

Accents and Spelling -- Transcript

Context

Hola y buenos días. Today I want to talk about accents and spelling. Okay, so I may not turn you into a champ at your local spelling bee, but I bet I can help you figure out when words need accents and understand the basic rules about spelling in Spanish.

Don't believe me? Well, let's jump into the lesson and I'll prove it to you.

Information

1. Of course, you already know that spelling is much simpler in Spanish than it is in English. Words are almost always spelled phonetically and there are only a couple of letters that offer any duplication of sounds. Most important, if a word ends in a vowel and you want to make it plural, you add an *s*. If it ends in a consonant, add an *es*.
2. Now, regarding where we place the natural stress on words when we're speaking, and when we have to write in accents, there are three simple rules. Rule Number 1 states that if a word ends in a consonant except for *n* or *s*, the natural stress should fall on the last syllable. Think of the word *papel* or the verb *estar*. They end in consonants and have their natural stress on the last syllable.
3. Rule Number 2 says that if a word ends in a vowel or *n* or *s*, the natural stress should fall on the second-to-last syllable. Think of words like *estudiante*, *libros*, and *habla*. They fit the rule and have their natural stress on the second-to-last syllable.
4. Rule Number 3 is a variation on the first two. It says that if a word violates Rule Number 1 or Rule Number 2, you have to write in an accent. So if you have a word that ends in a consonant (except *n* or *s*) and you want to put the stress someplace besides the last syllable, you have to write in an accent. Like with the word *lapiz*. The same thing holds for a word like *café* because it ends in a vowel but we want to stress the last syllable.
5. The only other thing to add is that sometimes we have two words that are spelled exactly alike and, in those cases, we often differentiate the two by putting an accent on one of them. Such is the case of *si* (if) and *sí* (yes).
6. Finally, this is one of those things that's really easy to practice. Just open your book or look at a Spanish newspaper on the Web. Find words that have written accents and then apply the three rules above to explain why an accent was necessary.

Review – Things to Remember

Okay, so let's review the three rules quickly.

- If a word ends in a *t* with the exception of *n* or *s*, the natural stress should be on the last syllable.
- If a word ends in a vowel or *n* or *s*, the natural stress should be on the second-to-last syllable.
- If you want to break either of these rules, get ready to write in an accent.