

Spanish: Word Stress & The Accent Mark

Accents are used in Spanish to

- 1) Identify the stress of a word and how to **pronounce** it.
- 2) Identify the stress of a word and how to **write** it.
- 3) Signal the difference in **meaning** of words that would otherwise be spelled the same.

I. There are a few different types of words in Spanish based on where the spoken stress is:

Agudas: have stress on the last syllable.

Examples: *doctor, ciudad, comer, razón*

Llanas: have stress on the penultimate syllable; most words in Spanish are *llanas*.

Examples: *nada, origen, compro, este*

Esdrújulas: Have stress on the third-to-last syllable. These always have accents.

Examples: *plátano, teléfono, dámelo*

Sobreesdrújulas: have stress on the fourth-to-last syllable. These always have accents. Many are commands.

Examples: *díganoslo, escribemela, pásamelo*

II. Now that we are aware of these types of words, we can practice two rules about where to put accents on words in Spanish.

An **accent is required** if these conditions are met:

- 1) If the word is **aguda** and ends in any vowel, N, or S.

Examples: *están, estás, hablé, corrí, estudió*

- 2) If the word is **llana** and ends in any consonant *except* for N or S.

Examples: *lápiz, árbol*

III. As we said earlier, accents are used to distinguish two words from one another that are spelled the same. Here is a list of some words where you can see the difference:

Sé – *yo* form of the verb “saber”

Se – pronoun (reflexive)

Yo no **sé** la respuesta.

Él **se** afeita todos los días.

Tú – “you” (subject)

Tu – possessive adjective

Tú eres muy perezoso.

Tu amigo es muy perezoso.

Mí – object of preposition

Mi – possessive pronoun

El regalo es para **mí**.

Mi tarea ya está hecha.

Él – “he” (subject)

El – definite article (m.)

Él tiene un perro grande.

El cuento es interesante.

Té – Tea

Te – DOP, IOP, reflexive pronoun

Tomamos **té** dulce en el sur.

No **te** creo.

Sí – Yes

Si – if (conjunction)

Sí, hice la tarea hoy.

Si tuviera tiempo, comería más.

You can also see the difference between the following words. Generally speaking, an accent causes the word to become interrogative. Without an accent, the word is used as a conjunction.

With accent	Without accent
Qué – what? ¿Qué quieres hacer hoy? <i>What do you want to do today?</i>	Que – that No hice la tarea que el profe asignó <i>I didn't do the homework that the professor assigned.</i>
Por qué – why? ¿Por qué no estabas en clase hoy? <i>Why weren't you in class today?</i>	Porque – because No estaba en clase porque me dolía el estómago. <i>I wasn't in class because my stomach hurt.</i>
Cuándo – when? (at what time?) ¿Cuándo empieza el concierto? <i>When does the concert start?</i>	Cuando – when (introducing adverb clause) Cuando llegue mi paquete, dámelo. <i>When my package arrives, give it to me.</i>
Dónde where? (in/at what place?) ¿Dónde está la casa de tu niñez? <i>Where is the house from your childhood?</i>	Donde – where (introducing relative clause) Voy a la casa donde vive mi madre. <i>I'm going to the house where my mother lives.</i>
Cómo – how? (in what way?) ¿Cómo estás hoy? <i>How are you today?</i>	Como –like or as Los niños se comportaron como ángeles. <i>The children behaved like angels.</i>
Quién – who? (which person?) ¿Quién cerró la puerta? <i>Who closed the door?</i>	Quien – who (introducing relative clause), the one who, he/she who, whoever Quien tenga la llave, entrégamelo ahora, por favor. <i>Whoever has the key, turn it in to me now, please.</i>