

The **Accent's** Way

THE AMERICAN ACCENT GUIDE **FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS**

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[Click to watch video](#)

In this guide, you will learn about the most common pronunciation challenges Spanish speakers face, how to overcome them, and how to PRACTICE effectively in order to improve your accent and clarity in English. Daily practice and repetition of sounds will help you create awareness, and help you develop the muscle memory needed to pronounce the sounds and words correctly with little effort!

Here are the 10 most common mistakes made by Spanish speakers:
(Don't forget to listen to the audio and to practice along)

MISTAKE #1:

Dropping final consonants at the end of words

In Spanish, words never end in a consonant cluster (when two or more consonants are pronounced together with no vowels between them, for example, strength, loved, texts). While clusters may appear at the beginning or middle of words in Spanish (español, hombre, crédito) they never appear at the end of words and are almost impossible for Spanish speakers to pronounce.

Therefore, it is very likely for Spanish speakers to unintentionally drop one or two consonant sounds if they are part of a final consonant sequence in order to bring the pronunciation closer to what's possible in Spanish - a single consonant.

Practice the following words, make sure you pronounce all consonants:

| | |
|----------|---------|
| Mind | Bent |
| Cleared | Camp |
| Scripts | Synched |
| Strength | Texts |
| Worked | Build |

MISTAKE #2:

Substituting a final M with N

The M consonant sound exists in Spanish, but it never appears at the end of words. Therefore, while it's not at all difficult for Spanish speakers to pronounce the M alone, it can be quite challenging for them to pronounce it at the end of words.

This is why when a word ends with M in English (some, ham, cream)

Spanish speakers may substitute it with the closest sound available that does show up at the end of words in Spanish - N (or NG).

This substitution usually happens subconsciously, and awareness is the number one factor in improving this pronunciation challenge.

The word 'game' is pronounced as 'gain'

The word 'seem' is pronounced as 'seen'

The word 'foam' is pronounced as 'phone'

Practice: First, pronounce the M clearly at the end of each of the following words, make sure your lips are closed and that you are not pronouncing an /n/ instead of the /m/.

Sam

Rum

Room

Slam

Meme

Comb

Cream

home

Now, pronounce the following pairs, making sure they don't sound the same:

Home- hone

Sum-son

Foam - phone

Gum-gun

Mam-man

Seem-seen

Game-gain

Team-teen

Term-turn

skim-skin

MISTAKE #3:

Z is pronounced as S

Since there's no Z (as in zoo) in Spanish, the Z sound is often misplaced with an S, especially when it appears in the middle or end of words.

The Z is the voiced pair of the S consonant sound. Basically, they are pronounced the same, except that for the fact that with the Z sound, the vocal cords are vibrating.

It's very easy to make this mistake since both sounds look and feel the same, except for the vibrations of the vocal cords.

This is also a result of the orthography (the way words are written and the spelling). Since English, unlike Spanish, is not a phonetic language, many times the /z/ sound is represented by the letter 's'. In Spanish, the letter 's' always represents a /s/ sound. That creates an additional challenge and confusion related to the perception of how the word should sound (unfortunately, most speakers learn English by reading and writing first and their listening skills are compromised).

Practice: The words below have an 's', but should be pronounced like /z/.

Practice them!

Husband

Was

Reason

His

Cousin

Has

Pause

Because

Is

season

MISTAKE #4:

The /y/ (As in 'yes') consonant sound and the /j/ (as in 'job) switch places

Oftentimes, Spanish speakers may pronounce the /y/ consonant sound as in 'yes' 'years' and 'yellow' as a /j/ sound, pronouncing it as jes, jears, and jello (by the way, this is not the same /j/ as in 'jalapeno').

Also, quite often the substitution will be reversed too.

A word that begins with 'j' will be pronounced with a /y/

Yob instead of job

Yust instead of just.

Practice the two sounds separately first:

Y

Yes

Yello

Young

Years

Yard

J

Job

genuine

Justice

Giraffe

Jam

And then in minimal pairs (do you pronounce them the same?)

Yet-jet

Yam-jam

Yolk-joke

Yell-jell

Yacht - jot

MISTAKE #5:

Different vowels are pronounced the same

In Spanish, there are 5 vowels (a, e, i, o, u) while in English there are about 16; none of them really correspond with the English sounds.

Since most Spanish speakers are not familiar or comfortable with the pronunciation of vowels in English, they tend to merge similar vowels into the closest vowel sound in Spanish.

Example of different words that are usually pronounced the same:

sheep-ship, reach-rich, leave- live (watch a video tutorial about the sheep-ship vowel pair)
pool-pull, food-foot, fool-full (watch a video tutorial about the pool-pull vowel pair).

| Distinguish between similar vowel pairs

Sheep-ship

Pool-pull

Read-rid

Luke-look

Least-list

Who'd -hood

Sleep-slip

Fool-full

Heat-hit

Food-foot

Beach-bitch

Boot-book

[Click here for a video tutorial about the 'sheep-ship'](#)

[Click here for a video tutorial about the 'pool-pull'](#)

MISTAKE #6:

The /v/ consonant is pronounced as /b/

Since the pronunciation of the letter 'v' in Spanish is more similar to the pronunciation of /b/ in English, this pronunciation carries over to English as well.

The V is a fricative and to pronounce it, the bottom lip has to touch the top teeth, and air passes between the teeth and the lips (it's a voiced sound).

The B is created as both lips close and touch each other.

If a B is pronounced in place of a 'v', words may change meaning:

'very' will sound like 'bury' and 'vote' will sound like 'boat'.

Practice: Make sure these two words do not sound the same!

Very - berry

Fiver - fiber

Vote - boat

Curve- curb

Vet - bet

Vat - bat

Vow - bow

Vest - best

MISTAKE #7:

The American R is replaced with a Spanish /r/

The Spanish R and American R are pronounced differently.

In Spanish, there are two R's (pero, perro) and for both sounds, the tip of the tongue touches the upper palate.

For the R in English, the tip of the tongue doesn't touch the upper palate, but curls back a bit as the lips round (click to watch a video tutorial about the R).

Spanish speakers often pronounce the American R as they would pronounce the Spanish R, bringing the tip of the tongue to touch the upper palate.

Practice: Make sure the tip of your tongue doesn't touch the upper palate when pronouncing the R.

| | |
|--------|--------|
| Red | Credit |
| Right | Three |
| Real | World |
| Around | Care |
| Area | Stars |

[Watch video tutorial: The American R](#)

MISTAKE #8:

Mispronouncing the H

Since the letter H is silent in Spanish, and in American English it is generally pronounced (not always, you can learn more about the H here), some speakers mispronounce the H and create a velar fricative instead (just like the 'j' sound in 'jalapeno').

While the H in English is soft and sounds like a whisper, the substitution is more dominant - the back of the tongue is high and close to the soft palate.

Practice: Pronounce the H clearly in the following words, and keep your throat open.

| | |
|-------|---------|
| Hair | History |
| House | Home |
| Hero | Hip |
| Ahead | Behind |
| hello | Who |

[Watch a video tutorial about the H](#)

MISTAKE #9:

A vowel is added to words beginning with /st/

In Spanish, a word will never begin in a consonant cluster. To simplify the 'impossible' pronunciation of words that begin with 'st' in English, Spanish speakers add the /e/ vowel sound to words that begin with 'st'.

'estreet' instead of 'street', 'estrange' instead of 'strange'.

Practice the words and make sure you don't add a vowel before.

| | |
|----------|-------|
| Street | Staff |
| Strange | Sting |
| Stripes | Story |
| Strong | Stick |
| Strength | Stay |

MISTAKE #10:

The /th/ consonant sound is substituted with /t/ or /d/

For the TH, the tongue has to stick out from between the teeth.

Since Spanish speakers don't have the TH consonant sound in their language, they tend to keep the tongue inside for words with TH.

It is a common mispronunciation and sometimes will result in pronouncing different words the same.

The /th/ in 'thanks' (soft, voiceless TH) will be replaced with a /t/ and the word will sound

like 'tanks'. The /th/ in 'they' (voiced) will be replaced with a /d/ and the word will sound like 'day'.

Interestingly enough, the voiced TH does occur in Spanish, unintentionally, when the d appears between two vowels, (for example in 'pedir', 'estado', 'lodo'). It's called an allophone.

[Simplifying the TH: video lesson](#)

Practice: Stick the tongue out and release air when pronouncing the following words.

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Theory | They |
| Theatre | Them |
| Authentic | Another |
| Something | Father |
| Bath | breathing |

And remember...

Practice Makes Better!

(cause perfection is overrated)