Stress & Accent Marks — Essentials

Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

Understand it · Entiéndelo

What you are learning · Qué vas a aprender

Divide a word into syllables and choose the strong one. With no written accent, a word ending in a vowel, or in n/s after a vowel, normally stresses the next-to-last syllable; other endings normally stress the last. The mark in á, é, í, ó or ú usually identifies the stressed vowel, not a new vowel sound. Some accents distinguish word meanings even when pronunciation stays the same. Grammar View shows sentence roles in the short sentence examples; use it when you want to connect these sounds with how a sentence works.

English	Spanish
house · they speak · table — No written accent. Ends in a vowel or n → stress the next-to-last syllable.	casa · hablan · mesa
to speak · Spanish · truth — No written accent. Ends in another consonant → stress the last syllable.	hablar · español · verdad
doctor · also · English — The written accent shows the stressed vowel.	médico · también · inglés

Notes

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Use it · Úsalo

Accents and meaning · El acento y el significado

English	Spanish
Yes, you have your tea. — sí, tú and té carry the accent; tu does not.	Sí, tú tienes tu té.

Common mistake · Error común

An accented vowel is not a new vowel sound. Do not drop the mark in café or habló, and do not swap tú (you) with tu (your), or sí (yes) with si (if). Ñ is a separate alphabet letter, not an accented n. Also keep the accent on a question word even in an indirect question (No sé qué quieres) and drop it when the word only joins a sentence (Quiero que vengas). Capital letters keep their accent too: ¿Qué quieres? and Él canta.

Use it in real life · Úsalo en la vida real

At a café, say Quiero un café. First divide café and identify its strong syllable. Then write “your coffee” and “yes” in Spanish, choosing whether tu and si need accents.

Check and try again · Comprueba y vuelve a intentar

Quiero un café. Say ca-FÉ with the same clear e sound. Your coffee = tu café; yes = sí. If you missed the accent, check meaning as well as the strong syllable. Apply the clear vowels from Pronunciation while you stress the correct syllable.

Notes

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