

Guide to Spanish Pronunciation

OUR BEST TIPS, TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING YOUR SPANISH PRONUNCIATION



Foreword

We wrote this eBook to help you improve your Spanish pronunciation. That may seem like a daunting task at first — but we promise, Spanish pronunciation really isn't all that complicated!

All you need are a few good tools, and the right techniques to **train your ear** and **develop your listening and speaking skills**, and ultimately you'll see (and hear!) improvements to your pronunciation. In this guide, you'll find **all the resources you need** to get familiar with the Spanish alphabet and how different letters, words and phrases are pronounced. Plus, we'll take a look at the different Spanish accents around the world and help you choose the best one for you.

We really think that with this eBook to guide you, you'll make great strides with your spoken Spanish.



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Why It's Important to Learn Proper Spanish Pronunciation

There are a few different reasons why proper pronunciation is so important when it comes to learning a new language.



So that people can understand you

Spanish is considered a pretty easy language to learn, and you'll be able to start communicating effectively after learning just a few words and sentence structures. When someone asks you to repeat yourself, it's usually not because you've used the wrong grammatical structure. After all, even when people have poor grammar in English, you're probably still able to understand what they mean. Instead, it's usually due to poor pronunciation! Good Spanish pronunciation will help native speakers understand you better. This makes them more likely to engage in conversation with you, which will help you further improve your spoken Spanish. It's a virtuous cycle, and it all starts with good pronunciation.



To improve your overall level of Spanish

Someone who knows the rules of Spanish grammar and conjugation perfectly, but has poor pronunciation, will inevitably give the impression of having a poorer overall level of Spanish. Furthermore, not being able to engage in conversation because the people who you talk to can't understand you is a real obstacle to your progress.

On the flip-side, someone who has little knowledge of grammar, but has a decent accent, will nonetheless get better at grammar and conjugation through conversation. In everyday life, Spanish pronunciation is more important than nuanced grammar, conjugation, and an intimate knowledge of the language's complexities. Good pronunciation allows you to speak more smoothly and naturally, leading to speaking more often and making greater progress.



To gain self-confidence

When you don't know the correct pronunciation of many different words, you're more likely to hold yourself back and stick to the ones you know well. But you won't make any progress if you never take any risks! Knowing how a particular letter or combination of letters is supposed to sound in Spanish, and being able to make educated guesses about how new words are pronounced, will give you a big boost in confidence. When you know the right sounds of a language, and how to join them together, you'll enjoy speaking and communicating much more. You'll want to keep improving and learning more about the language, which is essential to maintaining steady progress.



The more you enjoy speaking a language, the more often you'll engage in conversations, which will help you make quicker progress.

Where to Start: The Spanish Alphabet

You might have the impression that Spanish pronunciation is complicated, because it sounds quite different than English, but it's **actually much simpler** — there are far fewer exceptions, and no tricky silent letters! (Okay, except h, but we promise, that's the only one!)

Pronunciation of the Spanish Alphabet

The alphabet is where it all starts. Like the English alphabet, the Spanish one has 26 letters, with two differences.

- First, there is no native *w*. Any time you see this letter, it will be in a word of foreign origin; it's pronounced the same as in English.
- Second, the addition of the letter *ñ*.

Like with many other languages, some foreign words have been "hispanized," or rewritten using Spanish sounds and letters. For example, the word *güisqui*, which means... whiskey! It's not the most common word, so you probably won't come across it all that often. However, it goes to show that the **link between pronunciation and spelling in Spanish is very strong**. Which is a great thing for us learners!



WAIT — ISN'T THE SPANISH ALPHABET THE SAME AS THE ENGLISH ONE?

When we speak about a language's "alphabet," we mean more than just the letters themselves. Instead, we're referring to each letter's pronunciation, special accents and characters, and any sounds that are unique to the language. Even though English and Spanish both use what's called the Latin alphabet, each one uses the individual letters and their combinations to represent different sounds.

The Spanish Alphabet

a	[a]
b	[be]
c	[ce]
d	[de]
e	[e]
f	[efe]
g	[ge]
h	[atche]
i	[i]
j	[jota]
k	[ca]
l	[ele]
m	[eme]
n	[ene]
ñ	[eñe]
o	[o]
p	[pe]
q	[cu]
r	[erre]
s	[ese]
t	[te]
u	[u]
v	[uve]
w	[uve doble (ES), u doble (L.A.)]
x	[equis]
y	[i griega]
z	[eta]



WHAT HAPPENED TO CH AND LL??

If you started learning Spanish before 2010, you may have been told that the Spanish alphabet contains two additional letters - CH and LL. However, a few years ago the Real Academia Española removed these "letters" from the alphabet. They are now considered letter combinations, just like CH, SH and TH in English.

Learning Phonetics

You can simplify your task by focusing on the letters that differ in pronunciation from English.

- A /a/ — pronounced like the *a* in *father*.
- E /e/ — pronounced like the *e* in *set*.
- I /i/ — pronounced like *ee* and in *sheep*
- U /u/ — pronounced like *oo* as in *shoot*.
- Y /j/ or /i/ — most often similar to an English *y*, as in *yellow*. It can also be pronounced like the Spanish letter /i/ (see above), as in the Spanish word *y*.
- C /s/ or /θ/ or /k/ — pronounced like an English *s* (Latin America) as in *stay*, English *th* (Spain) as in *these*, or English *k*, as in *kayak*.
- CH /tʃ/ — pronounced like *ch*, as in *choose*.
- G /g/ or /ɣ/ — pronounced like English *g* as in *good* when it is the first letter (like *gato*), and a similar sound otherwise, but where your tongue does not touch the roof of your mouth, as in Spanish *amigo*.



LEARN THE SPANISH ALPHABET WITH THE MOSALINGUA LEARN SPANISH APP

Did you know that MosaLingua's Learn Spanish app has lessons to help you learn the Spanish alphabet more quickly? It focuses on differences between English and Spanish. Plus, there are special flashcards to help you retain everything you've learned, using MosaLingua's Spaced Repetition System.

- J /x/ — comes from the back of the throat, somewhat similar to the English *h*, as in Spanish *jardín*.
- LL /ʎ/ — pronounced like English *y* as in *yellow*, or Spanish *pollo*
- Ñ /ɲ/ — this has no real equivalent in English, but it's a bit like an *n* and *y* together, as in Spanish *mañana*.
- R /r/ — pronounced like English *r* as in *red*.
- RR /r̄/ — a sound with no equivalent in English, but that exists also in, for example, Italian, the trilled or rolled *r*, as in Spanish *perro*.
- V /β/ — pronounced between and English *b* and *v*, as in Spanish *vaso*.
- X /ʃ/ — sometimes pronounced like English *x* as in *extraordinary*, or else like English *h* and in *happy*.
- Z /θ/ — similar to an English *th* as in *that* (Spain) or English *s* as in *start* (Latin America).

Of course, this list isn't exhaustive — phonetics is a fascinating subject, and one that can't be covered in a short list. However, **this list will help you with most of your day-to-day pronunciation.** There are fewer sounds than in English, so if you want to learn them all, you certainly can!

Looking for Patterns

Patterns are groups of sounds that **come up repeatedly**, and are **written differently but pronounced the same way** (like homonyms). To give you an example, in English, *-tion* and *-ssion* are usually pronounced the same way. That's a pattern. Knowing which letter groups form patterns in Spanish will save you time learning the language. Here's an example in Spanish (it might look familiar...): *-ción* and *-sión*. Easy, right?

Accent and Intonation

Accents can refer to either **regional accents** or **tonic accents** (word stress) in the language itself. Both play an important role in the pronunciation of a language, and particularly with Spanish. Accents and intonation **give a language its rhythm and musicality** — that's known as **prosody** in linguistics jargon. Once you've learned the Spanish alphabet and its pronunciation, the **next big step is to focus on accents**.

Regional Accents

There are a number of different Spanish accents! Spanish is a very rich language in terms of pronunciation and accents. When you start learning Spanish pronunciation, you'll start to pick up on the differences between the various regional accents.

The main differences between Spanish regional accents

The Spanish language is an official language in **21 different countries around the world!** Pronunciation and even vocabulary can vary from country to country — sometimes slightly, other times significantly. There are even different dialects in different regions of the same Spanish-speaking country, just like in English. Here are some of the most important differences:

- In Argentina, the double *ll* is pronounced like an English *ch* as in *cheese*.
- In Mexico, the *s* sound is closer to an English *z*, rather than the English and Spanish *S*.
- In Cuba, the *r* sounds a bit like an exhaled ("aspirated") *h*.
- In Latin American countries, *x* is pronounced like the English *h*.
- In Latin American countries, *c* is pronounced like the English *s*; in Spain, like the English *th*.

Be sure to check out [this article](#) (if you're reading this on your phone or computer, just click that link to go to it!) on our blog to learn more about the various Spanish accents and the differences between them.

How to choose the right Spanish accent for you

The next important question you need to ask yourself is, which accent do you want to learn?

Here's a tip to help you decide: it makes sense to **connect a particular accent with a region you're interested in**. For example, if you're planning on traveling to Latin America, it makes sense to focus on one of the accents from these countries, like Argentina. Hoping to lock down a new job in Madrid? Focus on the accent from Spain. Have a Peruvian friend that you'd like to practice your Spanish with? Try to copy their accent!

Don't worry, even if you choose the "wrong" accent for your purposes, it won't prevent you from being understood. After all, Americans, Canadians, Brits and Aussies all understand each other just fine (well, most of the time anyway!). Just **focus on pronouncing words clearly and confidently**, and people will have no trouble understanding you.

If there isn't a specific country tied to your reasons for learning Spanish, stick to a more neutral version of Spanish that will allow people from all over the Spanish-speaking world to understand you. As you continue to meet new people, travel, complete language courses, watch movies, and listen to music, you'll become **more and more aware of the interesting differences in pronunciation**.



WHICH IS THE MOST "NEUTRAL" SPANISH ACCENT?

Accents are a tricky thing. It depends a lot, of course, on who you ask. However, at MosaLingua, we've done a lot of research on the topic, and have come to the conclusion that the Bogota accent is one of the most neutral and easy to understand. In fact, many Latin American call-centers are based in Bogota, and news anchors with this accent are understood clearly and without trouble all throughout Latin America.

Tonic Accents: Intonation and Word Stress in Spanish

Tonic accents are grammatical, rather than regional. They determine the pitch and stress of syllables in a word, and give rhythm to a language and the words in a sentence. Because tonic accents are a deeply embedded part of any language, it's important to get them right so that people can understand you easily.

The meaning of some words can also change based on where you put the accent. Consider, for example, the English noun "project" (e.g. "This project will take a long time to complete), and the verb, "project" (e.g. "To be heard clearly, you need to project your voice.")

When you learn a language by focusing on words, phrases and expressions, rather than on grammatical rules, **acquiring a good accent comes naturally**. That's why it's important to **repeat words as you hear them**, paying close attention to pronunciation and intonation

There are **three main rules** to know and follow:

1

Words ending in a vowel (*a, e, i, o, u, y*), *s* or *n*

The tonic accent is on the **second-to-last syllable**. Exceptions are noted with a grammatical accent over a vowel. For example: *iglesia*, *joven*, *mano*.

2

Words ending in a consonant other than *n* or *s*

The tonic accent is on the **last syllable**. Exceptions are noted with a grammatical accent over a vowel. For example: *animal* (for comparison, in English, the first syllable is stressed).

3

All other words, plus exceptions to the first two rules

The tonic accent is noted over the vowel of the syllable to be stressed. For example: *árbol*, *jardín*, *atenciuon*.



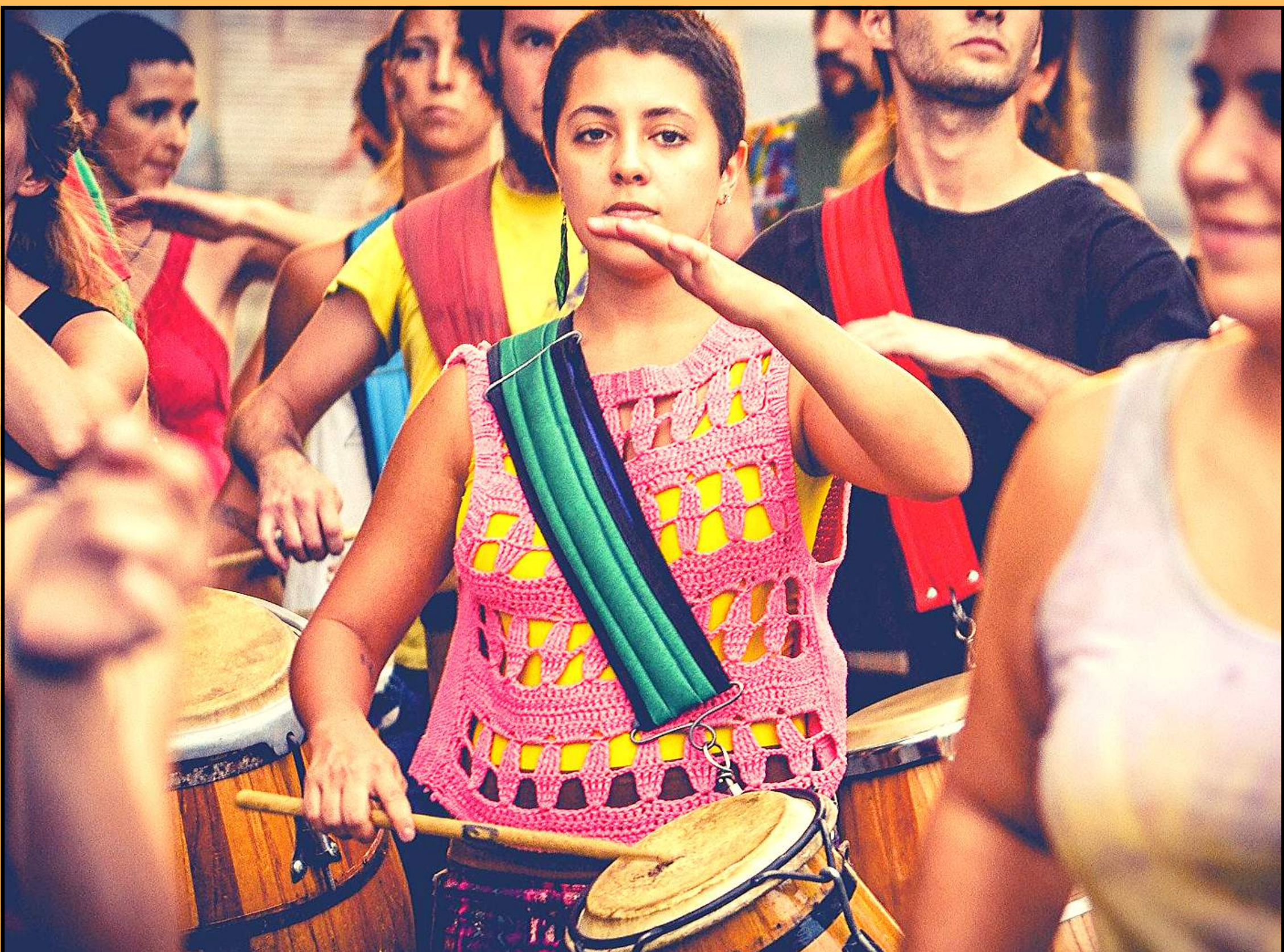
TONIC ACCENTS AND PLURAL NOUNS

Note that the placement of the tonic accent doesn't change when the word is plural, even if the number of syllables changes - that is, even if what was the second-to-last syllable is now third-to-last.

For example: joven becomes jovenes, and the accent stays in the same place.

Another thing to note is that, generally, words ending in -ion emphasize the o.

Check out this video ([click here to watch](#)) for a list of 10 Spanish words that most non-native speakers pronounce incorrectly!



Accents & intonation give rhythm to words, sentences and language.

Common Pronunciation Errors in Spanish

There are a couple common errors that English speakers make in Spanish:



Not rolling your *rrrrrr*'s

Let's be honest, if you're not used to rolling your *r*'s, it can be one of the more challenging aspects of speaking Spanish. It's a sound that just doesn't exist in English. But it's **definitely worth the effort**: a properly rolled *r* will immediately improve your Spanish pronunciation. Furthermore, a spoken word can have a different meaning depending on how it's pronounced. For example, the word *pero* (normal *r*) means "but" or "except," while the word *perro* (rolled *r*) means "dog."

To roll your *r*'s, place the tip of your tongue just behind your teeth, near your palate (the roof of your mouth), as if you were about to pronounce the English *d* sound. Once in place, firmly push the air from your lungs across your tongue and... *rrrrrrrrroll!*

Don't worry if you don't get it straight away. The key is to **practice, practice, practice**. Spend time watching movies or TV series, listening to podcasts, and using your MosaLingua Spanish app and imitate the Spanish speakers you hear as they roll their *r*'s.



Pronouncing the *z* like in English

In Spanish, *z* is pronounced like an English soft *s* as in *snake* when placed at the end of a word or before the letters *a*, *o* and *u*, as in *Cadiz*. In Spain, it's somewhere between an *s* and a *th*. Put the tip of your tongue just behind your teeth and try to pronounce the soft *s*.



Pronouncing *v* like *b*

Finally, this one gives English speakers trouble in Spanish... and Spanish speakers trouble in English! The proper pronunciation of the Spanish *v* is closer to a *b*, but differs in that it lacks the "explosive" sound — instead, it's pronounced like a *b* with your lips kept open. This differs from the English *b*, which is pronounced with the upper teeth against the lower lip.

The Best Resources for Improving Your Spanish Pronunciation

Now that you know the basics of Spanish pronunciation, here are some essential resources for helping you to make quick progress!



Our pronunciation resources

[Your MosaLingua App!](#)

MosaLingua's suite of apps has been designed and developed to help you learn the most important vocabulary and phrases necessary to understand and speak Spanish. Our apps for learning Spanish and Business Spanish are rich in vocab and feature lots of listening and pronunciation exercises:

- **MosaLingua Recordings:** all the words and phrases available in the MosaLingua apps (more than 3500 flashcards) have been recorded by native speakers to help you learn proper pronunciation. Listen to them, familiarize your ear, and then repeat.
- **MosaLingua Dialogues:** you'll also find rich dialogues, inspired by everyday life, to help get familiar with the right accent, intonation and pronunciation of the Spanish language. Our MosaLingua apps to learn Spanish offer 17+ dialogues from common situations.
- **Hands-free Mode:** a pair of headphones and your MosaLingua app for learning Spanish is all you need to work on your pronunciation! Hands-free mode allows you to review all your previously learned flashcards just by listening to them. You can practice your vocabulary and improve your Spanish pronunciation, all without lifting a finger.



Dictionaries and online pronunciation sites with audio clips

Another great way to improve your pronunciation is to listen to lots of different speakers pronounce the same word or phrase. These sites have audio recordings from lots of different Spanish speakers.

- **Rhinospike** (www.rhinospike.com): This site allows you to get the correct pronunciation of a word, sentence or entire passage of text, spoken by a native Spanish speaker. It's entirely free, and

based on the principles of mutual aid — so it only works if everybody contributes! To get the right pronunciation, you just have to ask, and in exchange, you can read a text or a sentence in English to help someone else.

- **Forvo** (www.forvo.com): This site brings together a database of words and sounds, in many different languages, all recorded by native speakers. That makes this site a great tool for when you find a word whose pronunciation you don't know. Type it into the Forvo search bar, select the right word, and listen to its pronunciation in Spanish. Repeat the word as many times as necessary to get a similar pronunciation.
- **Google Translate** (translate.google.com): This isn't the best option, but it can do in a pinch. Unlike the MosaLingua app and sites like Forvo, where the words are recorded by natives, on Google Translate the pronunciation is artificial and thus very robotic. Nonetheless, it can give you a rough idea of the correct way to pronounce a word or sentence.

When using audio recordings to improve your pronunciation, don't hesitate to record yourself (with your smartphone or computer) and compare your pronunciation with that of native speakers!

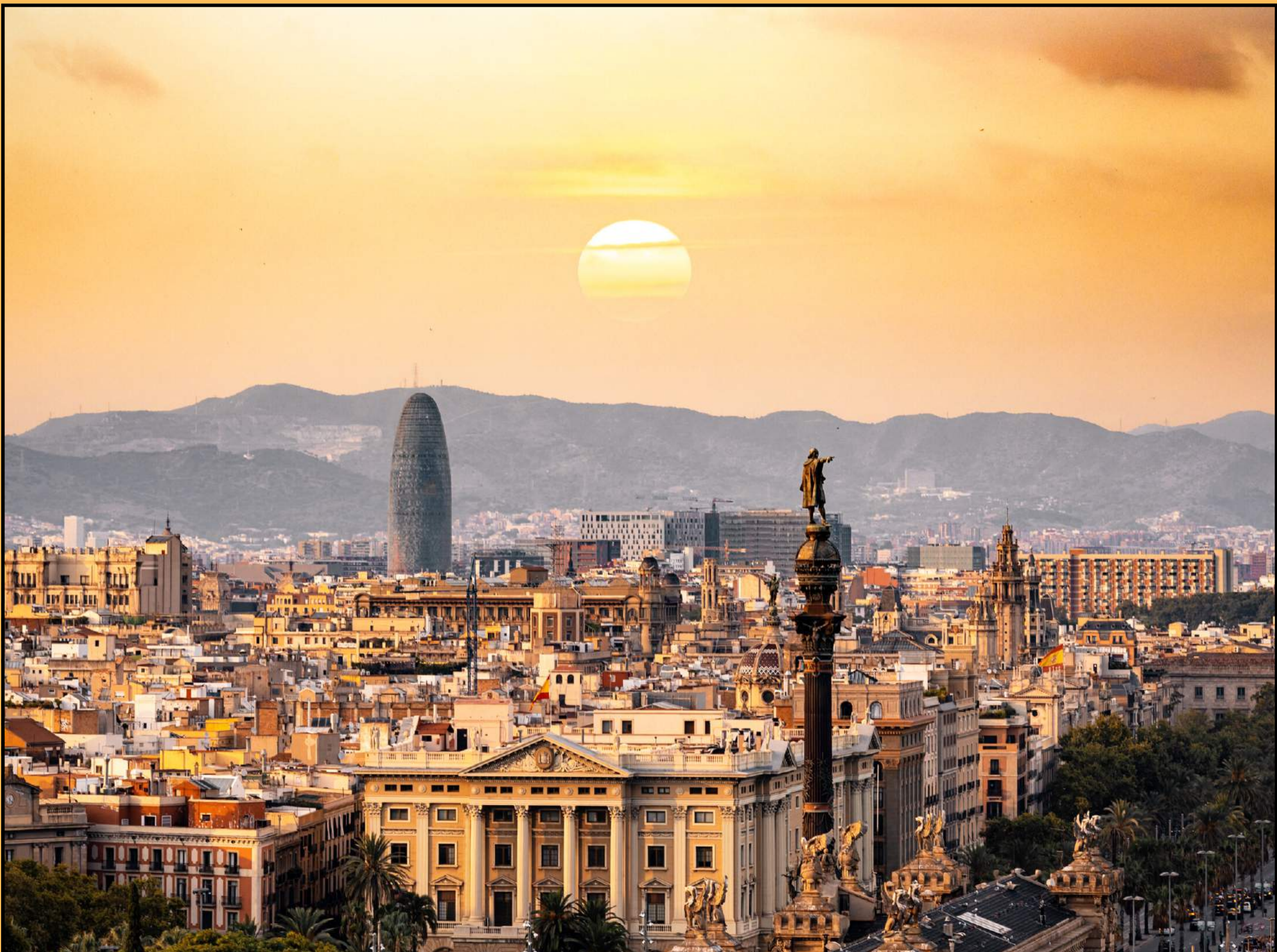


Improving your comprehension

Comprehension and pronunciation go hand-in-hand. As your comprehension of the language improves and you start to recognize words more easily, your pronunciation, intonation and rhythm will progress as well, and vice-versa. And best of all, there's lots of fun ways to do it!

- **Watching movies and series:** who said learning pronunciation had to be boring! Watching Spanish films or series, for example, is a fun and effective way to improve your pronunciation. MosaLingua has put together a list of [films](#) and [series](#) in Spanish that you can check out on our website. TV series have an ideal format for reviewing things regularly.

- **Listening to music:** yep, just like movies and series, Spanish music can help you broaden your vocabulary — while your ear becomes more accustomed to proper Spanish pronunciation. Once again, you can find a selection of [Spanish music](#) for improving your pronunciation on the MosaLingua blog.
- **Podcasts:** you can listen to native Spanish speakers talk about all kinds of different subjects with podcasts. Because they're spoken (rather than sung), and usually with an effort to be clear and easy to understand (as opposed to movies and TV series that aim to convey emotions), they tend to be a little easier to understand. Just find a podcast on a topic that interests you, and you can relax and improve your listening and pronunciation at the same time. Check out our selection of the best [Spanish podcasts](#) on our blog.



Of course, another great way to expose yourself to Spanish is to travel! Nothing beats immersing yourself in a language to rapidly improve your pronunciation. You'll hear Spanish being spoken all around you.

Get Your Spanish Pronunciation Corrected by a Conversation Partner

Practicing your spoken Spanish is the best way to improve your pronunciation. Of course, you can practice and train yourself at home. That's the easiest way to get started.

But as soon as possible, it's important to start practicing with someone who can correct you. Otherwise, you may not pick up on all the mistakes you make, and you'll develop bad habits — practicing on your own can only take you so far.

How do you find someone to practice speaking Spanish with? You can easily find a private tutor on the internet who can help you practice. At MosaLingua, we strongly believe in **free language exchanges** based on the principle of mutual aid. The idea is to meet a conversation partner on a language exchange site who speaks Spanish and who you can feel comfortable talking to. You'll spend half the time speaking in Spanish and half the time speaking in English — this way, you can both get better at your respective target language! And don't worry about making mistakes: remember that your conversation partner is in the exact same boat as you.

Language exchanges work best when you're comfortable with the person, and you can correct each other easily. If you're not having a good time with your partner, it's time to move on and find a new one. Once you've found a good conversation partner, make sure **you schedule regular conversations**. This is really important — by committing to practice together, you'll be sure not to fall behind.

You can find a list of the [best online language exchange websites](#) on our blog.



TIPS FOR MORE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Stretch your jaw well beforehand * Look in a mirror during pronunciation exercises * Speak loudly and slowly * Exaggerate your pronunciation * Repeat each word several times * Practice regularly, with exercises of around 5 minutes each.

