



ESPERANTO LESSON

Esperanto Grammar 1 • Chapter 1

• Sounds and Spelling

Esperanto Grammar 1

Chapter 1 · Sounds and Spelling

abc Sounds and Spelling — Sonoj kaj literumado

Esperanto spelling has no surprises. Every letter has one sound, every sound has one letter, and the stress is always in the same place. This chapter teaches the alphabet, the six accented letters, how to type them, and the single stress rule. It ends with the sixteen rules of Esperanto grammar as a map of the eight chapters ahead. This is the one chapter with pronunciation guides in English spelling; from Chapter 2 on, the Esperanto speaks for itself.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

Say every letter, always the same way. Put the stress on the **next-to-last syllable** of every word, without exception. If you can do those two things, you can read any Esperanto word aloud correctly the first time.

The 28 letters

The alphabet is the Latin alphabet with four letters removed (*q, w, x, y*) and six letters with a hat, called a *circumflex* (*ĉ ĝ ĥ ĵ ŝ*) or a *breve* (*ŭ*) added. That gives 28 letters in all:

a b c ĉ d e f g ĝ h ĥ i j ĵ k l m n o p r s ŝ t u ŭ v z

Five vowels (*a e i o u*), and 23 consonants. The letter names add *-o* to the consonant, so you can spell a word aloud: **bo, co, ĉo, do, fo, go, ĝo, ho, ĥo, jo, ĵo, ko, lo, mo, no, po, ro, so, ŝo, to, ŭo, vo, zo** (check).

The vowels: five pure sounds

LETTER	SOUND	LIKE THE...	EXAMPLES
a	ah	<i>a</i> in <i>father</i> (not <i>cat</i> , not <i>cake</i>)	kafo coffee · akvo water
e	eh	<i>e</i> in <i>bed</i>	teo tea · ne no
i	ee	<i>ee</i> in <i>see</i> , but short	libro book · vi you

LETTER	SOUND	LIKE THE...	EXAMPLES
o	oh (pure)	o in <i>port</i> , or the Scots <i>no</i> (no glide)	domo house · bone well
u	oo	oo in <i>moon</i> , but short	nur only · ĉu (a question word)

The vowels stay pure: do not let them glide into a second sound, as English does in *no* or *say* (in most accents). Scottish speakers have an advantage here, since the Scots *o* in *no* and *e* in *say* are already close to pure.

The consonants that behave as you expect

b d f h k l m n p t v z sound as in English; **s** is always as in *sit* (never *z*), and **g** is always hard as in *go*. **r** is rolled or tapped, as in a Scottish accent. Double letters are pronounced double, as in Italian (check): **mallonga** (short) has a doubled *l*, held for twice as long.

The consonants that need care

LETTER	SOUND	LIKE THE...	EXAMPLES
c	ts	<i>ts</i> in <i>cats</i>	cent hundred · centro centre
ĉ	ch	<i>ch</i> in <i>church</i>	ĉevalo horse · ĉokolado chocolate
ĝ	j	<i>j</i> in <i>jam</i>	ĝardeno garden · ĝi it
ĥ	kh	<i>ch</i> in Scots <i>loch</i>	ĥaoso chaos · ĥoro choir
j	y	<i>y</i> in <i>yes</i>	jes yes · jaro year
ĵ	zh	<i>s</i> in <i>measure</i> , French <i>j</i>	ĵurnalo newspaper · ĵaŭdo Thursday
ŝ	sh	<i>sh</i> in <i>ship</i>	ŝipo ship · ŝuo shoe
ŭ	w	<i>w</i> in <i>now</i> (only after a vowel)	aŭto car · Eŭropo Europe

A Scottish head start

Two sounds that trouble many English learners are ordinary in Scotland. The Esperanto **ĥ** is the *ch* of *loch* (and of *Auchtermuchty*), and the Esperanto **r** is the rolled Scots *r*. If you say *Edinburgh* with

a proper *-burgh*, you are already close to **Edinburgo** (check this spelling of the city's name).

Two letters, two sounds: the diphthongs

The letters *j* and *ŭ* also turn up after a vowel to form six two-sound combinations that fit in one syllable. They matter for the stress rule, so learn them as a set:

SPELLING	SOUNDS LIKE	EXAMPLES
aj	the <i>ai</i> of <i>aisle</i> (rhymes with <i>eye</i>)	kaj and · tajpi to type
ej	the <i>ay</i> of <i>day</i> (pure)	plej most · mejlo mile
oj	the <i>oy</i> of <i>boy</i>	libroj books · domoj houses
uj	oo-y	ĉiuj everyone
aŭ	the <i>ow</i> of <i>cow</i>	aŭto car · aŭ or
eŭ	eh-oo run together	Eŭropo Europe

Typing the accented letters

The six hatted letters are not on a standard British keyboard, and this is the practical hurdle for new learners. There are four ways round it:

1. **The x-system.** Type *x* after the letter: **cx gx hx jx sx ux** stand for **ĉ ĝ ĥ ĵ ŝ ŭ**. Since Esperanto has no *x* of its own, nothing is ambiguous. It is the most common system in e-mail and chat, and many Esperanto web tools convert it as you type (check which).
2. **The h-system.** Type *h* after the letter (**ch gh hh jh sh**) and just *u* for *ŭ*. This is older, and less clear, because *ch*, *gh* and *sh* can also appear as separate letters in unadapted names.
3. **An Esperanto keyboard layout.** Operating systems offer a layout, or you can install a free one, that puts the six letters on a key or a key combination (check the current options for Windows, macOS and your phone).
4. **Copy and paste** from a character map or a web page, for a few words only.

In this course the hatted letters are always printed in full, so what you read here is the standard spelling. For your own notes, the x-system is the quickest to start with.

Stress: always the next-to-last syllable

A syllable has one vowel (a diphthong counts as one). To find the stress, count syllables from the end of the word and stop at the second one. That syllable is stressed, always.

WORD	SYLLABLES	STRESS	ENGLISH
kafo	ka-fo	KA-fo	coffee
libroj	li-broj	LI-broj	books (<i>oj</i> is one syllable)
Esperanto	es-pe-ran-to	es-pe-RAN-to	Esperanto
Skotlando	skot-lan-do	skot-LAN-do	Scotland
Edinburgo	e-din-bur-go	e-din-BUR-go	Edinburgh
ĝardeno	ĝar-de-no	ĝar-DE-no	garden
ĉielo	ĉi-e-lo	ĉi-E-lo	sky (<i>i</i> and <i>e</i> are two syllables)
Hungario	hun-ga-ri-o	hun-ga-RI-o	Hungary

Watch out: words in -io and -ia

In **Hungario**, **Germanio**, **Italio** and **Francio**, the *i* and the *o* are separate syllables, so the stress falls on the *i*: **hun-ga-RI-o**, **ger-ma-NI-o**. English speakers often stress these like *Hungary* or *Germany*. The rule does not bend for names. The plural -j does not shift the stress, because it joins the last vowel's syllable: **LI-bro** becomes **LI-broj**.

The sixteen rules: a map of the course

Dr L. L. Zamenhof, who published the first Esperanto book in 1887, summarised the grammar in sixteen rules, which later became part of the *Fundamento* (1905), the official foundation of

the language (check dates). Wording and order vary between editions, so treat this as a summary. Rules 9 and 10 are this chapter. The rest are spread over the following chapters.

RULE	WHAT IT SAYS	CHAPTER
1	No indefinite article ("a"); one definite article, la , for everything	2
2	Nouns end in -o ; plural -j ; accusative -n	2
3	Adjectives end in -a , and agree with their noun; comparison with pli and plej	3
4	The numbers, and how they are built	7
5	The personal pronouns; possessives end in -a	4
6	Verbs do not change for person or number; the tense and mood endings; the participles	4, 7
7	Adverbs end in -e	3
8	Prepositions are followed by the plain (nominative) form	7
9	Every word is pronounced as it is written	1
10	Stress is on the next-to-last syllable	1
11	Compound words are formed by joining the parts	5
12	With another negative word, ne is dropped	8
13	To show direction, the accusative -n is used	2
14	Each preposition has one fixed meaning; je has no meaning of its own	7
15	Foreign words are used unchanged, apart from spelling	5, 8
16	The final <i>a</i> of la and the final <i>o</i> of a noun may be dropped (elision), mostly in poetry	8

Chapter 6, the correlative table, is not one of the sixteen rules as such, but it is the biggest single piece of the grammar, and it is covered in full.



In Use — En uzo

Read each exchange aloud, slowly, with the stress on the next-to-last syllable. The meanings are given; the grammar comes later.

① Meeting

A:

Saluton! Kiel vi fartas?

Hello! How are you?

B:

Bone, dankon. Kaj vi?

Well, thanks. And you?

A:

Ankaŭ bone.

Also well.

② Where do you live?

A:

Kie vi loĝas?

Where do you live?

B:

Mi loĝas en Edinburgo, en
Skotlando.

I live in Edinburgh, in Scotland.

A:

Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?

Do you speak Esperanto?

B:

Jes, iomete!

Yes, a little!



Quick Reference — Rapida referenco

ITEM	RULE
Alphabet	28 letters; no <i>q w x y</i> ; six hatted letters ĉ ĝ ĥ ĵ ŝ ŭ
Vowels	a e i o u as in <i>father, bed, see, port, moon</i> ; never glided
Tricky consonants	c =ts · ĉ =ch · ĝ =j · ĥ =loch · j =y · ĵ =zh · ŝ =sh · ŭ =w
Diphthongs	aj ej oj uj aŭ eŭ : one syllable each
Stress	next-to-last syllable, always; plural -j does not move it

ITEM

RULE

Typing

x-system: **cx gx hx jx sx ux** **Try It Yourself — Ekzercoj***Say the answer first, then click to check.*

1. How many letters does the Esperanto alphabet have, and which four English letters are missing?

▼ Show answer

28 letters. *q, w, x, y* are missing.

2. Write *ĉevalo* (horse) in the x-system.

▼ Show answer

cxevalo.

3. Which syllable is stressed in *Esperanto*?

▼ Show answer

The next-to-last: es-pe-**RAN**-to.

4. Which syllable is stressed in *Hungario*?

▼ Show answer

hun-ga-**RI**-o. The *i* and *o* are separate syllables, so the next-to-last is *ri*.

5. How is *cent* (hundred) pronounced at the start?

▼ Show answer

With *ts*, as in *cats*: "tsent". The letter *c* is never *k* or *s*.

6. Which Scottish sound is the Esperanto *ĥ*?

▼ Show answer

The *ch* of *loch*, as in **ĥoro** (choir).

7. What sounds does *aŭto* (car) begin with, and where is the stress?

▼ Show answer

It begins with *aŭ*, like *ow* in *cow*, one syllable: "OW-to". The stress is on **AŬ**, the next-to-last syllable.

8. Write *ŝipo* (ship) and *ĵurnalo* (newspaper) in the x-system.

▼ Show answer

sxipo and **jxurnalo**.

9. Does the plural *-j* change where the stress falls in *libro* → *libroj*?

▼ Show answer

No. *LI-bro* and *LI-broj* both stress the first syllable, because *oj* is one syllable.

10. How would you say the *j* in *jes* (yes) and the *ĝ* in *ĝardeno* (garden)? Are they the same?

▼ Show answer

No. **j** is like English *y* ("yes"), and **ĝ** is like English *j* ("jam"). This is the biggest trap for English speakers.

Words used in this chapter

saluton hello · **kiel** how · **vi** you · **fartas** is faring · **bone** well · **dankon** thanks · **kaj** and · **ankaŭ** also · **kie** where · **mi** I · **loĝas** live · **en** in · **ĉu** (question word) · **parolas** speak · **jes** yes · **iomete** a little · **kafo** coffee · **teo** tea · **libro** book · **domo** house · **akvo** water · **ĝardeno** garden · **aŭto** car · **ŝipo** ship · **jaro** year

Coming up in Chapter 2: Roots, Endings and Nouns. Why **libro** is a noun, **libroj** is more than one, and what the little **-n** does.