

# Alphabet and pronunciation

Each letter of the Esperanto alphabet has just one sound (or *phoneme*); there are *no* silent letters. Words are always pronounced exactly as they are spelled, and vice-versa.

## Vowels

The vowels in Esperanto are **a, e, i, o** and **u**, pronounced much like the sounds in the American English words *pa*, *bet*, *machine*, *glory*, *rude*. A handy mnemonic for remembering is the phrase: **Are there three or two?**

The Esperanto vowels are so-called “pure” vowels, or *monophthongs*. In English we often use *diphthongs*—vowels that “glide” together multiple sounds in a single syllable. Try pronouncing the word *play* very slowly, and listen closely to the sound of the *a*. For most speakers, the vowel begins with the sound of *e* in *bet* and then changes to the sound of *i* in *machine*. Be careful not to do this with Esperanto vowels. Esperanto does have diphthongs (see below), but they are always explicitly marked.

## Consonants

Most consonants in Esperanto have the same sounds as their counterparts in American English: **b, d, f, h, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v, z**

The other consonants:

**c** sounds like the *ts* sound in *hats*. Examples: **facila, palaco, celo**

**ĉ** sounds like the *ch* in *chess*. **ĉu, eĉ, maĉo**

**g** sounds like the *g* in *good*. **ge, legas, pagi**

**ĝ** sounds like the *g* in *gem*. **ĝis, manĝas**

**ĥ** is a sound we don't have in English, except in loan words. It's the guttural *ch* in Scottish *loch* and Yiddish *chutzpah*. Very few Esperanto words use it. **eĥo, ĥoro**

**j** sounds like *y* in *yes*. **jes, juna, sinjoro**

**ĵ** sounds like *s* in *pleasure*. **ĵeti, ĵaluza, aĵo**

**r** is slightly “tapped” or rolled, as in Scottish. **patro, por, tri**

**ŝ** sounds like *sh* in *shell*. **ŝelo, ŝi, freŝa**

**ŭ** sounds like *u* in *persuade* or *w* in *we*. **ŭato**

## The “sc” consonant grouping

Americans tend to have a lot of trouble with this pair, even though the sound “sts” does occur in English.

A common phrase in Esperanto is **Mi ne scias** (= “I don’t know”). To pronounce **ne scias** properly, try saying the following English phrase:

*The birds in the **ne**sts **see** us.*

## Diphthongs (vowel glides)

Diphthongs in Esperanto are formed by combining a vowel with the consonants **j** or **ŭ**. Each letter is pronounced separately, but the sounds are allowed to glide together in a single syllable.

**aj** sounds like *ai* in *aisle*. **pajlo, bluj**

**ej** sounds like *ei* in *vein* or *ay* in *play*. **kafejo, vejno**

**oj** sounds like *oy* in *boy*. **arboj, fojno**

**uj** sounds like *uj* in *hallelujah*. **Germanujo, tuj**

**aŭ** sounds like *ow* in *how*. **naŭ, Aŭstralio**

**eŭ** is a tough one for Americans. It begins with the sound of *e* in *bet* and glides into the sound of *oo* in *boat*. **neŭtrala, Eŭropo**

## Accent / stress

The stress in Esperanto words is always placed on the second-to-last syllable. For some people it helps to imagine speaking with an exaggerated stereotype of an “Italian” accent. (e.g., “MA-ma MI-a!”)

**domo** (DO-mo)

**rapida** (ra-PI-da)

**Esperanto** (es-pe-RAN-to)

**inteligenta** (in-te-li-GEN-ta)

## Letter names and the *aboco-kanto*

The names of vowels are simply the sounds of those vowels. Consonants are named by adding **-o** to each. So letter **b** is named “**bo**”, **c** is “**co**”, and so on. Here’s an Esperanto version of the “Alphabet Song” using all the names:

A, bo, co, ĉo, do, e, fo / go, ĝo, ho, ĥo, i, jo, ĵo.  
Ko, lo, mo, no, o, po, ro / so, ŝo, to, u, ŭo, vo, zo.  
Jen la alfabeto, do, kantu kun mi: aboco...

## Typing the accented characters

Modern computers can easily handle the accented characters, but it isn't always obvious how to type them. A simple low-tech workaround is known as the "x method": just put an **x** after any character that takes an accent. Thus **ĉ** becomes **cx**, **ŝ** becomes **sx**, **ŭ** becomes **ux**, and so on. The word **ĉirkaŭ** (= "around") becomes **cxirkaux**. It's a bit ugly, but it works.

You may come across other solutions—for example the "h method" that uses **ch**, **gh**, **hh** etc., with a simple **u** for **ŭ**. The "x method" is more popular online, however—and less ambiguous, since there's no **x** character in the Esperanto alphabet to cause confusion.

## Pronunciation practice

Try pronouncing the following words; some are easy, some are quite tricky. When consonants or vowels are grouped together, make sure to pronounce each one distinctly, e.g. **boato** ("bo-AH-toh"), **aero** ("a-EH-roh"), **knabo**, (kah-NAH-boh), **scii** (sts-EE-ee) and to always place the stress on the second-to-last syllable, e.g. **familio** ("fah-mee-LEE-o").

*amas kaj amuza ataki bone dankon estas fakto naŭ granda imiti kato kio loka muziko nun Parizo por tablo uzi vin venas aero birdo boato blua dentisto devas familio honoro instruisto ĵaluza ideo laboro lerni letero lia lingvoj longa mia ĵus memoras multa patro rapidi saluton tie tre ankaŭ certe ĉirkaŭ ĉu decidis esperantisto Eŭropo ĝuste hejme hodiaŭ ĥoro internacia jes ĵurnalo kiel knabo paco poŝto kuracas neŭtrala kvin scii*

## False friends

Here's an especially devious list of Esperanto words that happen to look like English. Try sounding them out using Esperanto pronunciation only!

*al bane bare blue brake dance divide do fame fido glue gusto hare have idea image invite jam jen june lace lame lite literature male mane mare minus minute mole move note nun nature opinion ore pace page pane para penis per pike plane plume plus police pro pete pure radio range religion ride rule sale same sane sate save science side simile simple sole solve spice stare strange sub table time tire troue vera vice vine vole*