

Spanish Sound System

Vowels

Spanish is very phonetic. If you are familiar with the sound system and you know how a word is spelled, you can pronounce it reasonably well. If you can pronounce it, you can also spell it correctly in most cases.

The vowels are very important. They never change, as they do in English. They are pronounced as follows:

A – pronounced *ah*, as in “all.”

E – pronounced *eh*, as in “egg.”

I – pronounced *ee*, as in “see.”

O – pronounced *oh*, as in “go.”

U – pronounced *oo*, as in “soon.”

J, G, and H

The J is pronounced similar to our H, more or less guttural depending on the region.

Examples: jarabe, jeringa (*syrup, syringe*)

The G followed by an A, an O, a U, or a consonant is a “hard G,” pronounced like the G in our word “go”.

Examples: garganta, gota, gusto, gripa (*throat, drop/gout, taste, flu*)

The G followed by an E or an I is pronounced like the Spanish J, similar to our H but more guttural:

Examples: gel, ginecología (*gel, gynecology*)

The H is always silent:

Examples: hora, hay

Word Stress

Word Stress is also very predictable, and very helpful in pronouncing Spanish.

There is **one basic rule** to remember: If a word ends in a vowel, N, or S, the stress is on the next to the last syllable. If it ends in anything else, the stress falls on the last syllable.

Examples:

abdomen accidente artritis

These words end in a Vowel, N, or S, so the stress is on the next to the last syllable.

cholesterol obesidad diagnosticar

These words *do not* end in a Vowel, N, or S, so the stress is on the last syllable.

Any word that is an exception to this rule must have an accent mark:

cápsula antibióticos infección

According to the rule, these words should all have the stress on the next to the last syllable, because they end in a Vowel, N, and S. But they do not follow the rule. They have an accent mark to show that.