Pronunciation & First Words

La pronunciación y primeras palabras

Grammar hints: bold = subject; underline = verb; italics = object; bold with a gray highlight = negation. The labels below each example explain its roles.

Understand it: clear vowels · Entiéndelo: vocales claras

What you are learning · Qué vas a aprender

Say clear Spanish vowels, keep h silent, and introduce yourself with a short phrase. First work on the sounds within words; Course: Stress & Accent Marks then shows which syllable to emphasize. You do not need to imitate every regional accent feature yet. Grammar View shows sentence roles in the short sentence examples; use it when you want to connect these sounds with how a sentence works.

How to make the sounds · Cómo producir los sonidos

Spanish has five basic vowel sounds: a, e, i, o, u. Open your mouth for a; use an eh-like e and ee-like i; round your lips for o and u. Keep each sound steady rather than turning it into an English glide. In casa, both a vowels keep their basic sound even though the first syllable is stronger. In oso, keep a clear o at both ends; do not finish with an English ow sound. English spelling guides are starting approximations, so listen to the word and compare your own attempt.

English	Spanish
house; both a vowels keep an ah-like sound	casa
table; e stays eh and a stays ah	mesa
island; i keeps an ee-like sound	isla
bear; both o vowels stay clear, without an English ow glide	oso
grape; u keeps an oo-like sound	uva
Ana speaks. Ana: Subject — who or what?; speaks: Verb — action or state	**Ana** habla. Ana: Subject — who or what?; habla: Verb — action or state

Try it · Inténtalo

Listen to casa, mesa, isla, oso and uva. Say each word slowly, then at a comfortable pace. Point to the vowel letters you hear. In casa and oso, compare the first and last vowel: does the last one stay clear, or become an English uh or ow? Repeat just that word before moving on.

Page 1 of 5 · v0.62.0 · © 2026 Mark Tervan. All rights reserved.

Self-check · Comprueba tu respuesta

Casa has a + a; mesa has e + a; isla has i + a; oso has o + o; uva has u + a. The two a vowels in casa and the two o vowels in oso keep their basic vowel quality. KAH-sah and OH-soh mark the stronger syllable, not a different sound for the unstressed vowel. Compare with audio; reading the answer alone cannot check your pronunciation.

Common mistake · Error común

A less stressed vowel is still a vowel. Do not turn the last a of casa into an English uh or add an English ow glide to oso. Say the final vowel clearly without giving every syllable equal emphasis.

Compare the sounds · Compara los sonidos

How the spelling changes the sound · Cómo cambia el sonido

Some written differences signal a real sound difference; others do not. Hola starts with o because h is silent in this word. In pero/perro, the vowels stay the same, but r between vowels is a quick tongue tap and rr is a trill; this changes but into dog. Touch the ridge behind your upper teeth briefly for the tap; the trill uses airflow to vibrate the tongue tip. A single r at the beginning of a word, as in rojo, also has the trill sound. In año, ñ is one consonant with an ny-like sound, not an ordinary n. Listen to the whole word, then focus on the sound that distinguishes it.

English	Spanish
hello; the written h adds no sound	hola
but / dog; a quick r tap versus a rolled rr	pero / perro
year; ñ has an ny-like sound, distinct from n	año
The dog runs. The dog: Subject — who or what?; runs: Verb — action or state	**El perro** corre. El perro: Subject — who or what?; corre: Verb — action or state

Try the contrast · Prueba el contraste

Say hola without blowing an English h first. Then alternate pero and perro while keeping e and o steady. Which word means dog, and which consonant changes? Finish with año: keep the ñ sound distinct from n. Replay a troublesome word rather than speeding up.

Check the contrast · Comprueba el contraste

Hola begins with the o vowel. Perro means dog and uses the trill; pero means but and uses a brief tap between the vowels. Año means year and uses ñ. The spelling tells you what to aim for, but listening and comparing are needed to check the sound you produce.

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Common mistake · Error común

Do not assume every single r is a tap: compare pero with the initial r of rojo. Also distinguish silent h from the letter pair ch: chico has a ch sound. Work on one contrast at a time; a difficult trill does not stop you from practicing a clear greeting.

Build it step by step · Constrúyelo paso a paso

From a word to a first phrase · De una palabra a una primera frase

Build a phrase in meaningful pieces: ¡Hola! → Me llamo… → your name. In hola, h is silent, so begin with o. In llamo, ll has a y-like sound in the pronunciation model used here; do not say two English l sounds. Me llamo is the phrase for giving your name; ¿Cómo te llamas? asks the other person. First say each piece with clear vowels, then join the pieces into one greeting. Keep your own name as you normally say it. Capitals in the pronunciation guide mark the strong syllable; the next sound lesson explains syllables and stress.

English	Spanish
Hello! My name is Mark.	¡Hola! Me llamo Mark. llamo: Verb — action or state
What's your name? Nice to meet you.	¿Cómo te llamas? Mucho gusto. llamas: Verb — action or state
How are you? I'm fine, thanks.	¿Cómo estás? Estoy bien, gracias. estás: Verb — action or state

Use it in real life · Úsalo en la vida real

Meet a new classmate. Give your greeting and name: ¡Hola! Me llamo… Then ask ¿Cómo te llamas? When they answer, say Mucho gusto. Try without reading; if a sound is unclear, replay the relevant phrase and repeat it before trying the conversation again.

Check and try again · Comprueba y vuelve a intentar

¡Hola! Me llamo [your name]. ¿Cómo te llamas? Mucho gusto. Check silent h in hola, clear vowels, and the y-like ll in llamo/llamas. Listen once, say it, then compare one feature at a time. Synthesized practice audio is not a native accent recording. Continue to Stress & Accent Marks for strong syllables and written accents.

Common mistake · Error común

Do not pronounce Spanish by reading the English guide as if it were a new word to memorize. The guide approximates the sound; the Spanish sentence carries the meaning. Use Me llamo with your own name and ¿Cómo te llamas? to ask someone else, then practice the entire exchange.

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Sound reference · Referencia de sonidos

Use the reference to solve a sound problem · Usa la referencia para resolver una duda

This is a lookup, not a list to master before speaking. Choose one spelling you need, find a word using it, listen, and return to your phrase. A neighboring letter can change the sound: g in gato differs from g before e/i in gente; gu keeps the hard g in guitarra, with a silent u. In güe/güi, ü tells you to pronounce u, as in pingüino. Qu before e/i also has a silent u, as in queso. The English guides are approximate. The regional rows at the end prepare you to recognize variation; start with clear, broadly understood words.

English	Spanish
like the a in father	a — “ah”
like the e in bed	e — “eh”
like the i in machine	i — “ee”
steady oh, without an ow glide	o — “oh”
like the oo in moon	u — “oo”
y-like here: llama; regional sounds vary	ll
like canyon — año sounds like “AH-nyo”	ñ — “ny”
a rolled/trilled r — perro	rr
an h sound — jugo sounds like “HOO-go”	j
silent in hola; ch has its own sound	h
tap between vowels: pero; initial trill: rojo	r
like h — gente sounds like “HEN-teh”	g + e/i
like s — cena, zapato	c + e/i, z
like k, silent u — queso sounds like “KEH-so”	qu
a hard g, silent u — guitarra	gu + e/i
same consonant; firmer or softer by context	b / v
an s before a consonant is often softened — está sounds like “eh-TAH”	s → h (PR)
the d is often dropped — cansado sounds like “kan-SAO”	-ado → -ao (PR)

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English	Spanish
an r ending a syllable often sounds like l — puerta sounds like “PWEL-ta”	r → l (PR)

Try the reference · Prueba la referencia

Use the rows to explain why queso does not have an oo sound after q, why guitarra keeps a hard g, and why vaca does not need an English v sound. Then choose a useful word with one of these spellings and practice it aloud.

Check the spelling pattern · Comprueba el patrón escrito

In queso, qu supplies a k sound and u is silent. In guitarra, gu before i keeps a hard g and u is silent. Spanish b and v represent the same consonant sound, so vaca does not begin with the English lip-and-teeth v. Their sound can be firmer or softer depending on context; the spelling alone does not choose that difference.

Common mistake · Error común

Do not apply one English letter sound everywhere or copy every regional reduction immediately. Check the neighboring letters and the whole word. The s-like sound for c before e/i and z is the model used here; some Spanish varieties use a th-like sound instead. Regional variation is part of listening, not a reason to abandon clear practice.

Puerto Rico Tip

You may hear syllable-final s softened or omitted and syllable-final r pronounced differently in Puerto Rican conversation. Use the marked regional reference rows for recognition; you do not need to imitate every local feature to introduce yourself clearly.

Use the letters in a sentence · Usa las letras en una oración

English	Spanish
Ana eats *cheese*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; eats: Verb — action or state; cheese: Direct object — receives the action	**Ana** come *queso*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; come: Verb — action or state; queso: Direct object — receives the action

Notes

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