

A PRONUNCIATION GUIDE TO CROATIAN LANGUAGE for English speakers

General observations

1. Croatian is a phonetic language. The rule is: Speak as you see it written; write as you hear it spoken. A Croatian never has to ask “and how do you spell that?” The pronunciation and spelling are absolutely consistent.
2. There are five vowels in Croatian: A, E, I, O, U. These are pronounced as in Latin; their quality does not change regardless of stress or length (thus there are no diphthongs).
3. The consonants are also as in Latin. Croatian also has additional consonants. Some are spelled as a combination of two letters, others have their own signs (such as letter “ž” or “š”; this is explained below).
4. The general challenge to the English speaker is not to Anglicize Croatian, to lose the purity of the vowels (which as such do not exist in English) or the consonants (some of which do not exist or are similar but still different than in English), and thus taint the pronunciation. Two consonants are in particular hard for English speakers: “nj” which is spelled by using two letters to make one sound as in English “new,” and “lj” which is again one sound pronounced as in Italian “figlia” not a succession of two consonant sounds. Also, be careful with the final vowels: they are pronounced
5. Singing diction rules are the same for Croatian as for Latin or Italian: “sing on vowels, insert quick consonants.”
6. When consonants appear next to each other, all of them are pronounced. Sometimes there are several of them in succession and all of them are pronounced (as in “tvrđ,” meaning “hard”).
7. Croatian (and some other Slavic languages) do not differentiate much between the hard “ch” sound (spelled as “č”) and the soft “ch” (spelled as “ć”). For English speakers “ch” as in “church” and a bit stronger will suffice.

Specific Guide to Pronunciation

How to pronounce the consonants:

B = is pronounced as “b” in “boy”
C = tz, as in “pizza” or “pretzel”
Č = ch as in “church” and a bit stronger,
harder sound
Ć = a soft “ch” sound (see comment 7)
D = as “d” in “Denver”
F = as “f” in “fountain”
G = as “g” in “good”
(it is always a hard “g” sound
regardless of what precedes it or
follows it)
H = “h” as in “house” but a bit stronger
(more fricative) than in English
J = as “y” in “yellow” except after “n”
when it is a part of the consonant
“nj”
K = as “k” in “kiosk”
L = as in Latin “L” (half way between the
Italian “L” and the English “L”
Except when followed by “j” in
which case it forms the letter “lj”
(see “Lj”)

Lj = no equivalent in English; same as
the Italian “gl” in “figlia” or
“Corigliano” (American composer)
or like “lli” in “million”
M = as “m” in “mother”
N = as “n” in “never”
Nj = as in “onion”
P = as in Latin (“p” as in “Peter” but not
aspirated, i.e. plosive)
R = as in Latin, normally flipped, but
may be rolled for emphasis; thus may
function as a semi-vowel (may be
sustained or prolonged for dramatic
purposes)
S = as “s” in “Smith”
Š = as “sh” in “shout”
T = as “t” in Latin “tempus” – similar to
English “t” as in “time” but not
aspirated; it is plosive, i.e. hard.
Z = as “z” in “zebra”
Ž = “zh” as in “pleasure”