The letter "o" and the sound [o]

1. Sounds produced by the letter "o"

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter "o", including:

[o̯ʊ̯] h**o**pe*
[a] h**o**t
} Letter "o"

*Notice that in English, the sound is a combination of a vowel and a semivowel, [o] and [ʊ̯]. The pure [o] does not exist in English (see **diphthong explanation**).

> ➢ **In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter "o."**

This sound is the [o] as in "hope," but without the glide at the end.

[o] **o**j**o**, c**o**sa, **o**p**o**rtunidad, gat**o** → Letter "o"

2. Letters that produce the sound [o]

In English, more than one letter can produce the sound [o̯ʊ̯].

Letter "o" → [o̯ʊ̯] as in h**o**pe
Letters "oa" → [o̯ʊ̯] as in b**oa**t
Letters "ou" → [o̯ʊ̯] as in th**ou**gh

> ➢ **In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [o].**

Letter "o" → [o] as in **o**j**o**

3. Diphthong Explanation

The English tendency for pronouncing the sound [o] in Spanish is to add on [u] at the end, making it into the diphthong [o̯ʊ̯], because the pure [o] doesn't exist in English—it is always pronounced as [o̯ʊ̯]*. It is important to distiguish the sounds to prevent confusion, because pronouncing [o] as [o̯ʊ̯] is an incorrect pronunciation and it gives you a distinct foreign

* The diphthong is marked by a curve (‿) under the diphthongized vowel.

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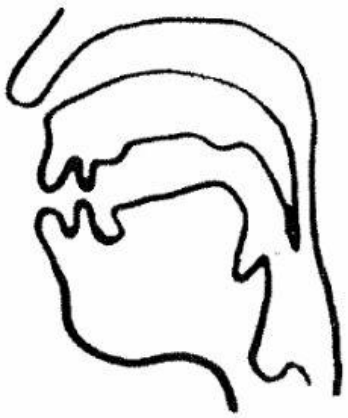
accent. To sound more like a native speaker, it is necessary to keep the [o] sound short and clear.

4. Pronunciation Reminder

The Spanish vowels are "short" in duration in comparison to English; the sound is not extended, like the sound actors make they are in slow motion, diving in front of the bullet that is aimed for the president: "N**o**!" It is short, like when someone asks if you have started your homework yet, and you say, "N**o**pe, not yet!"

5. Making the Sound

The sound [o] is called a rounded back middle vowel. The tongue raises about halfway up in the oral cavity, and the tongue pushes toward the back of the mouth. The lips form a rounded shape when making this sound. The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [o].



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Exercises to practice the Spanish [o]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [o̯ʊ̯] sound closest to the [o] from the Spanish letter "o."

P**o**ker	Sp**o**t	F**o**rtunate
C**ou**gh	Th**ou**gh	En**ou**gh
R**o**se	**O**ptional	R**oo**m
H**o**me	Rob**o**t	R**o**bot
Microsc**o**pe	**Oa**tmeal	**O**pen

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter "o."

	English	**Spanish**
1.	**O**pportunity [_____]	**O**p**o**rtunidad [_____]
2.	P**o**sitive [_____]	P**o**sitiv**o** [_____]
3.	**O**ther [_____]	**O**tr**o** [_____]
4.	Teleph**o**ne [_____]	Teléf**o**n**o** [_____]
5.	Ch**o**colate [_____]	Ch**o**c**o**late [_____]
6.	Imp**o**ssible [_____]	Imp**o**sible [_____]
7.	**O**ption [_____]	**O**pci**ó**n [_____]
8.	Act**o**r [_____]	Act**o**r [_____]

C. Look at the following really long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

Gentileshombres	(gentlemen)
Nacionalsocialismo	(national socialism)
Obligatoriedad	(obligatory nature)
Otorrinolaringólogo	(Eye, Nose, and Throat specialist)
Estacionamiento	(parking)
Rimbombante	(ostentations, grandiose)
Salchiconería	(delicatessen)
Servodirección	(power steering)
Zangolotear	(to shake)

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D. Practice saying the following Spanish words with [o]. Focus particularly on avoiding the [oʊ̯] diphthong where it should it be a short and pure [o].

Hermano	Ocho	Roco
Mayor	Colmena	Hosco
Original	Ordenador	Dinero
Trabajo	Cocina	Postal
Ojo	Español	Modelo

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