**Use of written accent marks in Spanish**

Accent marks are in Spanish for two different purposes: to indicate where the stress or emphasis falls on a word when it is pronounced, and to help differentiate between identically spelled words. They are only used over vowels (**á**, **é**, **í**, **ó**, **ú**), and are written as a short diagonal line, from upper right to lower left.

1. The following rules regarding written accents assume you know on which syllable of a word the stress occurs. An accent mark is normally NOT required if:
   1. The word ends in a vowel (**a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**) or **n** or **s** and the stress falls on the next-to-the-last (or penultimate) syllable. Examples:

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| **camino** |  | [**ca-MI-no**, *road*, ends in a vowel, and the stress falls on the next-to-the last syllable] |
| **hablan** | [**HA-blan**, *they speak*, ends in an **n** and the stress falls on the next-to-the-last syllable] |
| **muchachas** | [**mu-CHA-chas**, *girls*, ends in an **s** and the stress falls on the next-to-the-last syllable] |

* 1. The word ends in a consonant other than **n** or **s** and the stress falls on the last syllable. Examples:

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| **querer** |  | [**que-RER**, *to want*, ends in an **r** and the stress falls on the last syllable] |
| **ciudad** | [**ciu-DAD**, *city*, ends in a **d** and the stress falls on the last syllable] |

1. A written accent mark IS required if the situation is not as given in the above two rules, that is, when:
   1. The word ends in a vowel (**a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**) or **n** or **s** and the stress falls on the last syllable. Examples:

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| **caminó** |  | [**ca-mi-NÓ**, *he/she walked* ends in a vowel, and the stress falls on the last syllable] |
| **canción** | [**can-CIÓN**, *song*, ends in an **n** and the stress falls on the last syllable] |
| **verás** | [**ve-RÁS**, *you will see*, ends in an **s** and the stress falls on the last syllable] |

* 1. The word ends in a consonant other than **n** or **s** and the stress falls on the next-to-last syllable.  Examles:

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| **mártir** |  | [**MÁR-tir**, *martyr*, ends in an **r** and the stress falls on the next-to-the-last syllable] |
| **cárcel** | [**CÁR-cel**, *jail*, ends in an **l** and the stress falls on the next-to-the-last syllable] |

* 1. The stress falls on any vowel more than two syllables from the end of the word.  Examples:

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| **propósito** |  | [**pro-PÓ-si-to**, *purpose*, is stressed on the third-from-the-last syllable] |
| **dándomelo** |  | [**DÁN-do-me-lo**, *giving it to me*, is stressed on the fourth-from-the last syllable] |

* 1. The stress falls on a weak vowel (**i** or **u**) which comes immediately before or after a strong vowel (**a**, **e, o**).  Examples:

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| **día** |  | [**DÍ-a**, *day*; the stress falls on an **i** which is immediately followed by an **a**] |
| **actúo** |  | [**ac-TÚ-o**, *I act*; the stress falls on a **u** which is immediately followed by an **o**] |

* 1. **Note**: Unless accented, the letters **i** and **u** become semi-consonants when the come in contact with other vowels. Thus, without written accents, the above words would be pronounced **DYA** (one syllable) and **AC-tuo** (two syllables).

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| **To sum up the above rules:**  Does the word end in **a, e, i, o, u, n**, or **s**?   * 1. If the answer is “**yes**” and it is **not** stressed on the **next-to-the-last syllable**, a written accent is required.   2. If the answer is “**no**” and it is **not** stressed on the **last syllable**, a written accent is required. |

1. Accent marks are required on some words to differentiate them from otherwise identically spelled ones. There are three groups of these word pairs; in all cases the more emphatic word of the pair carries the written accent mark
   1. Exclamation and question words are written with a written accent mark; the corresponding relative pronouns or connecting words are not:

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| **¿adónde?** | *(to) where?* |  | **adonde** | *(to) where* |
| **¿cómo?** | *how?* |  | **como** | *as, like, because* |
| **¿cuál?** | *which?* |  | **cual** | *which, as* |
| **¿cuándo?** | *when?* |  | **cuando** | *when* |
| **¿cuánto(s)?** | *how much, how many?* |  | **cuanto(s)** | *as much, as many* |
| **¿dónde?** | *where?* |  | **donde** | *where* |
| **¿qué?** | *what, how?* |  | **que** | *which, that* |
| **¿quién(es)?** | *who, whom?* |  | **quie**n | *who, whom* |

* 1. Examples:

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| ¿**Adónde vas?** |  | *Where are you going?* |
| **¿Cuánto cuesta?** |  | *How much does it cost?* |
| **¡Qué interesante!** |  | *How interesting!* |
| **No sé cómo se llama.** |  | *I don't know what his/her name is. (indirect question)* |
| **Cuando vengan, iremos al parque.** |  | *When they come, we'll go to the park.* |
| **Digo que no es verdad.** |  | *I say that it isn't true.* |
| **La mujer de quien hablas es la jefa.** |  | *The woman you're talking about is the boss.* |

* 1. Several pairs of monosyllabic (one-syllable) words are similarly distinguished by the presence or absence of accent marks. The word that is more emphatic receives the written accent.

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| **dé** |  | *give* (subjunctive of **dar**) |  | **de** |  | *of, from* |
| **él** | *he, him* | **el** | *the* |
| **más** | *more, most* | **mas** | *but* |
| **mí** | *me* | **mi** | *my* |
| **sé** | *I know* (**saber**), *be* (**ser**) | **se** | *himself, herself,* etc. |
| **sí** | *yes, indeed* | **si** | *if, whether* |
| **té** | *tea* | **te** | *you, yourself* |
| **tú** | *you* | **tu** | *your* |

* 1. The demonstrative pronouns (**éste**, **ése**, and **aquél**, *this one*, *that one*) generally carry a written accent mark, while the demonstrative adjectives (**este**, **ese**, and **aquel**, *this*, *that*) never do. Note also that the neuter pronouns **esto**, **eso**, and **aquello** (*this thing*, *this matter*, *this business*) never take an accent mark since there is no corresponding adjective form.

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| **éste** |  | **ésta** |  | **éstos** |  | **éstas** |  | *this one, these* |
| **ése** | **ésa** | **ésos** | **ésas** | *that one, those* |
| **aquél** | **aquélla** | **aquéllos** | **aquéllas** | *that one, those* |

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| **este** |  | **esta** |  | **estos** |  | **estas** |  | *this, these* |
| **ese** | **esa** | **esos** | **esas** | *that, those* |
| **aquel** | **aquella** | **aquellos** | **aquellas** | *that, those* |

* 1. Examples:

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| **No me gusta esta blusa; prefiero ésa.** |  | *I don't like this blouse; I prefer that one.* |
| **Eso es estraño.** |  | *That's strange.* |

1. Special cases.
   1. When an adverb is formed by adding **-mente** to the feminine form of an adjective, the accent mark is retained, if the adjective form has one.   Examples:

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| **fácil** |  | *easy* |  | **fácilmente** |  | *easily* |
| **rápido** | *quick* | **rápidamente** | *quickly* |

* 1. **Sólo** vs. **solo**:

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| **Sólo** (with an accent) | = | **solamente,** *only* (an adverb) |
| **solo** (without an accent mark) | = | *alone* (an adjective). |

* 1. **Por qué** vs. **porque**:

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| **Por qué** (two words, with an accent mark) | = | *why* (question word) |
| **porque** (one word, no accent mark) | = | *because*. |

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