

Chapter 1

Realising that You Know a Little Spanish Already

In This Chapter

- ▶ Spotting the Spanish you know already
 - ▶ Pronouncing words correctly
 - ▶ Implying gestures
 - ▶ Understanding typical expressions
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If you're familiar with the term 'Latin Lover', you may not be surprised to know that Spanish is called a Romance language. But the romance we're talking about here isn't exactly the Latin Lover type – unless you love to learn Latin.

Spanish (as well as other languages such as Italian, French, Romanian and Portuguese) is a Romance language because its origins reside in the Latin of ancient Rome. This common ancestry means that Romance languages have many similarities in grammar and the way they sound. (The fact that these languages all sound so romantic when spoken is purely a bonus!) For example, **casa** (*kah-sah*), the word for 'house', is identical in look, meaning and sound whether you speak Portuguese, Italian, Romanian or Spanish.

The differences in the Romance languages aren't terribly difficult to overcome. For example, Spanish speakers can talk with Portuguese or Italian speakers and make themselves understood pretty well, even if the other person sounds a bit strange. Still, each Romance language is different from its sister languages.

Standard Spanish is a language that comes from a central region of Spain called Castilla. For that reason, some people call the language **castellano** (*kahs-teh-yah-noh*), which simply means 'Castilian'. This book concentrates on standard, modern Spanish, and is based mostly on **castellano**: Spanish as good and crystal-clear as it comes.

A quick Spanish geography lesson

Spain consists of the Iberian mainland peninsula – except for Portugal and Gibraltar – the Islas Baleares (Balearic Islands), the Islas Canarias (Canary Islands) and two small areas in the North of Africa called Ceuta and Melilla. Outside of Spain, Spanish is most widely spoken in Latin America.

Thousands of miles away from the castellano-speaking Spanish mainland, however, the

Spanish in Latin America developed in its own way to become a language still instantly recognisable as Spanish, but with its own words and pronunciations. For this reason, you may come across Americans who speak ‘Spanish’ but struggle to make themselves understood in Madrid, and Europeans who speak ‘Spanish’ but can’t get a coffee in Cartagena!

This chapter is the foundation for the rest of the book and, among other things, discusses pronunciation and some of the conventions we use in subsequent chapters. We also give you a few quickie phrases to show Spanish speakers that you’re part of the gang!

Recognising the Spanish You Know Already

The English language is like an ever-growing entity that, with great wisdom, absorbs what it needs from other cultures and languages. English is also a language that resembles a bouquet of flowers plucked from many different roots. One of these roots is Latin, which 2,000 years ago was spread all over Europe by the Romans and later by scholars of the Middle Ages.

Because all these live elements exist in the root of the language, you can find many similarities between English and Spanish in the words that come from both Latin and French roots. These words can cause both delight and embarrassment. The delight comes in the words where the coincident sounds give similar meanings. The embarrassment comes from words where the sounds and even the roots are the same, but the meanings are completely different.

Among the delightful discoveries of similarities between the languages are words such as **teléfono móvil** (*teh-leh-phoh-noh moh-beel*) (mobile telephone), **soprano** (*soh-prah-noh*) (soprano), **pronto** (*prohn-toh*) (right away; soon) and thousands of others that differ by just one or two letters, such as **conclusión** (*kohn-kloo-seeohn*) (conclusion), **composición** (*kohm-poh-see-thee-ohn*) (composition), **libertad** (*lee-behr-tahd*) (liberty), **economía** (*eh-koh-noh-meeah*) (economy), **invención** (*een-behn-theeohn*) (invention) and **presidente** (*preh-see-dehn-teh*) (president).

Watching out for false friends

The trouble begins in the world of words with what French linguists call false friends. Within the groups of false friends, you find words that look very similar and even have the same root, and yet mean completely different things. One that comes to mind is the word **actual**, which has very different meanings in English and Spanish. In English, you know that it means real, in reality or the very one. Not so in Spanish. **Actual** (*ahk-tooahl*) in Spanish means present, current, belonging to this moment, this day or this year.

So, for example, when you say the actual painting in English, you're referring to the real one, the very painting people are looking at or want to see. But when you say **la pintura actual** (*lah peen-too-rah ahk-tooahl*) in Spanish, you're referring to the painting that belongs to the current time, the one that follows present-day trends – a modern painting.

Another example is the adjective 'embarrassed', which in English means ashamed or encumbered. In Spanish, **embarazada** (*ehm-bah-rah-thah-dah*) is the adjective that comes from the same root as the English word, and yet its use nowadays almost exclusively means 'pregnant'. So you can say in English that you're a little embarrassed, but in Spanish you can't be just a little **embarazada**. Either you're pregnant or you're not!

Getting to know some crossover influences

Word trouble ends at the point where a word originating in English is absorbed into Spanish or vice versa. For instance, the proximity of the United States to Mexico produces a change in the Spanish spoken there: the result, for example, is that 'car' in Mexico is **carro** (*kah-rroh*), but in South America people say **auto** (*ahoo-toh*) and in Spain **coche** (*koh-cheh*).

Here are just a few examples of Spanish words that you know already because English uses them, too:

- ✓ You've may have been to a **fiesta** (*feehs-tah*).
- ✓ You've probably taken a **siesta** (*seehs-tah*) or two.
- ✓ You probably know at least one **señorita** (*seh-nyoh-ree-tah*), and you surely have an **amigo** (*ah-mee-goh*).
- ✓ You know the names of places such as **Los Angeles** (*lohs ahn-Heh-lehs*) (the angels), **San Francisco** (*sahn frahn-thees-koh*) (Saint Francis), **Florida** (*floh-ree-dah*) (the blooming one) and **Puerto Rico** (*pooehr-toh ree-koh*) (rich harbour).
- ✓ You may have eaten a **tortilla** (*tohr-tee-yah*) or **paella** (*pah-eh-yah*).

- ✓ You fancy the **tango** (*tahn-goh*) or the **rumba** (*room-bah*), or you may dance the **flamenco** (*flah-men-koh*).
- ✓ You have a friend named **María** (*Mah-ree-ah*) or **Ana** (*ah-nah*).

Reciting Your ABCs

Correct pronunciation is vital to avoiding misunderstandings. The following sections present some basic guidelines for proper Spanish pronunciation.



Next to the Spanish words throughout this book, we show the pronunciation in parentheses, which we call pronunciation brackets. Within the pronunciation brackets, we separate the words that have more than one syllable with a hyphen, such as (*kah-sah*). An underlined syllable within the pronunciation brackets tells you to accent, or stress, that syllable. We say much more about stress later in this chapter in the section ‘Looking at Pronunciation and Stress’. In the meantime, don’t let yourself get stressed out (pardon the pun). We explain each part of the language separately, and promise to ensure that the pieces fall quickly into place.

In the following sections we comment on some letters of the alphabet from the Spanish point of view. The aim is to help you to understand Spanish pronunciation. Here is the basic Spanish alphabet and its pronunciation:

a (ah)	b (beh)	c (theh)	d (deh)
e (eh)	f (<u>eh</u> -feh)	g (Heh)	h (<u>ah</u> -cheh)
i (ee)	f (<u>Hoh</u> -tah)	k (kah)	l (<u>eh</u> -leh)
m (<u>eh</u> -meh)	n (<u>eh</u> -neh)	ñ (<u>eh</u> -nyeh)	o (oh)
p (peh)	q (koo)	r (<u>eh</u> -reh)	s (<u>eh</u> -seh)
t (teh)	u (oo)	v (<u>oo</u> -beh)	w (<u>doh</u> -bleh <u>oo</u> -beh or <u>oo</u> -beh <u>doh</u> -bleh)
x (<u>eh</u> -kees)	y (ee gree <u>eh</u> -gah)	z (<u>theh</u> -tah)	

Spanish also includes some double letters in its alphabet: **ch** (*cheh*) and **ll** (*ye*), and uses the **rr** (*a trilled r*) pairing.

We don’t go through every letter of the alphabet in the sections that follow, only those that you use differently in Spanish than in English. The differences can lie in pronunciation, appearance, the fact that you seldom see the letters or that you don’t pronounce the letters at all.

Checking out consonants

Consonants tend to sound the same in both English and Spanish. The following sections look more closely at the behaviour and pronunciation of the consonants that do differ.



Even within the Spanish-speaking world, some consonants are pronounced differently. For example, in standard Spain the consonant **z** is pronounced like the *th* in the English word *thesis*. Latin Americans, however, don't use this *th* sound; in those countries, **z** and **s** sound the same.



In the Spanish speaker's mind, a consonant is any sound that needs to have a vowel next to it when you pronounce it. For example, saying the letter **t** by itself may be difficult for a Spanish speaker. To the Spanish ear, pronouncing **t** sounds like **te** (*teh*). Likewise, the Spanish speaker says **ese** (*eh-seh*) when pronouncing the letter **s**.

The letter K

In Spanish, the letter **k** is used only in words that have their origin in foreign or ancient languages. More often than not, this letter is seen in **kilo** (*kee-loh*), meaning *thousand* in Greek, such as in **kilómetro** (*kee-loh-meh-troh*) (kilometre).

The letter H

In Spanish, the letter **h** is always mute. That's it!

Note, however, that the pronunciation brackets throughout this book do often include the letter *h*. These *hs* generally indicate certain vowel sounds, which we cover in the later section 'Finding Out About Vowels'. But the Spanish **h** itself doesn't appear within the pronunciation brackets, because the letter is mute.

Here are some examples of the Spanish **h**:

- ✓ **Huelva** (*ooh-ehl-ba*) (name of a city in Spain)
- ✓ **hueso** (*ooeh-soh*) (bone)
- ✓ **huevo** (*ooeh-boh*) (egg)

The letter J

The Spanish consonant **j** sounds like a guttural English letter *h*. Normally, in English, you say *h* quite softly, as though you're just breathing out. To pronounce the Spanish **j**, you say an *h* but gently raise the back of your tongue, as if you're saying the letter *k*. Push the air out really hard and you get the sound. Try it – you sound as if you're gargling, don't you?

To indicate that you need to make this sound, we use a capital letter *H* within the pronunciation brackets.

Now try the sound out on these words:

- ✓ **Cajon** (*kah-Hohn*) (big box)
- ✓ **Gijón** (*Hee-Hohn*) (the name of a city in Northern Spain)
- ✓ **jadeo** (*Hah-deh-oh*) (panting)
- ✓ **jota** (*Hoh-tah*) (the Spanish name for the letter **j**; also the name of a folk dance in Spain.)
- ✓ **tijera** (*tee-Heh-rah*) (scissors)

The letter **C**

The letter **c**, in front of the vowels **a**, **o** and **u**, sounds like the English letter **k**. We use the letter *k* in the pronunciation brackets to indicate this sound. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **acabar** (*ah-kah-bahr*) (to finish)
- ✓ **café** (*kah-feh*) (coffee)
- ✓ **casa** (*kah-sah*) (house)
- ✓ **ocaso** (*oh-kah-soh*) (sunset)

When the letter **c** is in front of the vowels **e** and **i**, it sounds like the English letters **th** in the word ‘thanks’. In the pronunciation brackets, we indicate this sound as *th*. Check out these examples:

- ✓ **acero** (*ah-theh-roh*) (steel)
- ✓ **cerro** (*theh-roh*) (zero)
- ✓ **cine** (*thee-neh*) (cinema)

The letters **S** and **Z**

In standard Spanish, the letter **z** is pronounced like the letters **th** in the English word ‘bath’. We use *th* in the pronunciation brackets to indicate this sound. Following are some examples:

- ✓ **cerveza** (*ther-beh-thah*) (beer)
- ✓ **veloz** (*beh-loth*) (fast)
- ✓ **zarzuela** (*thahr-thoo-eh-lah*) (Spanish-style operetta)

The letters **B** and **V**

In Spanish, the letters **b** and **v** are pronounced the same, the sound being somewhere between the two letters. This in-between is a clear sound, closer to the English letter **b** than **v**. If you position your lips and teeth to make a **v** sound, and then try to make a **b** sound, you get it. To remind you to make this sound, we use *b* in our pronunciation brackets, for both **b** and **v**. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **cabeza** (*kah-beh-thah*) (head)
- ✓ **vida** (*bee-dah*) (life)
- ✓ **violín** (*beeoh-leen*) (violin)

The letter **Q**

Spanish doesn't use the letter **k** very much; when the language wants an English **k** sound in front of the vowels **e** and **i**, it unfolds the letter combination **qu** instead. So when you see the word **queso** (*keh-soh*) (cheese), you immediately know that you say the English **k** sound. Here are some examples of the Spanish letter **q**, which we indicate by *k* in the pronunciation brackets:

- ✓ **paquete** (*pah-keh-teh*) (package)
- ✓ **pequeño** (*peh-keh-nyoh*) (small)
- ✓ **química** (*keeh-meeh-kah*) (chemistry)
- ✓ **tequila** (*teh-kee-lah*) (Mexican liquor, spirits)

The letter **G**

In Spanish the letter **g** has a double personality, like the letter **c**. When you combine the letter **g** with a consonant or when you see it in front of the vowels **a**, **o** and **u**, it sounds like the English **g** in goose. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **begonia** (*beh-goh-neeah*) (begonia)
- ✓ **gato** (*gah-toh*) (cat)
- ✓ **gracias** (*grah-theeahs*) (thank you)
- ✓ **pagado** (*pah-gah-doh*) (paid for)

The **g** changes personality in front of the vowels **e** and **i**. It sounds like the Spanish **j**, which we indicate with the capital *H* in our pronunciation brackets:

- ✓ **agenda** (*ah-Hehn-dah*) (agenda; date book)
- ✓ **gerente** (*Heh-rehn-teh*) (manager)

To hear the English sound *g* (as in goat) in front of the vowels *e* and *i*, you must insert a *u* in Spanish, making **gue** and **gui**. To remind you to make the goat sound (no, no, not *mmehehe*, but a hard *g*), we use *gh* in our pronunciation brackets:

- ✓ **guía** (*gh~~ee~~ah*) (guide)
- ✓ **guiño** (*gh~~ee~~-nyoh*) (wink)
- ✓ **guerra** (*gh~~eh~~-rrah*) (war)

Double consonants

Spanish has two double consonants: **ll** and **rr**. These double consonants are considered to be a single letter, and each has a single sound. For this reason, they stick together when we separate syllables in the pronunciation brackets. For example, the word **calle** (*ka~~h~~-yeh*) (street) appears as **ca-ll**e. And **torre** (*to~~h~~-rreh*), (tower) separates into **to-rr**e.

The letter LL

In standard Spanish, the **ll** consonant sounds like the letter *y* in the English word *yes*, and throughout this book in the pronunciation brackets, we use *y* to indicate this sound.

Try saying **ll**, using the *y* sound, in the following examples:

- ✓ **brillo** (*bree-yoh*) (shine)
- ✓ **llama** (*yah-mah*) (flame; also the name of an animal)
- ✓ **lluvia** (*yoo-beeah*) (rain)



Across the Atlantic, Argentineans and Uruguayans pronounce **ll** differently, as the sound that happens when you have your lips pursed to say *s* and then make the *z* sound through them. Try it. Fun, isn't it? But really, the sound isn't that difficult to make, because you can find the English equivalent in words like *measure* and *pleasure*. The way you say those English *s* sounds is exactly how **ll** is pronounced in Argentina and Uruguay.

The letters RR

The letters **rr** together sound like a strongly rolled *r*. In fact, every *r* is rolled in Spanish, but the double one is the real winner. To roll an *r*, curl your tongue against the roof of your mouth as you finish the *r* sound. It should trill.



An easy way to make this sound is to say the letter *r* as though you were pretending to sound like an outboard motor. There, you have it! Spanish speakers take special pleasure in rolling their **rrs**. One fun thing about **rr** is that no words begin with it. Isn't that a relief! In pronunciation brackets we simply indicate this sound as *rr*.

Play with these words:

- ✓ **carrera** (*kah-rreh-rah*) (race; profession)
- ✓ **correo** (*koh-rreh-oh*) (mail, post)
- ✓ **tierra** (*teeeh-rah*) (land)

The letter **y**

When falling at the start or in the middle of a word, the letter **y** in Spanish represents sounds that are very similar to those of **ll**, and we advise that you pronounce it as the English letter **y** in *yes* and *you*. In the pronunciation brackets, we indicate this sound as *y*:

- ✓ **playa** (*plah-yah*) (beach)
- ✓ **yema** (*yeh-mah*) (yolk; also finger tip)
- ✓ **yodo** (*yoh-doh*) (iodine)



In Spanish, the letter **y** is a consonant, but it sounds like the English vowel **i** when coming at the end of a word:

- ✓ **buey** (*boo-eh-eeh*) (ox)
- ✓ **ley** (*leh-eeh*) (law)
- ✓ **rey** (*reh-eeh*) (king)



The people of Argentina and Uruguay strongly pronounce this **y** sound – when it falls at the start or in the middle of a word – by keeping their tongue against their upper palate a little longer.

The letter **Ñ**

When you see a wiggly line on top of the letter **n** that looks like **ñ**, use the *ny* sound that you use for the English word *canyon*. The wiggly line is called a **tilde** (*teel-deh*). In pronunciation brackets, we show this sound as *ny*. Try out the following examples:

- ✓ **cuñado** (*koo-nyah-doh*) (brother-in-law)
- ✓ **mañana** (*mah-nyah-nah*) (tomorrow)
- ✓ **niña** (*nee-nyah*) (girl)

Finding out about vowels

The biggest difference between English and Spanish is almost certainly in the way that people write and pronounce vowels, and so to sound like a native Spanish speaker you have to concentrate on them.

You may be well aware that one vowel in English can have more than one sound. Look, for instance, at *fat* and *fate*. Both words have the vowel *a*, but they're pronounced quite differently from one another. The good news is that in Spanish, you always say the vowels one way, and one way only.

The upcoming sections discuss the five vowels, which are the only vowel sounds in Spanish. These sounds are **a** (*ah*), **e** (*eh*), **i** (*ee*), **o** (*oh*) and **u** (*oo*). Spanish views each of these vowels as being by itself and combines the vowels into twos to make other sounds.

The vowel A

Almost all children sing their ABCs. In Spanish, the English letter *a* that starts off the song, is pronounced *ah*. The easiest way to remember how to pronounce the letter **a** in Spanish is to sing the chorus of the Christmas carol 'Deck the Halls' to yourself. You remember the chorus, don't you? *Fa la la la la, la la, la la*. We write this sound as *ah* in the pronunciation brackets.

Here are some sample words to practise. Remember that you pronounce each and every **a** exactly the same way:

- ✓ **Badajoz** (*Bah-dah-Hohth*) (a city in south-western Spain)
- ✓ **Guadalajara** (*gooah-dah-lah-Hah-rah*) (a city in Spain and also in Mexico)
- ✓ **mapa** (*mah-pah*) (map)

The vowel E

To get an idea of how the Spanish **e** sounds, smile gently, open your mouth a bit and say 'eh'. The sound should be like the letter *e* in the English word *pen*. In our pronunciation brackets, this vowel appears as *eh*.

Try these examples:

- ✓ **pelele** (*peh-leh-leh*) (rag doll; puppet)
- ✓ **pelo** (*peh-loh*) (hair)
- ✓ **seco** (*seh-koh*) (dry)

The vowel I

In Spanish the vowel **i** sounds like the English *ee* in 'seen', but just a touch shorter. To give you an example, when English speakers say 'feet' or 'street', Spanish speakers hear what sounds like almost two Spanish **is**.

We indicate this sound as *ee* in our pronunciation brackets. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ **irritar** (*ee-ree-tahr*) (to irritate)
- ✓ **piña** (*pee-nyah*) (pineapple)
- ✓ **pintar** (*peen-tahr*) (to paint)

The vowel O

To say **o**, the Spanish put their mouths in a rounded position, as if to breathe a kiss over a flower, and keep it in that position while saying **o**. The sound resembles the English **o** in *floor*, but a bit shorter. We indicate this sound as *oh* in the pronunciation brackets.

Try practising the sound on these words:

- ✓ **coco** (*koh-koh*) (coconut)
- ✓ **orilla** (*oh-ree-yah*) (a river bank)
- ✓ **oro** (*oh-roh*) (gold)
- ✓ **toro** (*toh-roh*) (bull)

The vowel U

The fifth and last vowel in Spanish is the **u**, and it sounds like the English letters *oo* in 'moon' or 'loon', but just a touch shorter. We write this sound as *oo* in the pronunciation brackets. Here are some examples of the Spanish **u** sound:

- ✓ **cuna** (*koo-nah*) (cradle)
- ✓ **cuñado** (*koo-nyah-doh*) (brother-in-law)
- ✓ **curioso** (*koo-reeoh-soh*) (curious)
- ✓ **fruta** (*froo-tah*) (fruit)
- ✓ **luna** (*loo-nah*) (moon)
- ✓ **tubo** (*too-boh*) (a tube)

Discovering diphthongs

Good grief, you say, what's that? Well, *diphthong* comes from Greek, where *di* means two and *thong* comes from a very similar word meaning sound or voice. (Don't worry, we had to look it up in the dictionary.) Very simply, it means *double sound*.

The Spanish word is **diptongo** (*deep-tohn-goh*). From the Spanish-speaking point of view, **diptongos** are the combination of two vowels. For instance, **i** and **o** combine to make **io** as in **patio** (*pah-teeoh*) (courtyard or patio).



Joining the weak to the strong

Diptongos are always made up of a weak and a strong vowel. Calling vowels ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ is a Spanish language convention. The convention comes from the fact that the so-called strong vowel is always dominant in the diphthong. To the Spanish speaker, **i** and **u** are weak vowels, leaving **a**, **e** and **o** as strong ones.



To visualise this weak or strong concept, consider a piccolo flute and a bass horn. The sound of the piccolo is definitely more like the Spanish **i** and **u**, whereas the base horn sounds more like the Spanish **a**, **e** and especially **o**.

Any combination of one strong and one weak vowel is a **diptongo** (*deep-tohn-goh*), which means that they belong together in the same syllable. In fact, they’re not only together, they’re stuck like superglue; you can’t separate them.

In the **diptongo**, usually the stress falls on the strong vowel (we talk more about stress in the later section ‘Looking at Pronunciation and Stress’). An accent mark – a little mark sitting above a vowel – alerts you when the stress falls on the weak vowel (turn to the later section ‘Understanding accents in diphthongs’ for more). In the combination of two weak vowels, the stress is on the second one.

Try these examples of diphthongs:

- ✓ **bueno** (*booeh-noh*) (good)
- ✓ **cuando** (*kooahn-doh*) (when)
- ✓ **fiar** (*feeahr*) (to sell on credit or to rely on someone or something)
- ✓ **fuera** (*fooeh-rah*) (out, outside)
- ✓ **suizo** (*sooee-thoh*) (Swiss)
- ✓ **viudo** (*beeoo-doh*) (widower)

Separating the strong from the strong

When you combine two strong vowels, they don’t form a diphthong. Instead, the vowels retain their separate values, and so you must put them into separate syllables. Have a look at these examples:

- ✓ **aorta** (*ah-ohr-tah*) (aorta) (see, just as in English!)
- ✓ **feo** (*feh-oh*) (ugly)
- ✓ **marea** (*mah-reh-ah*) (tide)
- ✓ **mareo** (*mah-reh-oh*) (dizziness)

Did you notice in the previous list how changing one letter, in **marea** and **mareo** for example, can change the meaning of a word? This letter phenomenon occurs in Spanish, just as in English. Finding such words is fun. In the case of the previous list, at least the two words come from the same root **mar** (*mahr*) (sea). And, associating the tide to one's dizziness isn't all that difficult. But in other places you can have oceans of difference. Here are some more examples: **casa** (*kah-sah*) (house) and **cosa** (*koh-sah*) (thing), and **pito** (*pee-toh*) (whistle), **pato** (*pah-toh*) (duck) and **peto** (*peh-toh*) (bib or breastplate).

Looking at Pronunciation and Stress

In Spanish, you stress one syllable in every word. Stress is the accent that you put on a syllable as you speak it. One syllable always gets more stress than the other syllables in a word. Finding the stress is easy in single-syllable words, but many words have more than one syllable, and that's when the situation becomes stressful (geddit?).

Searching for stress, normally

Can you believe that you're searching for stress? In Spanish, the right stress at the right time is a good thing, and fortunately stress in Spanish is easy to control. If you have no written accent, you have two possibilities:

- ✓ The word is stressed next to the last syllable if it ends in a vowel, an **n** or an **s**. Here are some examples:
 - **pollo** (*poh-yoh*) (chicken): the word ends in a vowel.
 - **Carmen** (*kahr-mehn*) (Carmen, as in the female name): the word ends in an **n**.
 - **mariposas** (*mah-ree-poh-sahs*) (butterflies): the word ends in an **s**.
- ✓ The word is stressed on the last syllable when it ends in a consonant other than **n** or **s**. Look at these examples:
 - **cantar** (*kahn-tahr*) (to sing)
 - **feliz** (*feh-leeth*) (happy)

Words not stressed in one of these two ways have an accent mark to indicate where you need to place the stress.

Spotting accented vowels

One good thing about having the accent mark on a vowel is that you can tell immediately where the stress is, just by looking at the word.



The accent mark doesn't affect how you pronounce the vowel, just which syllable you stress.

Here are some examples of words with accent marks on a vowel:

- ✓ **balcón** (*bahl-kohn*) (balcony)
- ✓ **carácter** (*kah-rahk-tehr*) (character, personality)
- ✓ **biógrafo** (*foh-toh-grah-foh*) (photographer)
- ✓ **pájaro** (*pah-Hah-roh*) (bird)

Understanding accents in diphthongs

An accent within a diphthong (check out the earlier section 'Discovering diphthongs' for more about the doubled vowels) shows you which vowel to stress. Take a look at these examples:

- ✓ **¡Adiós!** (*ah-deeohs*) (Goodbye!)
- ✓ **¡Buenos días!** (*booeh-nohs deeahs*) (Good morning!)
- ✓ **¿Qué decías?** (*keh deh-theeahs*) (What were you saying?)
- ✓ **tía** (*teeah*) (aunt)



If the strange punctuation in some of the words in this list looks confusing, check out the following section, which explains all!

¡Punctuation Plus!

The unfamiliar punctuation in phrases such as **¡Buenos días!**, **¿Qué decía?** and **¡Adiós!** is a particularly Spanish attribute. The language indicates the mood (or tone) of what you're saying both at the beginning and at the end of the phrase that forms a question or an exclamation, as in **¿Qué decía?** (*deh-theeah*) (what were you saying?) or **¿me decías?** (*meh dehtheeahs*) (what were you telling me?).



As far as we know, Spanish is the only language that provides this sort of punctuation, which is very useful when you have to read something aloud because you know beforehand how to modulate your voice when the phrase is coming up.

This punctuation is the verbal equivalent of making gestures, as the following examples demonstrate:

- ✓ **¿Dónde está?** (*dohn-deh ehs-tah*) (Where is it?)
- ✓ **¡Qué maravilla!** (*keh mah-rah-bee-yah*) (How wonderful!)

Some Basic Phrases to Know

The following phrases can get you through a number of awkward pauses while you think of the right word:

- ✓ **¡Olé!** (*oh-leh*) (Great!; Superb!; Keep going!): You often hear this Spanish expression during bullfights and at some rather passionate flamenco shows!
- ✓ **¿Qué pasa?** (*kee pah-sah*) (Hello, what's happening?): This expression is an informal, relaxed way to greet someone, or you can use it just to ask for an update on a situation.
- ✓ **¿De verdad?** (*deh behr-dahd*) (Really?): This phrase indicates slight disbelief.
- ✓ **¡No me digas!** (*noh meh dee-gahs*) (You don't say!): This phrase also conveys disbelief.



Fun & Games

Try to match these Spanish letters with the English letters they sound like. Draw a line from the Spanish letter to its English sounding equivalent and then provide a Spanish word that uses that sound.

Spanish Letter	English Letter	Spanish Word
ll	e	_____
j	H	_____
i	s	_____
z	k	_____
q	y	_____

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