



# Paleogra-what?! Deciphering Spanish Handwriting

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This handout is designed to help you learn about the Spanish language, including the alphabet, Spanish names, and common abbreviations. It then teaches how to find key information in common Spanish records that will enable non-Spanish speakers to find important information in Spanish records.

## THE SPANISH ALPHABET

The Spanish alphabet differs from the English alphabet in two important ways.

1. The modern alphabet has one letter in addition to the 26 letters of the English alphabet. It is Ñ, which falls between N and O in alphabetical listing.

However, historic records may also include the letters Ch, Ll, and Rr, which were once considered distinct letters. In alphabetical listings, Ch would fall between C and D, Ll would fall between L and M, and Rr would fall between R and S.

2. Several of the letters in the alphabet are interchangeable. The following is a list of interchangeable letters, with examples of how they may appear in genealogical documents.

- i and y Ysabel or Isabel
- b, v, and u Habia or havia
- j, g, and x Mujer or muger
- c, z, s, ss, ç, and x Diciembre or Dixiembre
- y and ll Cayetano or Calletano
- h and nothing Henero or Enero, Tomás or Thomás

## COMMON SPANISH NAME ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of common abbreviations for Spanish first names. Always check to see if the name is spelled out completely in other parts of the record to verify that the abbreviation

<b>Ant<sup>o</sup></b>	Antonio	<b>Ma</b>	Maria
<b>F<sup>co</sup> or Fran<sup>co</sup>.</b>	Francisco	<b>Mag<sup>da</sup></b>	Magdalena
<b>J<sup>a</sup></b>	Juana	<b>Migl</b>	Miguel
<b>J<sup>n</sup></b>	Juan	<b>P<sup>o</sup></b>	Pedro
<b>Jpha</b>	Josepha	<b>Ygn<sup>o</sup></b>	Ygnacio

For additional common name abbreviations, consult the BYU Script Tutorial abbreviation pages for [Given Names](#) and [Surnames](#) by clicking on the link if viewing this electronically or visit <https://script.byu.edu/Pages/Spanish/en/chabbreviations.aspx> and click either *Given Names* or *Surnames* to view the list of abbreviations.

Name abbreviations can also be found on the [Spanish Genealogical Word List](#) in the FamilySearch Wiki at [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish\\_Genealogical\\_Word\\_List#General\\_Word\\_List](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List#General_Word_List)

## SPANISH LAST NAMES

Spanish people frequently used the double surname system, where each individual has two last names. The first last name typically comes from the individual's father, while the second last name comes from the individual's mother.

For example, if you have an ancestor named Juana Perez Ramos, following traditional naming patterns, you can make the following assumptions.

- Perez Ramos is Juana's full last name
- Perez is her paternal surname, passed down from her father
- Ramos is her maternal surname, passed down from her mother.
- When Juana marries, she will keep her double surname. Some women born after 1950 may add their husbands' paternal surname to the end of their name. For example, if Juana married Pedro Sanchez Gomez, she may choose to be known as Juana Perez Ramos de Sanchez.

## SPANISH DATES

In Spanish records, the date is usually one of the first pieces of information to appear in an entry. Often, the dates are written out.

### Numbers

<b>Mil</b>	1000	<b>Noventa</b>	90	<b>Nueve</b>	9
<b>Novecientos</b>	900	<b>Ochenta</b>	80	<b>Ocho</b>	8
<b>Ochocientos</b>	800	<b>Setenta</b>	70	<b>Siete</b>	7
<b>Setecientos</b>	700	<b>Sesenta</b>	60	<b>Seis</b>	6
<b>Seiscientos</b>	600	<b>Cincuenta</b>	50	<b>Cinco</b>	5
<b>Cincocientos</b>	500	<b>Cuarenta</b>	40	<b>Cuatro</b>	4
		<b>Treinta</b>	30	<b>Tres</b>	3
		<b>Veinte</b>	20	<b>Dos</b>	2
		<b>Diez</b>	10	<b>Uno</b>	1

## Months

<b>Enero or Enº</b>	January
<b>Febrero or Fbº</b>	February
<b>Marzo or Mzº</b>	March
<b>Abril or Abº</b>	April
<b>Mayo</b>	May
<b>Junio</b>	June
<b>Julio</b>	July
<b>Agosto, Agº, or Agº</b>	August
<b>Septiembre, Septº, or 7bre</b>	September
<b>Octubre, Ocº, Octº, or 8bre</b>	October
<b>Noviembre, Nove or 9bre</b>	November
<b>Diciembre, Dice or 10bre</b>	December

A full list of Spanish numbers and dates can be found on [Spanish Genealogical Word List](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List) in the FamilySearch Wiki at

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish\\_Genealogical\\_Word\\_List#Numbers](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List#Numbers)

## KEY WORDS BY RECORD TYPE

Civil registration and parish records are the backbone of Spanish genealogical research.

Civil registration typically began in the late-1800s and was required for all residents. Births, marriages, and deaths were all reported to a municipal clerk, who made an official record of the event. These civil registration records are typically kept at the municipal office for 70-100 years, then moved to a district or state archive.

Parish records begin as early as the mid-1500s. Because most people in Spanish-speaking countries attended the Catholic church, their baptisms, marriages, and burials were recorded by the priest. Parish records are the most commonly used records in Spanish-language genealogical research.

When looking at a civil registration or parish record for the first time, begin by looking for words you recognize easily. Use an alphabet chart to identify letters or compare unknown letters with words you recognize. The following key words can help you identify important information in Spanish birth, marriage, and death records.

### Birth or Baptism Records

Birth or baptism records usually include the infant's name, birthdate, and (if a baptism record) baptism date. They also include information on the infant's parents, including their names and marital status, ages, professions, and birth places. Occasionally, grandparents are also mentioned.

Look for the following key words to identify important information in birth or baptism records.

<b>Bautizé</b>	baptized
<b>Hijo legitimo de</b>	legitimate son of
<b>Hijo natural</b>	illegitimate son
<b>Nació</b>	born
<b>Abuelos</b>	grandparents
<b>Paternos</b>	paternal
<b>Maternos</b>	maternal

### **Marriage Records**

Marriage records frequently contain a great deal of information about the bride and groom. This information may include their ages, prior marital status, birth place, residence, profession, and the names of their parents.

Look for the following key words to identify important information in birth or baptism records.

<b>Años de edad</b>	years old
<b>Casé y velé</b>	I married
<b>Celibe</b>	single
<b>Comparecieron</b>	appeared
<b>Hijo legitimo de</b>	legitimate son of
<b>Hijo natural</b>	illegitimate son
<b>In facie ecclesiae</b>	in front of the church (latin)
<b>Originario</b>	originally from
<b>Soltero</b>	single
<b>Vecino</b>	resident
<b>Viudo</b>	widower

### **Death or burial records**

Death or burial records can provide valuable information about an individual at the end of their life. In addition to the name and death date of the deceased person, death or burial records may include their age, marital status, profession, birth place, residence, ,or the names of their spouse or parents. Death records may also indicate if the decedent left a will, which would provide additional information about their belongings and living family members.

Look for the following key words to identify important information in death or burial records.

<b>Años de edad</b>	years old
<b>Cadaver</b>	body
<b>Esposo de</b>	spouse of
<b>Falleció</b>	died
<b>Hecho testament</b>	made a will

<b>Hijo legítimo de</b>	legitimate son of
<b>Hijo natural</b>	illegitimate son
<b>Murió</b>	died
<b>Sepultura</b>	sepultada
<b>Viudo</b>	widower





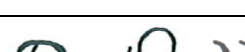










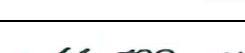
For complete genealogical word list, A full list of Spanish numbers and dates can be found on [Spanish Genealogical Word List](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List) in the FamilySearch Wiki at [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish\\_Genealogical\\_Word\\_List](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Spanish_Genealogical_Word_List)





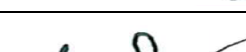
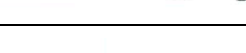










### Additional Online Resources

- After joining a group in the **FamilySearch Community** ([community.familysearch.org](https://community.familysearch.org)), you can post questions asking for research guidance or document translation help, and the community of genealogists from around the world will give you personal help. The following groups are useful for Hispanic research.
  - Latin America Genealogy Research
  - Investigación Genealógica (primarily in Spanish)
- **BYU Script Tutorial** ([script.byu.edu/Pages/Spanish/en/welcome.aspx](https://script.byu.edu/Pages/Spanish/en/welcome.aspx)) provides paleographical word lists, name lists, and practice activities in a variety of Spanish-language genealogical documents.
- On the **FamilySearch Learning Center**, search for “Spanish,” or the Hispanic country where your ancestor lived to access online classes to help you learn to access and read the records.
- **The FamilySearch Wiki** contains a Spanish genealogical word list and a paleography manual (in Spanish) that can greatly expand your ability to read Spanish records.

## Alphabet Chart

The following alphabet chart comes from the Reading Spanish Handwritten Records lesson series posted on the Learning Center on FamilySearch.org

<b>A</b>	
<b>B</b>	
<b>C</b>	
<b>Ch</b>	
<b>D</b>	
<b>E</b>	
<b>F</b>	
<b>G</b>	
<b>H</b>	
<b>I</b>	
<b>J</b>	
<b>K</b>	
<b>L</b>	
<b>Li</b>	
<b>M</b>	
<b>N</b>	

<b>a</b>	
<b>b</b>	
<b>c</b>	
<b>ch</b>	
<b>d</b>	
<b>e</b>	
<b>f</b>	
<b>g</b>	
<b>h</b>	
<b>i</b>	
<b>j</b>	
<b>k</b>	
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<b>ll</b>	
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