

THE LATIN ALPHABET

Welcome to the study of Latin! *Latina gaudium est!* (Latin is fun!). Languages can be difficult to learn, but also very rewarding. Latin is no different. Thankfully, there are *some* aspects of Latin that are fairly simple. We're going to start with one of the easiest tasks in Latin: pronouncing letters of the alphabet.

Some languages use different alphabets than we are used to in English. Sometimes these alphabets look similar to the letters we know, and sometimes they look very different.

Greek:	Α	Β	Γ	Δ	Ε	Ζ	Η	Θ	Ι	Κ	Λ
	Μ	Ν	Ο	Π	Ρ	Τ	Υ	Φ	Χ	Ψ	Ω

Hebrew:	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ
	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת

The Greek alphabet (above) is similar to ours, but some letters are very different. The Hebrew Alphabet (also above), on the other hand, is completely different! Thankfully, Latin uses the same alphabet as English, with a couple of missing letters. In fact, most of the letters make the same sounds in Latin that we know in English (yay!). In this lesson, we're only going to pay attention to the consonants that make different sounds in Latin than they do in English, but we'll consider *all* the vowels and vowel combinations. Let's talk about vowels first.

The vowels in Latin are the same as those in English. In addition, if you know Spanish or Italian, then you already have a pretty good idea of how the vowels sound in Latin. Like English vowels, every Latin vowel can be either short or long. Long vowels will have a small line written above them (called a macron).

A ā (long a) like the "a" in father

 a (short a) like the "a" in pizza

 *short a sounds almost just like long a when its accented

E ē (long e) like the "e" in they

 e (short e) like the "e" in pet

I ī (long i) like the "i" in pizza

 i (short I) like the "i" in pig

O ō (long o) like the "o" in alone

 o (short o) like the "o" in flop

U ū (long u) like the "u" in flute

 u (short u) like the "u" in put

Sometimes, two vowels make one sound together. We call these vowel combinations "diphthongs." In English, words like food, seek, and boat contain diphthongs. Here are the most common diphthongs in Latin that you need to know:

AE like "ai" in aisle (As in, I walked down an *aisle* in the grocery store.)

AU like "au" in sauerkraut (Gross!)

EI like "ei" in eight

OE like the "oi" in oink

So, now that you've mastered Latin verb sounds, you might want to know about a few consonants that are different in Latin.

C is always hard like *cat*. It is never soft (an "s" sound) like *city*.

CH never makes a "ch" sound like *chase* or a "sh" sound like *machine*. In Latin, it sounds just like a hard "c" as in *Christ*.

G is always hard like *goat*. It is never soft (a "j" sound) like in *giraffe*.

GN makes "ny" sound like in *lasagna*.

I is sometimes a consonant. When it comes before another vowel it is pronounced like the letter "y" in *yellow*.

J does not exist in classical Latin. In later versions of Latin it replaced the consonantal "i" and made a "y" sound. You won't see any j's in the Latin we are learning.

S always makes a snake sound, and never a "z" sound as in *was*.

V makes the same sound as our "w" as in *work*.

W There is no "w" because "v" does its job!

Y There is no "y" in Latin. See the letter "i" above for the "y" sound.

LATIN SYLLABLES

If there are no consonants next to each other, divide after each vowel or diphthong. So, the word *Rōma* is syllabified like this: Rō | ma.

Here are a few more examples:

magister mēnsam amāmus creabant

ma | gis | ter mēn | sam a | mā | mus cre | a | bant

LATIN WORD ACCENTS

Knowing how to recognize syllables will help with pronunciation. Words with more than one syllable have to have an accent (stress) on a syllable. Try saying the English words below by accenting different syllables to see how pronunciation is affected by the stress syllable.

BASEball vs baseBALL

EXit vs exIT

SYLlable vs sylLABLE

Here's the simple rule for Latin accents: In Latin, the stress falls on the next to last syllable if its vowel is long, and on the one before that (the next, next to last) if it is short. (Tip: a two-syllable word will always stress the first syllable.) Here are some examples:

MAGister

aMĀbam

PUer

creĀbitis

NUmerus