

LATIN PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Since virtually all of the **SACRED LATIN TEXTS** in this volume have been appointed for use in the Roman Church, the Roman pronunciation of the liturgical Latin has been chosen for presentation here. First authorized by Pope Pius X (*Motu Proprio*) in 1903, this method was later published by the St. Gregory Guild in 1937 (*The Correct Pronunciation of Latin According to Roman Usage*), and "enlarged and newly edited" by William D. Hall in 1971 (*Latin Pronunciation According to Roman Usage*). The *Singer's Manual of Latin Diction and Phonetics* by Robert S. Hines is noteworthy for its linguistic thoroughness and its inclusion of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as a universally useful pronunciation guide. Another excellent summary, along with very insightful comments concerning the performance and interpretation of Plainsong, is given by the Benedictines of Solesmes in their introduction to the *Liber Brevior* of 1954. The principles set forth by these reknowned interpreters of the liturgical Latin repertoire have been chosen as the basis for this pronunciation guide.

V O W E L S

The six vowels in the Latin language are:

A E I O U Y

In Latin, unlike English, all the vowel sounds should be pure and unchanging. Mixtures, impurities, and diphthongs are forbidden. "The vitally important element in this style," according to the Solesmes, "is the rich, open, warm sounds of the vowels A and U. The other elements will, to be sure, receive our close attention; but this one is primary and indispensable." The O is also problematical: both the "closed o" sound ([o]); lips too-rounded) and an "aw" sound that is too-open must be avoided; the correct sound is [ɔ], the "open o" of warm.

<u>Written</u>		<u>Pronounced</u>	<u>IPA</u>	<u>Incorrect Pronunciation</u>	<u>Transliterated</u>
A	=	<u>father</u>	[ɑ]	(never <u>fawn</u> or <u>fan</u>)	ah
E	=	<u>fed</u>	[ɛ]	(never <u>fate</u>)	eh
I	=	<u>fee</u>	[i]	(never <u>fir</u>)	ee
O	=	<u>fought</u>	[ɔ]	(never <u>foe</u>)	aw
U	=	<u>food</u>	[u]	(never <u>foot</u>)	oo
Y	=	<u>fee</u>	[i]	(like I above)	ee

Examples:

Kýrie eléison.
 Glória in excélsis.
 Crêdo in unum Déum.
 Sâncrus, Benedîctus qui vénit.
 Âgnus Dei, dóna nóbis pácem.

Keé - ree - eh eh - léh - ee - sáwn.
 Gláw - ree - ah een eh - kshéhl - sees.
 Kréh - daw een oó - noom Déh - oom.
 Sáhnh - toos. Beh - neh - deék - toos kwee véh - neet.
 Ah - nyus Déh - ee, dâw - nah nâw - bees pâh - chehm.

Generally, when two vowels come together, each retains its own distinct sound and is treated as a separate syllable:

<i>el<u>e</u>ison</i>	eh - <u>l</u> eh - <u>ee</u> - <u>s</u> awn
<i>fil<u>i</u>i</i>	fe <u>e</u> - <u>lee</u> - <u>ee</u>
<i>me<u>i</u>, <u>a</u>it</i>	me <u>h</u> - <u>ee</u> , <u>áh</u> - <u>eet</u>

In some musical settings consecutive vowels are treated by the composer as one syllable and assigned to a single note, in which case they should be treated as "diphthongs," with the first vowel sound receiving the greatest duration and the second vowel introduced as a "vanishing vowel" just prior to the following syllable. For ensemble precision and clarity of diction these durations may be assigned rhythmic values, but they should not be articulated and heard as separate rhythmic entities.

AE/OE should be pronounced as **E** ([ɛ], "eh").

<i>b<u>o</u>nae volunt<u>ar</u>is</i>	b <u>aw</u> - <u>neh</u> vaw - loon - t <u>ah</u> - tees
<i>t<u>e</u>nebrae fact<u>ae</u> sunt</i>	t <u>eh</u> - <u>neh</u> - bre <u>h</u> f <u>ah</u> k - t <u>eh</u> soont
<i>rex coel<u>e</u>stis</i>	rrehks che <u>h</u> - l <u>eh</u> - stees
<i>in saecula saecul<u>o</u>rum</i>	een s <u>eh</u> - coo - lah s <u>eh</u> - coo - l <u>aw</u> - room

U when preceded by **Q** or **NG** and followed by another vowel, is sung quickly (like the glide [w]) and is part of the same syllable as the vowel which follows:

<i>qu<u>i</u>, qu<u>ae</u>, qu<u>od</u>, qu<u>am</u></i>	kwee, kweh, kwawd, kwahm
<i>u<u>nde</u> fluxit sa<u>ng</u>uine</i>	o <u>on</u> - deh floo - kseet sa <u>hn</u> - gwee - neh

Au/Eu/Ay are sung as diphthongs, with the greatest duration given to the first vowel, and the second vowel introduced just prior to the following syllable or word:

<i>Laudate D<u>o</u>minum</i>	Lah - ood <u>ah</u> - teh	D <u>aw</u> - mee - noom
<i>Victimae pasch<u>al</u>i laudes</i>	Veek - tee - meh	pah - sk <u>ah</u> - lee l <u>ah</u> - oodehs

C O N S O N A N T S

If the purity of the Latin vowels is responsible for the warmth and rich vocal color of this venerable language, the consonants establish its essential character. Clean, quick articulation is essential; lyric diction is the rule. Double consonants should be prolonged and slightly suspended (like Italian), and, accordingly, the **D**, **T**, and **K** should not be strongly plosive as they are in English.

The following consonants are pronounced as they are in English:

B D F K L M N P Q V

and the other consonants are pronounced as follows:

C

is hard, like "k" in kick :

<u>Cum</u> <u>Sáncto</u> <u>Spiritu</u>	<u>Koom</u> <u>Sáhŋk</u> - taw <u>Speé</u> - ree - too
<u>Gloricámus</u> <u>te</u>	<u>Glaw</u> - ree - <u>fee</u> - káh - moos <u>teh</u>
<u>Úbi</u> <u>cāritas</u>	<u>Oó</u> - bee <u>káh</u> - ree - tahs

except before E, AE, OE, I, Y, when it is like "ch" in church :

<u>Dóna</u> <u>nóbis</u> <u>pācem</u>	<u>Dáw</u> - nah <u>náw</u> - bees <u>páh</u> - <u>chehm</u>
<u>descēdit</u> <u>de</u> <u>coēlis</u>	<u>deh</u> - shéhn - deet <u>deh</u> <u>chéh</u> - lees
<u>Rex</u> <u>coelēstis</u>	<u>RRehks</u> <u>chéh</u> - lēh - stees
<u>In</u> <u>dūlcī</u> <u>júbilo</u>	<u>Een</u> <u>doól</u> - <u>chee</u> <u>yoó</u> - bee - law

CC before the above vowels is pronounced "tch" (stopped "r"):

<u>Ecce</u> <u>sacērdos</u>	<u>Eh</u> - <u>tcheh</u> <u>sah</u> - <u>chéhr</u> - daws
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but

<u>In</u> <u>Ecclesiūs</u>	<u>Een</u> <u>Ehk</u> - <u>kléh</u> - šee - ees
<u>peccāta</u> <u>mūdi</u>	<u>pehk</u> - <u>káh</u> - tah <u>moón</u> - dee

SC before these same vowels is like "sh" in shell :

<u>ascēdit</u> ; <u>descēdit</u>	<u>ah</u> - <u>shéhn</u> - deet; <u>deh</u> - <u>shéhn</u> - deet
<u>suscipe</u> <u>deprecationem</u>	<u>soó</u> - <u>shee</u> - peh <u>deh</u> - <u>preh</u> - cah - tsee - áw - nehm

CH is always like K :

<u>Chrīste</u> <u>elēison</u>	<u>Kreé</u> - steh <u>eh</u> - lēh - ee - sawn
<u>Jesum</u> <u>Chrīstum</u>	<u>Yéh</u> - šoom <u>Kreé</u> - stoom

G

is hard, like the "g" in God:

<u>Glória</u> <u>Pátri</u>	<u>Gláw</u> - ree - ah <u>Páh</u> - tree
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except before E, AE, OE, I, when it is soft like the "g" in gem :

<u>Pānis</u> <u>angélicus</u>	<u>Páh</u> - nees <u>ahn</u> - jéh - lee - coos
<u>Fīlium</u> <u>unigénitum</u>	<u>Fee</u> - lee - oom <u>oo</u> - nee - jéh - nee - toom

GN has the prepalatal sound found in Italian (sogno), French (digne), and Spain (señor), which is probably best rendered as "ny" :

<u>Ágnus</u> <u>Dēi</u>	<u>Áh</u> - <u>nyoos</u> <u>Déh</u> - ee
<u>prōpter</u> <u>māgnam</u>	<u>práwp</u> - tehr <u>máh</u> - <u>nyahm</u>
<u>O</u> <u>māgnum</u> <u>mystérium</u>	<u>Aw</u> <u>máh</u> - <u>nyoom</u> <u>mee</u> - stéh - ree - oom
<u>Magnificat</u>	<u>Mah</u> - <u>nyee</u> - fee - caht

H

is silent as in honest (not honey) :

<i>pax hominibus</i>	pa.hks	()aw - meé - nee - boos	
<i>et homo factus est</i>	eht	()áw - maw fáhk - toos	ehst

except in the two Medieval glosses "*michi*" and "*nichil*" :

<i>míhi; níhil</i>	meé - kee;	neé - keel
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PH has the sound of "f" :

<i>per prophétas</i>	pehr	praw - fêh - tahs
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J

is pronounced like the "y" in you (the glide [j]). Care must be taken to move quickly and completely through this sound to the purity of the following vowel:

<i>Jubilare Deo</i>	Yoo - bee - láh - reh	Déh - aw
<i>Jesu Chríste</i>	Yéh - šu	Kreé - steh
<i>et semini ejus</i>	eht séh - mee - nee	éh - yoos

and is sometimes written as an "i" :

<i>Allelúia!</i>	Ahl - leh - loó - yah!
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PH

is pronounced like "f" :

<i>Chérubim et Séraphim</i>	Kéh - roo - beem	eht Séh - rah - feem
<i>Prophetárum númerus</i>	Praw - feh - táh - room	noó - meh - roos

R

should be flipped with the tongue when it appears between two vowels or at the end of a word ([ɹ] , herein transliterated as "r" - never the burred [r] as in American English), and should be rolled when it appears at the beginning of a word ([ʀ] , herein transliterated as "RR" or "rr"). This consonant also requires special attention when combined with other consonants:

<i>Miserere nobis</i>	Mee - šeh - reh - reh	naw - bees
<i>Per Prophétas</i>	Pehr	Praw - fêh - tahs
<i>Rex treménda</i>	RRehks	trêh - méhn - deh
<i>et resurréxit</i>	eht	rreh - šoo - rrêh - kseet

it should not be introduced too early and thereby influence or modify the purity of the vowel which precedes it:

<i>Kýrie</i>	Keé - ree - eh, <u>not</u> keé - ee - eh
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S

is hard as in see (never raise) :

<u>S</u> anctus	Sáhŋk - toos
Veni <u>S</u> ancte <u>S</u> piritus	Véh - nee Sáhŋk - teh Speé - ree - toos

except when it comes between two vowels and is *slightly* softened (š) :

Miserere <u>m</u> ei, D <u>e</u> us	Mee - <u>š</u> eh - rêh - reh méh - ee Déh - oos
invisib <u>i</u> lium	een - vee - <u>š</u> ee - beé - lee - oom
In parad <u>i</u> s <u>u</u> m	Een pah - rah - deé - <u>š</u> oom

SCH is like the "sk" of school :

Victimae pascháli laudes Veék - tee - meh pah - skáh - lee láh - oodehs

T

is hard as in tea, but not as plosive as it is in English:

Tu solus altissimus Too sáw - loos ahl - teé - see - moos

TI before a vowel and following any letter except S, X, or T is pronounced "tsee" :

Grat <u>i</u> as agimus tibi	Gráh - tsee - ahs áh - jee - moos teé - bee
deprecat <u>i</u> onem nostram	deh - preh - cah - tsee - áw - nehm náu - strahm
consubstanti <u>a</u> lem Pátri	cawn - sub - stahn - tsee - áh - lehm Páh - tree
but	
m <u>i</u> x <u>t</u> io; mix <u>t</u> ura	meéks - tee - aw; meeks - toó - rah

TH is always hard, like tea :

ún <u>u</u> m sánctam Cathólicam	oó - noom sáhŋk - tahm Cah - táw - lee - cahm
Dóminus D <u>e</u> us Sábaoth	Dáu - mee - noos Déh - oos Sáh - bah - awt

X

is pronounced like "ks" as in tacks or tax :

R <u>x</u> trem <u>e</u> ndae	RRehks treh - méhn - deh
Júste J <u>u</u> dex	Yoó - steh Yoó - dehks

except when it comes between 2 vowels and is *slightly* softened ("ks") :

D <u>i</u> xit Mar <u>i</u> a	Deé - <u>k</u> seet Mah - reé - ah
láudat ex <u>e</u> rcitus	láh - oodaht eh - <u>k</u> séhr - chee - toos
Exultáre D <u>e</u> o	Eh - <u>k</u> sool - táh - teh Déh - aw

XC is pronounced as "ksk" before the vowels O, A, or U :

excogitáre; excusárus eks - kaw - jee - táh - reh; eks - koo - šáh - toos

but when XC appears before E, AE, OE, I, and Y it becomes "ksh" :

in excélsis een eh - kshéhl - sees

Y is treated like the vowel I (fil, "ee").

Z is pronounced like "dz" of *suds* :

et cum Lázaro . eht coom Láh - dzah - raw

COMMON PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS

As most directors have experienced far too often, the same problems seem to plague beginning choristers and inexperienced directors. Here are a few things to watch for:

- A often pronounced too far back in the throat instead of forward and open. Sing "ah" -- not "aw" (it is not "Awdoramus Te").
- E often too bright ("ay" instead of "eh"); sometimes even introduces the diphthong "ayee" (it is not "Adoramus Tayee").
- I sometimes pronounced "ih" instead of "ee" -- especially in the phrase *in excelsis*.
- O is often pronounced "oh" or "ohoo" (as a diphthong) instead of "aw" (it is not "Glohria")
- U often impure, towards *foot* or slightly "umlauted," especially if preceded by J. (*cujus, ejus*)
- Y sometimes heard as "ih" -- especially in the word *Kyrie*.
- AU initial vowel not prolonged long enough before changing to [ul.
- AE/OE often pronounced "ay" instead of "eh".
- GN one oftens hears a hard G, expecially in *Magnificat* and *Agnus*.
- H is often pronounced (*hominibus*); it should be silent, except *mihi* and *nihil*.
- J this sound must not be mixed in (remain) with the following [u] vowel; an impure umlaut sound often results.
- R is burred instead of flipped or rolled.
- S not Z, although *slightly* softened when it comes between two vowels.
- TI often pronounced "tee" instead of "tsee".
- TH should be "t", not "th"; listen to *Sabaoth* and *carholicam* especially closely.
- X note the two exceptions to the "ks" pronunciation, expecially *excelsis* (it is not ehks - chéhi - sees).