ɛ)
güi	gwi	always	lingüista	liŋ.'gwis.ta	extinguish (but with i)
h	silent	always	hablar	a.'βlar	heir
i	i	always	sí	si	sleep
ia	ja	always	gloria	'glɔ.rja	as in the Italian—piano
ie	je	always	prefiero	pre.'fje.rɔ	siesta
io	jɔ	always	ilusión	i.lu.'sjɔn	viola
iu	ju	always	ciudad	θju.'ðað	cue
j	x	always	pajarita jojoba	pa.xa.'ri.ta xo.'xo.βa	no English equivalent— Ger. Bach
k	k	always	kiwi	'ki.wi	kiwi
l	l	always	paloma	pa.'lɔ.ma	lesson
ll	ʎ	always	llorar caballero	'ʎɔ.rar ka.βa.'ʎe.rɔ	yes
m	m	always	mañana	ma.'ɲa.na	morning
n	n	initial, interior, final	mientras	'mjɛn.tras	never

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n	m	before b, m, p in words or within phrases	sin mancha convidados	sim 'man.tʃa kɔm.bi.'ða.ðɔs	mama
	ɲ	before f	enferma confusa	ɛɲ.'fer.ma kɔɲ.'fu.sa	no English equivalent—similar to sing with m, not n
	ŋ	before c, g, k, q, x in words or within a phrase	blanca con guitarra ven que	'blaŋ.ka kɔŋ gi.'ta.rra beŋ ke	sinker
ñ	ɲ	always	señor	se.'ɲɔr	onion
o	ɔ	always	amor	a.'mɔr	more
oi, oy	ɔj	always	sois	sɔjs	boy
			voy	bɔj	
p	p	always	pobre	'pɔ.βre	poor
q	k	always	querer	ke.'reɾ	king
r	r (rolled)	always if initial or just after a breath	rosa	'rɔ.sa	as in the British—merry
	r (rolled)	after s, n, l (<u>S</u> aturday <u>N</u> ight <u>L</u> ive), before a consonant, or final in a word	sonreír perlas placer	sɔn.re.'ir 'peɾ.las pla.'θeɾ	as in the British—merry
	r (flipped)	after consonants other than s, n, l, & between vowels in a word or word group	María de rocío	ma.'ri.a ðe rɔ.'θi.ɔ	no English equivalent—one flip against the upper front teeth

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rr	r (rolled)	always	tierra	'tjɛ.rra	as in the British—merry
s	s	always if initial or between vowels in a word or word group	sustento mis ojos tu sonido rosa	sus.'tɛn.tɔ mis 'ɔ.xɔs tu sɔ.'ni.ðɔ 'rɔ.sa	soft
	z	before voiced consonants (b, β, d, dʒ, ð, g, ɣ, l, λ, m, n, ɲ, ɳ, r, r, v, y, z) in a word or within a word group	desde mientras la entusiasmo verdes río	'dez.ðɛ 'miɛn.traz la ɛn.tu.'sjaz.mɔ 'ber.ðɛz 'ri.ɔ	rose
t	t	always dental with the tongue at the back of the upper teeth	tener	tɛ.'nɛr	no English equivalent—It. tutti
u	u	always when followed by a consonant	luz	luθ	food
ua	wa	always	agua	'a.ɣwa	Guatemala
ue	we	always, except after g & q	bueno	'bwɛ.nɔ	sweater
	ɛ	after g & q	que juguetón	ke xu.ɣɛ.'tɔn	kent guess (soft g)
ui, uy	wi	always, except after g & q or if the two vowels are in different syllables	ruidoso mui guíon huy	rwi.'ðɔ.sɔ muj 'gi.ɔn ui	queen no English equivalent

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ui, uy	i	after g & q	guiño quince	'gi.ɲo 'kin.θɛ	guild but with i keep
uo	wɔ	always	cuota	'kwɔ.ta	quota
v	b	always if initial	vivo	'bi.βɔ	brook
	b	after n	enviar	ɛm.'bjar	amber
	β	within a word or phrase	novia	'nɔ.βja	none in English— soft b with lips lightly touching
w	w	used only in foreign words	windsurf	wind.'surf	wicked
x	s	if initial	xilófono	si.'lɔ.fɔ.nɔ	soft
	ks	in interior position	exhalar	ɛk.sa.'lar	exhale
y	j	if initial, interior or final	yema joya	'je.ma 'xɔ.ja	year
	dʒ	following n or l	inyección	in.dʒɛk.'θjɔn	jelly
z	θ	initial, interior, final	zapata	θa.'pa.ta	thimble
			cabeza	ka.'βɛ.θa	
			voz	bɔθ	
z	z	before voiced consonants— in a word or within a word group	voz de	bɔz ðɛ	ease

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