

Spanish Syllable Structure & Stress Patterns

The 3-Step Method for Counting Syllables

1

Find all the vowels (a, e, i, o, u) - these are your syllable centers

Example: hermano > h(e)rm(a)n(o) = 3 vowels = 3 syllables

2

Look at consonants between vowels - they follow specific patterns

This is where the magic happens - consonants "choose" which vowel to join!

3

Apply the splitting rules based on consonant patterns

Simple patterns that work 95% of the time!

Syllable Splitting Rules

One Consonant = Joins Next Vowel

Single consonants are "friendly" - they want to start the next syllable

Examples: ca-sa, co-mer

Two Different Consonants = Split Them

When you have two different consonants between vowels, split them in the middle

Examples: car-ta, her-ma-no

Spanish Digraphs = Act Like One Sound

These look like double letters but represent single sounds - treat them like one consonant

Spanish digraphs: rr (rolled R), ll (like y), ch (like English ch)

Examples: pe-rro, ca-lle, mu-cho

Special Pairs = Stay Together

Some consonant pairs are "best friends" and never split

Never split: bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, br, cr, dr, fr, gr, pr, tr

Examples: ha-blar, li-bro

Three+ Consonants = Split Smart

Keep the last consonant (or special pair) with the next vowel

Examples: cons-truir, com-pren-de

Spanish Digraphs (Special Letter Pairs)

These letter pairs make ONE sound and stay together:

CH: like "ch" in "chat"

Examples: mu-cho, le-che

LL: like "y" in "yes"

Examples: lla-ve, ca-lle

RR: rolled "r" sound

Examples: pe-rro, ca-rro

The Two Golden Stress Rules (90% of words!)

Rule 1: Words ending in vowels, -n, or -s

Stress the second-to-last syllable

Examples: CA-sa, LI-bro, HA-blan, GRA-cias

Rule 2: Words ending in consonants (except -n, -s)

Stress the last syllable

Examples: ha-BLAR, ciu-DAD, pro-FE-sor

When Accent Marks Override the Rules

When a word breaks the natural stress rules, Spanish adds an accent mark (´) to show where the stress actually falls.

Compare These Word Pairs:

papá (pa-PÁ) = dad

papa (PA-pa) = pope

mamá (ma-MÁ) = mum

mama (MA-ma) = breast/he-she sucks

médico (MÉ-di-co) = doctor

medico (me-DI-co) = I heal

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ✗ DON'T ignore accent marks - they change meaning and pronunciation
- ✗ DON'T split digraphs (ch, ll, rr) - they stay together
- ✗ DON'T forget the stress rules - they apply to 90% of Spanish words
- ✗ DON'T confuse syllable counting with vowel sounds in diphthongs

Practice Examples - Test Your Understanding

Examples (Study These First):

Word	Syllables	Count	Stress Pattern
hermano	her-ma-no	3	her-MA-no
construir	cons-truir	2	cons-TRUIR
estudiante	es-tu-dian-te	4	es-tu-DIAN-te
música	mú-si-ca	3	MÚ-si-ca

Your Turn - Fill These In (Answers on Next Page):

Word	Syllables	Count	Stress Pattern
problema	_____	_____	_____
teléfono	_____	_____	_____
importante	_____	_____	_____
difícil	_____	_____	_____
universidad	_____	_____	_____
trabajar	_____	_____	_____
español	_____	_____	_____
natural	_____	_____	_____

Answer Key - Check Your Work!

Word	Syllables	Count	Stress Pattern
problema	pro-ble-ma	3	pro-BLE-ma
teléfono	te-lé-fo-no	4	te-LÉ-fo-no
importante	im-por-tan-te	4	im-por-TAN-te
difícil	di-fí-cil	3	di-FÍ-cil
universidad	u-ni-ver-si-dad	5	u-ni-ver-si-DAD
trabajar	tra-ba-jar	3	tra-ba-JAR
español	es-pa-ñol	3	es-pa-ÑOL
natural	na-tu-ral	3	na-tu-RAL

Practice More with Audio!

Visit our interactive syllable structure lesson with comparison audio:

spanishgrammar.co.uk/syllable-structure