

THE PRONUNCIATION OF LITURGICAL LATIN

by David G. Jensen

The Latin alphabet has 25 letters:

A, a	F, f	K, k	P, p	U, u	I (i) is often used in place of
B, b	G, g	L, l	Q, q	V, v	J (j), its consonantal form.
C, c	H, h	M, m	R, r	X, x	
D, d	I, i	N, n	S, s	Y, y	K, Y and Z occur only in
E, e	(J, j)	O, o	T, t	Z, z	words derived from Greek.

ACCENT: in a word of 2 syllables, the accent falls on the 1st syllable. In a word of 3 or more syllables, the accent falls on the *penult* (next to last), if that syllable is long; if not, the accent falls on the *antepenult* (2nd from last). A vowel is long either by nature, marked by an acute accent (´), or by position, preceding 2 or more consonants. A diphthong is also long.

VOWELS: each vowel, whether long or short, is pronounced crisply and distinctly. Stressed vowels are pronounced as long, and unstressed as short.

DIPHTHONGS: are pronounced as follows:

á = *a* in father; a = *a* in car

ae = *a* in fate

é = *a* in fate; e = *e* in bet

oe = *a* in fate

í = *ee* in reed; i = *i* in bit

au = *ou* in shout

ó = *o* in no; o = *o* in for

eu = *e + u*, as to left

ú = *u* in tune; u = *u* in put

ay = *i* in fine

y is always pronounced as *í*, above.

N.B.: in singing, care must be taken to pronounce short vowels clearly, more as long.

CONSONANTS: b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, q and v are pronounced as in English.

c is pronounced as *k*, except before a front vowel (*e, i, ae, oe* or *y*), when it is pronounced as *ch*, as in Church.

cc before a front vowel is pronounced *t + ch*; e.g., *ecce* = et-che.

ch, which occurs in words of Greek derivation, is always pronounced *k*.

g is hard (gate), except before a front vowel, when it is soft (gentle).

gn is always pronounced *ny*, as in barnyard.

CONSONANTS, concluded

h is silent, except it is pronounced as *k* in *mihi*, *nihil* and their compounds.

j (often written as i) is always pronounced *y*, as in *yet*.

r is lightly rolled, as it is in Italian.

s is pronounced as *s* in *see*, but it is softened slightly between 2 vowels.

sc is pronounced as *sk*, except before a front vowel, when it is pronounced *sh*, as in *shield*.

th, which occurs in words of Greek derivation, is always pronounced *t*.

ti before a vowel and following any letter except s, t or x is pronounced *tsee*;
otherwise it is pronounced as written.

x is pronounced *ks*, but is softened slightly between 2 vowels.

xc is pronounced *ksh* before a front vowel; otherwise it is pronounced as written (with hard c).

z is always pronounced *dz*, as English *ds* in *feds*.

Double consonants are always pronounced distinctly.