

Latin Pronunciation Guide

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We will sing with “Standard ‘American’ Church Latin” (as opposed to Classical Latin, or any variety of European Dialectical Latin).

Vowels

Each vowel has one sound.

A is pronounced as ‘ah’ in *father*, never as in the word *can*.

E is pronounced as ‘eh’ in *red, men, met*; never with the suspicion of a second sound as in *ray*.

I is pronounced as ‘ee’ in *feet*, never as ‘ih’ in *milk* or *tin*.

O is pronounced as ‘oh’ in *role*, never as in *go*.

U is pronounced as ‘oo’ in *moon*, never as u in *custom*.

Y is pronounced and treated as the Latin **I** (‘ee’).

AE and **OE** are pronounced as one sound, like the Latin **E** above (‘eh’).

caelum = *cheh-loom*

Otherwise, when two vowels come together, each keeps its own sound and constitutes a separate syllable.

diei = *dee-eh-ee*

fili = *fee-lee-ee*

This applies to **OU**, **AI** and **EI**.

prout = *proh-oot*

coutuntur = *coh-oo-toon-toor*

mei = *meh-i*

If several notes are sung on a double-vowel, all but the last note are carried by the *first vowel*. The second vowel is heard only on the last note as passing to the next syllable.

lauda = *lah~ah~ah~ah-wda*

euge = *eh~eh~eh~eh-wge*

U preceded by **Q** or **NG** and followed by another vowel as in words like *qui* and *sanguis*, keeps its normal sound (the English ‘w’) and is uttered as one syllable with the vowel which follows.

qui = *kwee*

quae = *kweh*

quod = *kwohd*

quam = *kwahm*

sanguis = *sah-ngwees*

But **cui** forms two syllables, and is pronounced as *koo-ee*.

Consonants

C before E/AE/OE ('eh') or **I/Y** ('ee') is soft, and pronounced as 'ch' in *church*.

caelum = cheh-loom

Cecilia = cheh-chee-lee-ah

Otherwise, C is hard like the English 'k'.

catholicam = kah-toh-lee-kahm

CC before E/AE/OE or I/Y is pronounced 't-ch'.

ecce = eht-cheh

siccitas = seet-chee-tahs

CH is always like 'k' (even before E or I).

cham = kam

G before E/AE/OE or I/Y is soft, and pronounced as 'j' in *generous*.

genitum = jeh-nee-toom

regina = reh-jee-nah

Otherwise, G is hard, as in *government*.

virgo = veer-goh

ego = eh-goh

GN has the softened sound given to these letters in French and Italian (or the Spanish ñ). The nearest English equivalent would be 'ny'.

agnus = ah-nyoos

regnum = reh-nyoom

magnificat = mah-nyee-fee-kaht

H is silent,

hominibus = 'oh-mee-nee-boos

except in two words where it is pronounced as 'k':

nihil = nee-keel

mihi = mee-kee

(In ancient books these words are often written *nichil* and *michi*.)

J (often written as **I**) is treated as **Y**, forming one sound with the following vowel.

alleluia = al-leh-loo-ya

Jesu = yeh-zoo

R must be slightly rolled on the tongue. Care must be taken not to modify the quality of the vowel in the syllable preceding the R.

kyrie = kee-ree-eh, not *kear-ee-eh* (or worse yet, *kear-ee-ay*)

S is generally aspirated as in the English word *sea*, but is slightly vocalized when coming between two vowels.

sanctus = sah-nktoos

vs.

eleison = eh-leh-ee-zohn

SC before E/AE/OE or I/Y is pronounced as ‘sh’ in *shed*.
descendit = *deh-shehn-deet*

T and TH are like the English ‘t’.
Christe = *kree-steh*
catholicam = *kah-toh-lee-kahm*

TI before a vowel and following any letter (except S, X, or T) is pronounced as ‘tsee’.
gratias = *grah-tsee-ahs*
laetitia = *leh-tee-tsee-ah*

X is pronounced ‘ks,’ but is slightly vocalized (as in the English ‘gz’) when coming between two vowels.
pax = *pahks*
vs.
exercitus = *eh-gzher-chee-toos*

XC before E/AE/OE or I/Y is pronounced as ‘ksh’ or ‘gsh’.
excelsis = *egg-shel-sees*
Otherwise, XC has the ordinary hard sound of the letters composing it.
excussorum = *eks-coos-soh-room*

Z is voiced, and pronounced as ‘dz.’ In this respect, it is related to the Latin **TI**, which is essentially the same sound but aspirated.

B, D, F, K, L, M, N, P, Q, & V (the remaining consonants) are pronounced as in English.

Double Consonants must be clearly sounded.
bello = *behl-loh*, not the English *bellow*

And of course, as much as possible, never break up the syllables of a word with a breath.