

# STANDARD PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

## VOWELS

N.B. A sensation of all the vowels feeling resonant in the same area of the mouth, with only minor changes in tongue position required between vowels, is the ideal of Italianate Church Latin. Vowels should never smear into one another; back-to-back vowels should, with one exception, be distinct.

### A

[a] in the Italian sense; very bright and forward, yet not harsh. Distinct from English [ɑ], which is much darker! One might also take care to avoid the very American-sounding [æ].

### E Æ Œ

[ɛ]. The vowel that causes the most contention and is also most often Americanized. As this is the primary vowel for both stressed and unstressed syllables, it is heightened somewhat from the typical Italian [ɛ]. Although this is roughly the same as [ɛ] in some languages, the symbol [ɛ] is closer to the necessary thought process for most North Americans. Those experiencing difficulty with this pronunciation should be advised to “say/sing ‘eh’ and think ‘ay’”; the resulting vowel is an excellent approximation of what is required. To either brighten excessively to [e] or [ɛɪ], or to open excessively to [ɛ], is incorrect and un-euphonious. Occasionally composers will set the middle two syllables of *eleison* as one syllable; in this case, the English diphthong “ay” [ɛɪ] is an excellent approximation. To use the single [ɛ] is not entirely correct.

Although some conductors will prefer distinction between E and Æ (i.e. *æternam*), with a *slight* brightening of the latter, they should still be understood as roughly equivalent phonetically.

### I Y

[i]. Must be kept pure and free from influence of [ɪ] (common in words such as *vidimus*, often mispronounced [vɪdimus]). This is the one vowel which is identical in English and in Italian/Italianate Church Latin.

### O

[ɔ]. Perhaps the most difficult to perfect for North American English speakers, as no close approximation can be found in their native tongue. Above all, one must avoid the diphthong [oʊ] that is so common in English. The vowel of “for” is a decent starting point for the brightness that is required. A similar vowel is found in languages such as Japanese and Romanian and transcribed [ɔ]; however, the thought process of [ɔ] is often more useful for English speakers. To reduce this to [ɑ] in an attempt to achieve [ɔ] cannot be more highly discouraged: the lips must be rounded. In words such as *Domino* [dɔ̃minɔ̃] the vowels will often sound different, but they should be formed the same way in the mouth.

## U

[u] in the Italian sense. Further back in the mouth, by far, than how this is often spoken in English, and with no sense of a second vowel. This should be as pure and distinct as any of the other vowels.

Latin has exactly one true diphthong:

## AU

[au]

but the vowels should not return to their English equivalents even in the absence of clearly delineated Italianate ones.

## CONSONANTS

N.B. English equivalents of these are as spoiling to the flow of Italianate Latin as English vowels; yet to over-exaggerate the cadence of Latin as being equivalent to Italian is also undesirable. A middle ground should be found. As in Italian, most doubled consonants in Latin are pronounced as such.

In Latin, certain consonants will be modified before “hard” vowels (A O U) or “soft” vowels (E I Y)

### B F M N P V

Functionally equivalent to English.

### C

[tʃ] before soft vowels and [k] before hard ones: *cæli* [tʃɛlis], but *canunt* [kanunt]. Occasionally doubled (eg. Latin *ecce* [ɛtʃɛ]); accomplished with a slight interruption between the two sounds.

### CH

Always [k]: *chorus* [kɔrus].

### D

[d]. Unaspirated, with the tongue directly touching the top of the back teeth.

### G

[dʒ] before soft vowels and [g] before hard ones: *gere* [dʒɛɛ], but *præ gustatum* [prɛgustatum].

### H

Normally silent; however, in *mibi* and *nihil*, pronounced as [k].

### GN

[n]: *Agnus* [anus].

### J

[j] whenever used as a consonant: *Jesus* [jɛzus]. Occasionally replaced by I as a consonant; this does not change the pronunciation.

### L

[l]. Much further forward in the mouth than in English.

### PH

[f] and functionally identical to English F: *Seraph* [sɛraf]

### R

[ɾ]. In Standard American English, there is no direct and intuitive version of this. It can only be found in certain versions of Received Pronunciation, which retain a “flipped” R. Above all else, the English approximant sound [ɹ] must be avoided.

A doubled R may be outright rolled: [r]

### S

Perhaps no other consonant has elicited so much division and disagreement in lyric diction than the Latin S.

It is advisable to follow the current pronunciation of the Italian language; that is, [s] after consonants and at the beginning of words, and [z] intervocally. Some conductors defend use of a constant [s];

however, it is worth noting that a) the transition to intervocalic [z] in regional dialects occurred before 1200 A.D. and therefore would have been known to all composers of the modern-day Latin repertoire, and b) in modern Italian pronunciation, the exclusive use of [s] is an anomaly at most. This pronunciation also neutralizes the difference between S and SS (the latter of which is always pronounced [s]). One finds little to support the use of intervocalic [s] other than its use in Latin of antiquity, which in every other way bears scarce resemblance to modern Romance languages and commonly practiced modern-day Church Latin.

There are some loan words that retain a hard S: *eleison* [ɛ̃lɛ̃isɔ̃n], *Jerusalem* [jɛ̃rusalɛ̃m].

### SC

[ʃ] before soft vowels and [sk] before hard vowels: *scientiam* [ʃiɛ̃ntsiam] but *scapulis* [skapulis]

### T TH

[t̥]. Unaspirated, with the tongue directly touching the back of the top teeth.

### TI

[t̥s] before any vowel, except when preceded by S, X, or T: *letitia* [lɛ̃t̥itsia], but *justitiam* [just̥itsiam].

### X

[ks], but [gz] when between two vowels: *Rex* [rɛ̃ks], but *exordium* [ɛ̃gzɔ̃rdium].

### XC

[kʃ] before soft vowels and [ksk] before hard ones: *excelsis* [ɛ̃kʃɛ̃lsis], but *excadus* [ɛ̃kskadus].

### Z

[dz]: *Zebedia* [dzɛ̃bɛ̃dia].