

Some thoughts on Spanish Pronunciation

In general, English is produced at the back of the mouth and throat, whereas Spanish is placed at the front of the mouth, behind the front teeth. The lips are more active and involved when speaking Spanish and will help you with the forward placement of the sound. If you are not using your mouth in this way, you will sound like a gringo, no matter what you are doing inside your mouth.

Consonants

V and B

As a general rule, any time you see a letter *v* in a Spanish word, aim to pronounce it between an English /v/ and /b/, but closer to a /b/.

D and T

The /d/ in Spanish usually comes between the teeth, just like the *th* sound in English, but without all the breathy release of air. This is true for /t/ but to a lesser degree.

L

Compared to the Spanish /l/, the English sound is very lazy. In Spanish, the /l/ is sharp, attentive, focused. The tip of your tongue presses against the bottom wrinkles of your alveolar ridge, just above the smooth part behind your upper teeth, and the body of the tongue behind it stands at rigid attention.

LL

Pronounced as /y/ in most countries. Use like the /y/ in yes.

R

Señor –Flick the tongue behind front teeth to make the /r/. In singing, delay the /r/ til the very end of the note.

Vowels

Most Spanish vowels are *pure vowels*, made up of one sound and not moving in your mouth, whereas many English vowels are *diphthongs*, longer sounds that combine two different vowels into one. Feel how your tongue moves around when you say ‘I’ or ‘you’ (as compared to the unmoving vowels in words like ‘pop’ and ‘eat’). Without the diphthong, Spanish vowels seem staccato to our ears. When a sound is held for longer than a quarter note, don’t let a single vowel become a diphthong. For the word *nosotros*—keep the Spanish /o/ going for the length of the note.



O

Your /o/ should be a simple, one-part sound from rounded lips, not fading into the English ‘oh’ that slides down toward a /u/ sound at the end. It’s not /aw/ exactly, but closer to /aw/ than /oh/.

E

/e/ sounds like in *de* or *Espíritu* should stay at that Canadian-sounding ‘eh’ sound without your tongue ever rising up to stretch it out.

And finally, in Spanish the vowel in each syllable is heard, not swallowed or altered. Don't let it become the schwa sound like *problem* or *item*.

Think about this with these words. The red letter is the one that sometimes gets swallowed.

eres

bendecimos

piedad

todopoderoso

concebido

amen