

## spanish alphabet

<i>Aa</i> a	<i>Bb</i> be	<i>Cc</i> the	<i>Ch ch</i> che	<i>Dd</i> de
<i>Ee</i> e	<i>Ff</i> e-fe	<i>Gg</i> khe	<i>Hh</i> a-che	<i>Ii</i> ee
<i>Jj</i> khe-ta	<i>Kk</i> ka	<i>Ll</i> e-le	<i>Ll ll</i> e-lye	<i>Mm</i> e-me
<i>Nn</i> e-ne	<i>Ññ</i> e-nye	<i>Oo</i> o	<i>Pp</i> pe	<i>Qq</i> koo
<i>Rr</i> e-re	<i>Ss</i> e-se	<i>Tt</i> te	<i>Uu</i> oo	<i>Vv</i> oo-ve
<i>Ww</i> oo-ve do-vle	<i>Xx</i> e-kees	<i>Yy</i> ee-grye-ga	<i>Zz</i> the-ta	

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## introduction

The lively and picturesque language of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* and Almodóvar's movies, Spanish (*español* *es-pa-nyol*), or Castilian (*castellano* *kas-te-lyá-no*), as it's also called in Spain, has over 390 million speakers worldwide. Outside Spain, it's the language of most of Latin America and the West Indies and is also spoken in the Philippines and Guam, in some areas of the African coast and in the US.

Spanish belongs to the Romance group of languages – the descendents of Latin – together with French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. It's derived from Vulgar Latin, which Roman soldiers and merchants brought to the Iberian Peninsula during the period of Roman conquest (3rd to 1st century BC). By 19 BC Spain had become totally Romanised and Latin became the language of the peninsula in the four centuries that followed. Thanks to the Arabic invasion in AD 711 and the Arabs' continuing presence in Spain during the next eight centuries, Spanish has also been strongly influenced by Arabic, although mostly in the vocabulary. Today's Castilian is spoken in the north, centre and south of Spain. Completing the colourful linguistic profile of the country, Basque (*euskera* *e-oos-ke-ra*), Catalan (*catalán* *ka-ta-lan*) and Galician (*gallego* *ga-lye-go*) are also official languages in Spain, though Castilian covers by far the largest territory.

Besides the shared vocabulary of Latin origin that English and Spanish have in common, there's also a large corpus of words from the indigenous American languages that have entered English via Spanish. After Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492, America's indigenous languages had a considerable impact on Spanish, especially in words to do with flora, fauna and topography (such as *tobacco*, *chocolate*, *coyote*, *canyon*, to name only a few).

Even if you're not familiar with the sound of Spanish through, say, the voices of José Carreras or Julio Iglesias, you'll be easily seduced by this melodic language and have fun trying to roll your *rr*'s like the locals. You may have heard the popular legend about one of the Spanish kings having a slight speech impediment which prompted all of Spain to mimick his lisp. Unfortunately, this charming explanation of the lisping 's' is only a myth – it's actually due to the way Spanish evolved from Latin and has nothing to do with lisping monarchs at all. So, when you hear someone say *gracias gra-thyas*, they're no more lisping than when you say 'thank you' in English.