

GUIDE TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF CHURCH LATIN

The main purpose of the chant is to bring out the sense of the words. Consequently, there must be good diction. This requires careful attention to correct pronunciation, accentuation and phrasing of the Latin text.

The Latin accent should not be treated with the same stress or emphasis accorded the accent of a word in English or German. On the contrary, the Latin accent is an uplifting impulse. In addition, the syllable with the accent is never prolonged beyond the length of any other syllable. The light nature of the Latin accent has the time value of only a single 8th note (♪) in music, and the final (weak) syllable is always softened and never accented (as happens in French or Italian). Every syllable must be pronounced distinctly, evenly and smoothly, with none of the tendency to run the syllables together common to French, Italian and English.

RULES FOR THE ROMAN PRONUNCIATION OF LATIN

VOWELS :

The vowels of the Latin alphabet are seven in number: A, E, I, J, O, U and Y. These are the life and soul of the words. Each must be enunciated as one single, pure sound. Each must be given its proper timbre, and to preserve it from the slightest shade of alteration, one must studiously avoid the slightest change in the position of lips and tongue during its articulation.

A is always pronounced "ah," like the "a" in *father*, never as in *can*.

E has no exact English equivalent. The closest sound is perhaps a slightly broadened "eh," half-way between the "e" in *let* and the "a" in *care*, but never as in *ate* or the *ey* sound in *obey*.

I is always pronounced "ee," as in *feet*, never like the "i" in *mist*. One must be particularly careful when the I is used at the beginning of a Latin word, that it be not too short.

(E.g., *inter* = EEN-tehr)

J (sometimes written I) is pronounced "ee." It is combined into one sound with the succeeding vowel.

(E.g., *Jesus* = eeYEH-soos
ejus = EH-eeyoos
jam = eeYAHM)

O is pronounced "aw," as in *dawn*, never like the "o" in *note*.

U is pronounced like the "oo" in *moon*, never like the "u" in *but*.

Y must be treated as a vowel and is always pronounced "ee," exactly like the Latin I above.

(E.g., *martyr* = MAHR-teer)

DIPHTHONGS :

AE, OE are pronounced as one sound ("eh," like the Latin E above.)

(E.g., *saeculorum* = seh-koo-LAW-room
caelum = CHEH-loom)

(N.B. An exception to the above rule occurs when the second vowel has a diaeresis over it or when the words in which AE or OE occur are derived from Hebrew.

(E.g., *Michaël* = MEE-kah-el
Noe = NAW-eh)

CONSECUTIVE VOWELS:

1) EI, EO, OU, AI, II, IO, IE.

When two vowels come together, the general rule is that each vowel keeps its own proper sound and is a separate syllable.

(E.g., *diéi* = dee-EH-ee
fílii = FEE-lee-ee
eórum = eh-AW-room
aiébat = ah-ee-EH-baht
devótio = deh-VAW-tsee-aw
prout = PRAW-oot
coutúntur = kaw-oo-TOON-toor)

2) AU, EU, AY.

The vowels in these three cases form one syllable, but both vowels must be heard distinctly. The principle emphasis belongs to the first vowel, and the second vowel takes a secondary place.

(E.g., *Paule* = PAHoo-leh
euge = EHoo-jeh
Raymúndus = Rah-ee-MOON-doos)

XIV

3) *UI, UE, UA, UO.*

When *U* is preceded by *Q* or *NG* and followed by another vowel (as in *qui, sanguis*), the weight or pressure is placed on the second vowel (in contrast to Rule 2).

(E.g., *sanguis* = SAHN-gooEES
 qui = kooEE
 quae = kooEH
 quam = kooAHM
 quod = kooAWD)

In other instances when *U* is followed by another vowel, both vowels are heard clearly and differ only in the accentuation (the last vowel is always softened).

(E.g., *tua* = TOO-ah
 cui = KOO-ee)

CONSONANTS :

Consonants are pronounced only in conjunction with vowels and must be articulated with crispness and energy, otherwise the words will become unintelligible.

C has two sounds:

1) hard, like "k" (as in the English *curt, cat*), when the *C* is followed by the vowels *A, O, U* and by any consonant.
(E.g., *caro* = KAH-raw
 corda = KAWR-dah
 cui = KOO-ee
 cuncta = KOONK-tah)

2) soft, like "ch" (as in the English *church, choice*), when followed by *I, E, Y, AE, OE.*
(E.g., *vocifera* = vaw-CHEE-feh-rah
 cýmbalum = CHEEM-bah-loom
 caeli (or *coeli*) = CHEH-lee
 certus = CHEHR-toos)

CC, when followed by *I, E, AE, OE*, is like "tch" in *fetch*.

(E.g., *accipe* = AH-tchee-peh
 ecce = EH-tcheh)

CH before any vowel is always a hard "k."
(E.g., *máchina*) = MAH-kee-nah)

C at the end of a word is always a hard "k."
(E.g., *nunc* = NOONK
 illuc = EEL-look)

G, like *C* above, has two sounds:

1) soft, like "j" in *jade*, when it is followed by *I, E, Y, AE, OE.*
(E.g., *regina* = reh-JEE-nah
 genus = JEH-noos)

2) hard, like the "g" in *go, gable*, in every other case, except when followed by *N* (see below).
 ego = EH-gaw

GN has the same sound as "ny" in *canyon*.

(E.g., *magnam* = MAH-nyahm
 agnus = AH-nyoos)

H is never aspirated as in the English word *home*. It is heard in the following instances:

(E.g., *glória* = GLAW-ree-ah)

1) when joined with *P* (ph) and pronounced as "f."

(E.g., *philosophía* = fee-law-saw-FEE-ah)

2) when it is between *C* and the vowels *E, I, O*, and pronounced as "k."

(E.g., *pulcher* = POOL-kehr)

3) in the two words *MIHI* and *NIHIL*, where it is pronounced "k."

MEE-kee
 NEE-keel

In all other cases, the *H* is silent.

(E.g., *hosánna* = aw-SAHN-nah
 honor = AW-nawr)

R is slightly rolled or trilled. It must never be omitted, as is done in certain sections of the United States.

(E.g., *carnis* = KAHRR-nees
 martyr = MAHRR-teer)

S is always hard (as in *yes, essence*.) It is never pronounced like a "z," as in *daze*.

(E.g., *miserére* = mee-seh-REH-reh
 sicut = SEE-koot
 dies = DEE-ehs)

(N.B.) Do not hiss the *S*, especially in words containing a double *S*.

(E.g., *sanctíssimum* = sahnk-TEE-sec-moom)

SC before I, E, Y, AE, OE is soft, like “sh” in *shed*.

(E.g., Francísce = frahn-CHEE-sheh
ascéndit = ah-SHEN-deet
súscipe = SOO-shee-peh)

SC, SCH before A, O, U is hard, like “sk” in *skull*.

(E.g., scamnum = SKAHM-noom
scuto = SKOO-taw
Pascha = PAH-skah)

TH is pronounced like “t” in *tough*, or like the “th” in *Thomas*.

(E.g., cathólicam = kah-TAW-lee-kahm
Thomas = TAW-mahs
Theos = TEH-aws)

TI is pronounced in two ways:

1) “tsee” when followed by any vowel and preceded by any letter except S, T, X.

(E.g., tértia = TEHR-tsee-ah
tótius = TAW-tsee-oos
malignántium = mah-lee-NYAHN-tsee-oom)

2) “tee” when followed by any vowel and preceded by S, T, X.

(E.g., commíxtio = kawm-MEEKS-tee-aw
modéstia = maw-DEH-stee-ah)

X is a double consonant: a combination of “gs” or “ks.”

1) It is given the softer sound of “gs” (as in *eggs*) at the beginning of a word, when it is preceded by an E and followed by a vowel (or when an H or S occurs between X and the vowel).

(E.g., exaltábo = eg-sahl-TAH-baw
exsúito = eg-SOOL-taw
exhíbeo = eg-SEE-beh-aw
vexílla = veg-SEEL-iah)

2) In every other case, it is hard (“ks”).

(E.g., excélsis = ek-SHELL-sees
pax = PAHKS
vox = VAWKS)

XC before E, AE, OE, I, or Y has the sound of KSH.

(E.g., excélsis = ek-SHELL-sees)

Before all other vowels XC has the ordinary hard sound of each of the consonants.

(E.g., Excussórum = eks-coos-SAW-room)

Z is pronounced “dz,” like the “ds” in *suds*.

(E.g., zizánia = dzee-DZAH-nee-ah
zelus = DZEH-loos
Lázarus = LAH-dzah-roos)