Stress & Accent Marks

Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

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

Understand it: find the strong syllable · Entiéndelo: encuentra la sílaba fuerte

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.

First find the syllables · Primero encuentra las sílabas

A syllable is a beat within a word. Say ca-sa (two beats), es-pa-ñol (three) and mé-di-co (three). Stress makes one beat stand out; keep the other vowels clear. Some adjacent vowels share a beat: también is tam-bién, not three syllables. Learn these examples before tackling every vowel combination. / Una sílaba es un golpe de voz dentro de una palabra. Di ca-sa (dos), es-pa-ñol (tres) y mé-di-co (tres). El acento hace destacar un golpe; mantén claras las otras vocales. Algunas vocales contiguas comparten una sílaba: también es tam-bién. Aprende estos ejemplos antes de estudiar todas las combinaciones de vocales.

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
Ana speaks *Spanish*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; speaks: Verb — action or state; Spanish: Direct object — receives the action	**Ana** habla *español*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; habla: Verb — action or state; español: Direct object — receives the action

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Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

Try it · Inténtalo

Say hola, español and café slowly. Tap once for each syllable, then say the word again and make the strongest beat stand out. Write the syllable divisions; use capitals to show emphasis in your practice notes without changing the normal spelling of the word.

Self-check · Comprueba tu respuesta

Hola has two syllables: ho-la → HO-la. Español has three: es-pa-ñol → es-pa-ÑOL. Café has two: ca-fé → ca-FÉ. Both syllables of café still contain clear vowels; the second is stronger. Capitals show emphasis here, but normal spelling remains hola, español and café.

Common mistake · Error común

Do not count every vowel letter as a separate syllable: también is tam-bién. Stress is the strongest syllable, not permission to drop other vowels. Start by listening to these worked examples before applying a rule to an unfamiliar vowel combination.

Build it step by step · Constrúyelo paso a paso

Choose the stress step by step · Elige el acento paso a paso

First look for a written accent: it identifies the stressed vowel in café or médico. Without one, check the ending: casa ends in a vowel, so stress CA; español ends in l, so stress ÑOL. The usual next-to-last rule applies to vowels and to n/s after a vowel; words ending in a consonant cluster, such as robots, follow the last-syllable pattern. A one-syllable word has no choice between syllables. Once you know the strong syllable, say the entire word with clear vowels.

What the written accent changes · Qué cambia la tilde

Á, é, í, ó and ú are the same five vowel letters with a written accent (tilde), not five extra alphabet letters. In café, é tells you to stress the final syllable; e keeps its basic vowel sound. In hablo/habló, the stress and verb meaning change. In tú/tu and sí/si, the accent distinguishes meanings without changing the basic pronunciation. A stressed í or ú beside a, e or o can also separate the vowels into syllables: día = dí-a; país = pa-ís. Keep accents when writing or typing. / Á, é, í, ó y ú son las mismas cinco vocales con tilde, no cinco letras adicionales. En café, é indica el acento en la última sílaba; e conserva su sonido básico. En hablo/habló, cambian el acento y el significado verbal. En tú/tu y sí/si, la tilde distingue significados sin cambiar la pronunciación básica. Una í o ú tónica junto a a, e u o también puede separar las vocales en sílabas: día = dí-a; país = pa-ís. Conserva las tildes al escribir.

English	Spanish
hello — Split: ho-la — Ends in a vowel → stress the next-to-last syllable: HO-la	hola
Spanish — Split: es-pa-ñol — Ends in l → stress the last syllable: es-pa-ÑOL	español

Stress & Accent Marks

Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

English	Spanish
coffee — Split: ca-fé — The written é → stress the last syllable: ca-FÉ	café
Ana drinks *coffee*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; drinks: Verb — action or state; coffee: Direct object — receives the action	**Ana** toma *café*. Ana: Subject — who or what?; toma: Verb — action or state; café: Direct object — receives the action

Try the rule · Prueba la regla

Explain the stress in casa, hablar and médico: find an accent first, then use the ending when there is none. Finally compare día with país; divide each into syllables and locate the accented vowel.

Check the rule · Comprueba la regla

CA-sa: no accent and a vowel ending. Ha-BLAR: no accent and an r ending. MÉ-di-co: the written accent identifies the first syllable. DÍ-a and pa-ÍS each have two syllables; stressed í separates from the neighboring a. The accent does not create a new i sound.

Common mistake · Error común

Check the written accent before guessing from the final letter. Médico ends in a vowel but stresses MÉ, not DI. Do not remove an accent simply because you can still recognize the word.

Accents and meaning · El acento y el significado

Check the meaning as well as the sound · Comprueba el significado además del sonido

An accent can help distinguish words. Tú means you; tu means your. Sí means yes; si means if. Choose the word by its job in the sentence, not by listening for a new vowel sound. In hablo/habló, both meaning and stress change: HA-blo is I speak; ha-BLÓ is he/she/usted spoke. You will study the past-tense form later; here the point is to notice why preserving the accent matters. Below, each pair has its own heading, short examples and a "How to tell" tip: small words (él/el, mi/mí), question words (qué/que, dónde/donde), past-tense verbs (llego/llegó), three-way sets (practico/práctico/practicó) and everyday nouns (papá/papa). A quick test: a question word, an exclamation or a stressed pronoun takes the accent; the same word that only joins a sentence does not. Older books also write dió and ví with an accent; today dio and vio have none.

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

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Stress & Accent Marks

Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

Try the meaning · Prueba el significado

Choose the spelling for your house and yes. Then identify which of hablo/habló means I speak and which has final-syllable stress. Then choose the spelling in each blank: ¿___ quieres? (what) and Quiero ___ vengas (that); Es para ___ (me) and ___ casa (my); ¿___ vives? (where) and La casa ___ vivo (where).

Check the meaning · Comprueba el significado

Your house is tu casa; yes is sí. Hablo means I speak and stresses HA; habló stresses BLÓ and means he/she/usted spoke. A meaning distinction does not always require a different pronunciation, as tú/tu shows. ¿Qué quieres? and Quiero que vengas. Es para mí and mi casa. ¿Dónde vives? and La casa donde vivo. A question word, or one inside an exclamation, takes the accent; the same word that only connects two parts of a sentence does not.

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.

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.

adonde / adónde · adonde = where to (links) · adónde = where to

How to tell: adonde / adónde

Adónde asks where to. Adonde links a place you are going to. Many people write a dónde in two words.

English	Spanish
adonde = where to — The town I am going to.	El pueblo adonde voy.
adónde = where to — Where are you going?	¿Adónde vas?

animo / ánimo / animó · animo = I cheer on · ánimo = spirit · animó = she cheered on

How to tell: animo / ánimo / animó

Ánimo is a noun (spirit). Animo is I cheer on. Animó is she cheered on.

English	Spanish
animo = I cheer on — I cheer the team on.	Yo animo al equipo.
ánimo = spirit — I have a lot of spirit.	Tengo mucho ánimo.
animó = she cheered on — She cheered the team on.	Ella animó al equipo.

aun / aún · aun = even · aún = still, yet

How to tell: aun / aún

Aún means yet or still, like todavía. Aun means even.

English	Spanish
aun = even — Even so, I am going.	Aun así, voy.
aún = yet — He has not arrived yet.	Aún no llega.

bailo / bailó · bailo = I dance · bailó = she danced

How to tell: bailo / bailó

An accent on the last syllable marks the past.

English	Spanish
bailo = I dance — I dance salsa.	Yo bailo salsa.
bailó = she danced — She danced all night.	Ella bailó toda la noche.

bebe / bebé · bebe = drinks · bebé = baby

How to tell: bebe / bebé

Bebé is the baby. Bebe is he drinks (beber).

English	Spanish
bebe = drinks — He drinks water.	Él bebe agua.
bebé = baby — The baby sleeps.	El bebé duerme.

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cambio / cambió · cambio = I change, change · cambió = he changed

How to tell: cambio / cambió

Cambio is now (or the noun change). Cambió is finished.

English	Spanish
cambio = I change — I change my mind.	Cambio de idea.
cambió = he changed — He changed his mind.	Él cambió de idea.

canto / cantó · canto = I sing · cantó = she sang

How to tell: canto / cantó

Canto is now (and also the noun a song); cantó is finished.

English	Spanish
canto = I sing — I sing.	Yo canto.
cantó = she sang — She sang.	Ella cantó.

celebre / célebre / celebré · celebre = celebrate · célebre = famous · celebré = I celebrated

How to tell: celebre / célebre / celebré

Célebre is famous. Celebre is a form of celebrar (he celebrate). Celebré is I celebrated.

English	Spanish
celebre = celebrate — I want him to celebrate.	Quiero que celebre.
célebre = famous — He is a famous singer.	Es un cantante célebre.
celebré = I celebrated — I celebrated yesterday.	Yo celebré ayer.

como / cómo · como = like, I eat · cómo = how

How to tell: como / cómo

Cómo asks how. Como means like or as, and also I eat (comer).

English	Spanish
como = like — He is tall like his dad.	Es alto como su papá.
como = I eat — I eat rice and beans.	Como arroz con habichuelas.

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English	Spanish
cómo = how — How are you?	¿Cómo estás?

cual / cuál · cual = which (links) · cuál = which one

How to tell: cual / cuál

Cuál asks which one. Cual links back to what you just said.

English	Spanish
cual = which — He told the truth, which is good.	Dijo la verdad, lo cual es bueno.
cuál = which one — Which one do you want?	¿Cuál quieres?

cuando / cuándo · cuando = when (links) · cuándo = when

How to tell: cuando / cuándo

Cuándo asks when. Cuando links two parts of a sentence.

English	Spanish
cuando = when — Call me when you arrive.	Llámame cuando llegues.
cuándo = when — When are you coming?	¿Cuándo vienes?

cuanto / cuánto · cuanto = as much as · cuánto = how much

How to tell: cuanto / cuánto

Cuánto asks how much. Cuanto appears in phrases like en cuanto (as soon as).

English	Spanish
cuanto = as soon as — As soon as I arrive, I will call you.	En cuanto llegue, te llamo.
cuánto = how much — How much does it cost?	¿Cuánto cuesta?

de / dé · de = of · dé = give

How to tell: de / dé

Dé is a form of dar (give), often after que. De means of or from.

English	Spanish
de = of — Ana's house.	La casa de Ana.

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English	Spanish
dé = give — I want him to give me water.	Quiero que me dé agua.

deposito / depósito / depositó · deposito = I deposit · depósito = tank · depositó = he deposited

How to tell: deposito / depósito / depositó

Depósito is a noun (tank). Deposito is I deposit. Depositó is he deposited.

English	Spanish
deposito = I deposit — I deposit money.	Yo deposito dinero.
depósito = tank — The tank is full.	El depósito está lleno.
depositó = he deposited — He deposited money.	Él depositó dinero.

donde / dónde · donde = where (links) · dónde = where

How to tell: donde / dónde

Dónde asks where. Donde names a place inside a sentence.

English	Spanish
donde = where — The house where I live.	La casa donde vivo.
dónde = where — Where do you live?	¿Dónde vives?

el / él · el = the · él = he

How to tell: el / él

Él is the pronoun he. El is the article the and comes before a noun (el perro).

English	Spanish
el = the — The dog sings.	El perro canta.
él = he — He sings.	Él canta.

esta / está · esta = this · está = is

How to tell: esta / está

Esta means this and comes before a noun (esta casa). Está is the verb estar (is). They sound alike but the stress differs: ES-ta, es-TÁ.

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English	Spanish
esta = this — This house is big.	Esta casa es grande.
está = is — The house is clean.	La casa está limpia.

estas / estás · estas = these · estás = you are

How to tell: estas / estás

Estas means these and comes before a noun. Estás is estar with tú (you are). The stress differs: ES-tas, es-TÁS.

English	Spanish
estas = these — These flowers are pink.	Estas flores son rosadas.
estás = you are — You are here.	Tú estás aquí.

este / esté · este = this · esté = be

How to tell: este / esté

Este means this (older books write éste; today it is este). Esté is estar after quiero que (I want it to be). The stress differs: ES-te, es-TÉ.

English	Spanish
este = this — This book is mine.	Este libro es mío.
esté = be — I want it to be here.	Quiero que esté aquí.

hablo / habló · hablo = I speak · habló = he spoke

How to tell: hablo / habló

The accent moves the stress to the end: HA-blo is now, ha-BLÓ is finished.

English	Spanish
hablo = I speak — I speak Spanish.	Hablo español.
habló = she spoke — She spoke with Ana.	Habló con Ana.

llego / llegó · llego = I arrive · llegó = he arrived

How to tell: llego / llegó

An accent on the last syllable marks the past: llego is now, llegó is done.

English	Spanish
llego = I arrive — I arrive at eight.	Llego a las ocho.
llegó = she arrived — She arrived early.	Ella llegó temprano.

mas / más · mas = but · más = more

How to tell: mas / más

Más is the everyday word for more. Mas (but) is formal; you will mostly see it in writing.

English	Spanish
mas = but — I tried, but I could not.	Lo intenté, mas no pude.
más = more — I want more.	Quiero más.

mi / mí · mi = my · mí = me

How to tell: mi / mí

Mí follows a word like para, a or de. Mi comes before a noun and means my.

English	Spanish
mi = my — It is my house.	Es mi casa.
mí = me — It is for me.	Es para mí.

miro / miró · miro = I watch · miró = he looked

How to tell: miro / miró

An accent on the last syllable marks the past.

English	Spanish
miro = I watch — I watch TV.	Miro la tele.
miró = he looked — He looked at the sky.	Él miró el cielo.

papa / papá · papa = potato · papá = dad

How to tell: papa / papá

Papá (dad) has the accent. Papa (no accent) is a potato.

English	Spanish
papa = potato — The potato is hot.	La papa está caliente.
papá = dad — My dad cooks.	Mi papá cocina.

paso / pasó · paso = I pass, a step · pasó = it happened

How to tell: paso / pasó

Paso is now (or the noun a step). Pasó is finished.

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English	Spanish
paso = I pass — I pass by your house.	Paso por tu casa.
pasó = it happened — It happened yesterday.	Pasó ayer.

por que / porqué · por que = for which · porqué = the reason

How to tell: por que / porqué

Porqué (one word, accent) is a noun: the reason. Por que (two words) means for which.

English	Spanish
por que = for which — The reason I am coming.	La razón por que vengo.
porqué = the reason — I do not know the reason.	No sé el porqué.

porque / por qué · porque = because · por qué = why

How to tell: porque / por qué

Por qué (two words, accent) asks. Porque (one word) gives the reason.

English	Spanish
porque = because — I am crying because I am sad.	Lloro porque estoy triste.
por qué = why — Why are you crying?	¿Por qué lloras?

practico / práctico / practicó · practico = I practice · práctico = practical · practicó = she practiced

How to tell: practico / práctico / practicó

Práctico describes (practical). Practico is I practice. Practicó is she practiced.

English	Spanish
practico = I practice — I practice Spanish.	Practico español.
práctico = practical — It is very practical.	Es muy práctico.
practicó = she practiced — Yesterday she practiced.	Ayer practicó.

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publico / público / publicó · publico = I publish · público = audience · publicó = she published

How to tell: publico / público / publicó

Público is a noun (audience). Publico is I publish. Publicó is she published.

English	Spanish
publico = I publish — I publish a book.	Yo publico un libro.
público = audience — The audience applauds.	El público aplaude.
publicó = she published — She published a book.	Ella publicó un libro.

que / qué · que = that · qué = what

How to tell: que / qué

Qué asks or exclaims. Que only joins two parts of a sentence.

English	Spanish
que = that — I want you to come.	Quiero que vengas.
qué = what — What do you want?	¿Qué quieres?
qué = how — How good!	¡Qué bueno!

quien / quién · quien = who (links) · quién = who

How to tell: quien / quién

Quién asks who. Quien links a clause to a person.

English	Spanish
quien = who — The person I am talking with.	La persona con quien hablo.
quién = who — Who is it?	¿Quién es?

sabia / sabía · sabia = wise · sabía = I knew

How to tell: sabia / sabía

Sabía is a past form of saber. Sabia describes a person: wise.

English	Spanish
sabia = wise — She is a wise woman.	Es una mujer sabia.
sabía = I knew — I knew the answer.	Yo sabía la respuesta.

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se / sé · se = goes with se llama · sé = I know, be

How to tell: se / sé

Sé is saber (I know) or ser (be). Se is a pronoun that goes with verbs like se llama (her name is) and se fue (he left).

English	Spanish
se = part of se llama — Her name is Ana.	Se llama Ana.
sé = I know — I know the answer.	Yo sé la respuesta.
sé = be — Be kind.	Sé amable.

si / sí · si = if · sí = yes

How to tell: si / sí

Sí answers a question (yes). Si starts a condition (if).

English	Spanish
si = if — If it rains, I am not going.	Si llueve, no voy.
sí = yes — Yes, I am going.	Sí, voy.

solo / sólo · solo = alone, only · sólo = old spelling of only

How to tell: solo / sólo

Solo means alone or only. Context tells you which; older books wrote sólo for only.

English	Spanish
solo = alone — I am alone.	Estoy solo.
solo = only — I only want water.	Solo quiero agua.

te / té · te = you · té = tea

How to tell: te / té

Té is the drink and keeps the accent. Te is a pronoun meaning you (te quiero, I love you), with no accent.

English	Spanish
te = you — I love you.	Te quiero.
té = tea — I want tea.	Quiero té.

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Acento y tilde: ¿cuál sílaba es fuerte?

termino / terminó · termino = I finish · terminó = it ended

How to tell: termino / terminó

An accent on the last syllable marks the past.

English	Spanish
termino = I finish — I finish at five.	Termino a las cinco.
terminó = it ended — The class ended.	Terminó la clase.

trabajo / trabajó · trabajo = I work, work · trabajó = she worked

How to tell: trabajo / trabajó

Trabajo is now (or the noun work). Trabajó is finished.

English	Spanish
trabajo = I work — I work here.	Trabajo aquí.
trabajó = she worked — She worked yesterday.	Trabajó ayer.

tu / tú · tu = your · tú = you

How to tell: tu / tú

Tú is the pronoun you. Tu means your and comes before a noun (tu casa). Both sound the same.

English	Spanish
tu = your — Your house.	Tu casa.
tú = you — You speak.	Tú hablas.

Notes

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