

## 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>f</u> ather	[ɑ]	(never <u>f</u> awn or <u>f</u> an)	ah
E	=	<u>f</u> ed	[ɛ]	(never <u>f</u> ate)	eh
I	=	<u>f</u> ee <u>t</u>	[i]	(never <u>f</u> it)	ee
O	=	<u>f</u> ou <u>gh</u> t	[ɔ]	(never <u>f</u> oe)	aw
U	=	<u>f</u> oo <u>d</u>	[u]	(never <u>f</u> oot)	oo
Y	=	<u>f</u> ee <u>t</u>	[i]	(like I above)	ee

#### Examples:

*Kýrie eléison,*  
*Glória in excélsis.*  
*Crédo in únum Déum.*  
*Sáñctus, Benedíctus qui vénit.*  
*Ágnus Déi, dóna nóbis pácem.*

Keé - ree - eh      eh - léh - ee - šawn,  
 Gláw - ree - ah      een      eh - kshéhl - sees.  
 Kréh - daw      een      oó - noom      Déh - oom.  
 Sáñhk - toos, Beh - neh - deék - toos      kwee      véh - neet.  
 Áh - nyus      Déh - ee, dáw - nah      náw - bees      páh - 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> éh - <u>ee</u> - šawn
<i>fí<u>l</u>i</i>	feé - <u>lee</u> - <u>ee</u>
<i>m<u>e</u>i, á<u>i</u>t</i>	méh - <u>ee</u> , áh - <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>bón<u>ae</u> voluntátis</i>	báw - <u>neh</u>	vaw - loon - táh - tees
<i>tênebr<u>ae</u> fáct<u>ae</u> sunt</i>	téh - neh - bréh	fáhk - <u>teh</u> soont
<i>rex coeléstis</i>	rrehks	ch <u>eh</u> - léh - stees
<i>in saecula saeculórum</i>	een	séh - coo - lah    seh - coo - láw - 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>	k <u>w</u> ee, k <u>w</u> eh, k <u>w</u> awd, k <u>w</u> ahm
<i>únde flúx<u>i</u>t sán<u>g</u>uine</i>	oón - deh    floó - ḳseet    sáhn - g <u>w</u> ee - 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>Laudáte Dóminum</i>	Lah - oodáh - teh	Dáw - mee - noom
<i>Víctimae pascháli láudes</i>	Veék - tee - meh	pah - skáh - lee    láh - 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 :

<i>Cum S<u>án</u>cto Sp<u>í</u>ritu</i>	<u>K</u> oom	Sá <u>h</u> ŋ <u>k</u> - taw	Speé - ree - too
<i>Gloricá<u>m</u>us te</i>	Glaw - ree - fee -	<u>k</u> áh - moos	teh
<i>Úbi c<u>á</u>ritas</i>	Oó - bee	<u>k</u> áh - ree - tahs	

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

<i>Dóna nóbis p<u>á</u>cem</i>	Dáw - nah	náw - bees	páh - <u>ch</u> ehm
<i>descéndit de c<u>o</u>élis</i>	deh - shéhn - deet	deh	<u>ch</u> éh - lees
<i>Rex c<u>o</u>eléstis</i>	RRehks	<u>ch</u> eh - léh - stees	
<i>In d<u>u</u>lci júbilo</i>	Een	doól - <u>ch</u> ee	yoó - bee - law

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

<i>É<u>c</u>ce sac<u>é</u>rdos</i>	Éh - <u>tch</u> eh	sah - chéhr - daws
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but

<i>In Eccl<u>e</u>síis</i>	Een	Eh <u>k</u> - <u>k</u> léh - šee - ees
<i>peccá<u>t</u>a m<u>u</u>ndi</i>	peh <u>k</u> - <u>k</u> áh - tah	moón - dee

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

<i>ascéndit; descéndit</i>	ah - shéhn - deet;	deh - shéhn - deet
<i>súscipe deprec<u>at</u>iónem</i>	soó - sh <u>ee</u> - peh	deh - preh - cah - tsee - áw - nehm

CH is always like K :

<i>Chr<u>is</u>te el<u>e</u>ison</i>	<u>K</u> reé - steh	eh - léh - ee - sawn
<i>J<u>e</u>s<u>u</u>m Chr<u>is</u>tum</i>	Yéh - šoom	<u>K</u> reé - stoom

# G

is hard, like the "g" in God:

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

<i>Pánis ang<u>é</u>licus</i>	Páh - nees	ahn - jéh - lee - coos
<i>Filium unigénitum</i>	Feé - lee - oom	oo - 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" :

<i>Ágnus D<u>e</u>i</i>	Áh - nyoos	Déh - ee
<i>pr<u>o</u>p<u>ter</u> mág<u>n</u>am</i>	práwp - tehr	máh - nyahm
<i>O mágnum mystérium</i>	Aw	máh - nyoom mee - stéh - ree - oom
<i>Magníficat</i>	Mah - nyéé - fee - caht	



## H

is silent as in honest (not honey) :

<i>pax hominibus</i>	pahks	( )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 - <u>kee</u> ;	neé - <u>keel</u>
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**PH** has the sound of "f" :

<i>per prophétas</i>	pehr	praw - féh - 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>Jubiláte Déo</i>	<u>Y</u> oo - bee - láh - teh	Déh - aw
<i>Jésu Chríste</i>	<u>Y</u> éh - šu Kreé - steh	
<i>et sémini ejus</i>	eht séh - mee - nee	éh - <u>y</u> oos

and is sometimes written as an "i" :

<i>Allelúia!</i>	Ahl - leh - loó - <u>y</u> ah!
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## PH

is pronounced like "f" :

<i>Chérubim et Séraphim</i>	Kéh - roo - beem	eht	Séh - rah - <u>feem</u>
<i>Prophetárum númerus</i>	Praw - <u>feh</u> - 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>Miserére nobis</i>	Mee - šeh - <u>reh</u> - <u>reh</u>	naw - bees
<i>Per Prophétas</i>	Pehr	Praw - féh - tahs
<i>Rex treménda</i>	<u>RR</u> ehks	tréh - méhn - deh
<i>et resurrexit</i>	eht	<u>rr</u> eh - šoo - <u>rr</u> éh - 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 - <u>ree</u> - eh, <u>not</u> keér - ee - eh
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# S

is hard as in see (never raise) :

<u>S</u> anctus	Sáhŋk - toos
Véni <u>S</u> ancte <u>S</u> pírítus	Véh - nee Sáhŋk - teh Speé - ree - toos

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

Miserére méi, Déus	Mee - šeh - réh - reh	méh - ee	Déh - oos
invisibílium	een - vee - šee - beé - lee - oom		
In paradís <u>u</u> m	Een pah - rah - deé - šoom		

**SCH** is like the "sk" of school :

Víctimae paschá <u>li</u> láudes	Veék - tee - meh	pah - skáh - lee	láh - oodehs
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# T

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

<u>T</u> u sólus altí <u>ss</u> imus	<u>T</u> oo	sáw - loos	ahl - teé - see - moos
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**TI** before a vowel and following any letter except **S**, **X**, or **T** is pronounced "tsee" :

Grát <u>i</u> as ágimus t <u>i</u> bi	Gráh - tsee - ahs	áh - jee - moos	teé - bee
deprecati <u>o</u> nem nóstr <u>a</u> m	deh - preh - cah - tsee - áw - nehm	náw - strahm	
consubstantiálem Pátr <u>i</u>	cawn - sub - stahn - tsee - áh - lehm	Páh - tree	

**but**

míxt <u>i</u> o; mixtúra	meéks - tee - aw; meeks - toó - rah
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**TH** is always hard, like tea :

ún <u>u</u> m sánctam Cathólic <u>a</u> m	oó - noom	sáhnk - tahm	Cah - táw - lee - cahm
Dómin <u>u</u> s Déus Sábaoth	Dáw - mee - noos	Déh - oos	Sáh - bah - awt

# X

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

R <u>x</u> treméndae	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") :

Díx <u>i</u> t Marí <u>a</u>	Deé - ksset	Mah - reé - ah
láudat ex <u>e</u> r <u>c</u> itus	láh - oodaht	eh - kséhr - chee - toos
Exultáte D <u>e</u> o	Eh - ksool - táh - teh	Déh - aw

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

excogitáre; excusátus	eks - kaw - jee - táh - reh; eks - koo - šáh - toos
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**but** when **XC** appears before **E**, **AE**, **OE**, **I**, and **Y** it becomes "ksh" :

in excélsis	een ch - kshéhl - sees
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**Y** is treated like the vowel **I** ([i], "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 [u].
- 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 *catholicam* especially closely.
- X**            note the two exceptions to the "ks" pronunciation, expecially *excelsis*  
(it is not ehks - chéhl - sees).