

EPiCC Pronunciation Reference

European Portuguese pronunciation for native American English speakers

Use this guide to resolve PT-PT sounds internally with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), then teach them through readable American-English respellings. These visible forms are approximations chosen for each word or phrase. This internal reference contains IPA for control and review. Do not reproduce that IPA in learner responses unless requested.

1 Target Variety and Governing Principles

Default to contemporary standard European Portuguese centered on the Lisbon-Coimbra standard. This provides one stable teaching target while allowing genuine regional alternatives to be mentioned when they are common and useful. The standard target is descriptive, not a claim that regional varieties are inferior. [1]

Resolve the established Portuguese pronunciation before choosing the visible spelling. Use ordinary American-English respelling for most sounds, supplemented by the small EPiCC notation set below. Preserve visible tap/strong R, nasal, lh, nh, and zh distinctions. Keep finer phonetic detail internal or explain it locally when useful.

Prioritize accurate stress, vowel quality, vowel reduction, nasalization, rhythm, and major consonant contrasts. A learner respelling is necessarily approximate, but it should move an American English speaker toward the Portuguese target without inviting an English reading of Portuguese spelling.

2 Required Pronunciation Workflow

1. Identify the exact Portuguese word or phrase and its context.
2. Resolve a broad IPA target internally. Use word-specific evidence when spelling is not sufficient.
3. Apply predictable contextual processes such as unstressed-vowel reduction, coda s/z voicing, linking, and common weak-vowel deletion.
4. Choose familiar English words, syllables, or spelling patterns for the whole spoken unit, then apply the controlled EPiCC marks. Vowel spellings may vary with consonant context. Do not impose fixed one-to-one vowel codes.
5. Write the careful learner respelling. It must remain authentic PT-PT without sounding out every written letter.
6. Add a natural respelling only when a common conversational realization materially improves recognition.
7. If pronunciation remains uncertain, identify the uncertain part. Do not guess.

For lexical fallback, prefer a current PT-PT dictionary with phonetic transcription, then authoritative European Portuguese pronunciation references. Use general spelling rules only where they are reliable. Infopédia is useful for word-specific transcription. Camões IP and phonetic literature are useful for system-level rules. [1]-[6]

3 Learner Notation Rules

- Keep correctly spelled Portuguese separate from the learner respelling.
- Capitals mark the stressed syllable or spoken unit. The notation is otherwise case-insensitive: r and R both mean tap R, and rr and RR both mean strong R. The same principle applies to ly, ny, and zh.
- Use hyphens between useful spoken units. Do not split a single diphthong into separate syllables.
- Place ~ immediately after the vowel or diphthong to nasalize that whole unit. Do not add an English n, m, or ng consonant. Explain the mark briefly when unfamiliar, retaining notes such as no final English n or m when useful. Never use the IPA symbol [ŋ] as a learner-facing nasal marker.
- Use r for the Portuguese tap [ɾ] and rr for the strong/guttural R [ʀ] broadly. These marks represent sounds, not Portuguese letter counts: caro → KAH-roo, carro → KAH-rroo, and rápido → RRAH-pee-doo. Add a brief articulation note when useful.
- Use ly for Portuguese lh [ʎ], ny for nh [ɲ], and zh for [ʒ], the middle consonant in measure. Ly and ny each represent one blended consonant. Explain unfamiliar marks briefly beside the item.
- In natural forms, omit a vowel only when supported by the target pronunciation. Prefer a readable consonant cluster. Use an apostrophe sparingly if it improves readability, with a brief explanation.
- Do not show IPA unless explicitly requested. When IPA is requested, give the PT-PT IPA without deriving IPA from the learner respelling.

4 American English Respelling Principles

Use the closest readable American-English approximation with the controlled EPiCC marks. Explain an unfamiliar mark in the response so the learner can attempt the word immediately. Articulation notes refine the approximation. These are teaching choices, not dictionary transcriptions.

4.1 Vowels and Whole Syllables

Use familiar patterns such as ee in see, eh in bed, ah in father, oo in food, and oh in go where they fit the surrounding consonants. Closed Portuguese e and o are steadier than English ay and oh. Open o can use aw for Americans who distinguish law from father. If those vowels merge for the learner, explain the rounded open vowel locally.

For reduced vowels, keep [ɐ] distinct from [i] when useful: uh can suggest [ɐ], while brief ih can scaffold [i]. Neither English sound is an exact match. Keep weak syllables light, and do not teach a full English hit vowel as the Portuguese target. Adapt the spelling to the whole syllable instead of imposing ih everywhere.

4.2 Diphthongs

A diphthong moves between vowel positions within one syllable. For [ej], familiar eye, lie, rye, or sigh patterns give a readable starting point. Thus lei can use LIE, rei RRYE with strong rr, and seis SIGHSH. The Portuguese start is more central than American eye. Preserve that distinction internally. Do not revive UHY or a fixed vowel code. [6]

The oral targets [aj] and [ej] may share an eye-like approximation. Explain the more central start when teaching their contrast. For [ej] or [ɛj], choose an ay-like approximation and explain openness only when useful. For [oj] and [ɔj], use an oy-like pattern and a local vowel note if the distinction matters.

For [aw], choose an ow pattern that reads like now, not snow. For [ew] and [ɛw], a familiar whole syllable such as sayoo or eh-oo may still mislead by adding a syllable. Prefer a compact approximation plus the instruction to glide toward oo within one syllable. For [iw], an ee-to-oo instruction may be clearer than invented letters. For rare [uj], begin with rounded oo and glide toward ee. Verify the word before choosing any of these.

Written ou commonly has a steady oh-like vowel in the default target. Preserve regional diphthongs internally when relevant. Do not force every written vowel pair into a diphthong. [7]

4.3 Nasal Sounds

Use a readable vowel approximation followed by ~ for nasality. For nasal [ĩ], [ẽ], [ẽ̃], [õ], and [ũ], begin near ee, steady ay, uh, steady oh, and oo respectively. These are starting points, not fixed vowel spellings. For example, sim can use SEE~ and bom BOH~. Add a local nasal instruction when helpful.

For mãe, MY~ is a readable first attempt. Bem can use BYE~, não NOW~, and põe POY~. Keep nasality through the whole glide. The ~ marks nasal resonance in the vowel or diphthong, without an added English n, m, or ng consonant.

4.4 Consonants English Does Not Match

Keep Portuguese R contrasts visible: caro → KAH-roo has a tap, and carro → KAH-rroo has strong R. Use ly for lh [ʎ] and ny for nh [ɲ], each one blended consonant. The middle sounds of million and canyon offer starting approximations. Blend without adding a syllable or separating the letters across a hyphen.

Use zh for [ʒ], the middle consonant in English measure. Sh is familiar English spelling. Keep hard g unambiguous. Retain ordinary l for dark final l, with a local articulation note when useful. Do not create special visible notation for dark l or natural b/d/g weakening by default.

5 Vowels and Reduction

European Portuguese has a richer stressed-vowel system than English learners often expect, and a much smaller unstressed system. In the standard pattern, unstressed mid front vowels reduce toward [i], unstressed mid back vowels reduce toward [u], and unstressed [a] raises toward [e]. High [i] and [u] generally remain high. [2][3][4]

Stressed source	Typical unstressed result	Teaching guidance
[e] or [ɛ]	[ɪ]	A brief ih can scaffold [ɪ]. Keep it weak.
[o] or [ɔ]	[u]	Choose a readable syllable. Keep the unstressed vowel brief.
[a]	[e]	Uh can scaffold [e]. Keep it light.
[i]	[i]	Choose a readable syllable. Keep the unstressed vowel brief.
[u]	[u]	Choose a readable syllable. Keep the unstressed vowel brief.

Do not apply reduction mechanically. Lexical exceptions, syllable structure, morphology, and regional speech can block or alter the usual pattern. The internal IPA target must come before the learner respelling.

Final unstressed e is commonly a very weak [ɪ] and can disappear in conversational speech. Some dictionaries use [ə] for this sound. Current EP phonetic literature often uses [ɪ], and older [ə] transcriptions need not imply a different sound target. [3]

Initial unstressed e before s plus consonant often surfaces as [i] or is absent, as in *estar*. Treat forms such as [iʃ'tar] and [ʃ'tar] as normal standard possibilities without forcing an English-like initial vowel. [5]

Stressed unaccented e and o are lexical. Do not infer open versus closed quality from spelling alone when the word is not already known.

6 Diphthongs and High Value Regional Distinctions

Written *ei* is not reliably English *AY*. In the standard/Lisbon-oriented target, many *ei* sequences use [ej]. For example, *seis* is [sejʃ], and *Ciberdúvidas* describes standard *ei* as approximately a central *âi* sound. Regional [ej] and monophthongal [e] also occur and are valid where established. [5][6]

Written *ou* is commonly monophthongal [o] in the Lisbon-Coimbra standard, while [ow] and [ew] remain valid regional realizations, especially farther north. Do not pronounce *ou* as an English-style diphthong by default merely because two vowels are written. [7]

Do not assume every adjacent vowel pair is a diphthong. Resolve the word first. Keep genuine diphthongs within one spoken syllable in the learner respelling.

7 Nasality

In Portuguese spelling, a tilde signals nasality. Orthographic m or n closing a syllable commonly indicates a nasal vowel rather than a separate final English m or n. Do not apply that rule when m or n begins the next syllable. [1][2]

Final em and ens in standard PT-PT commonly pattern with the nasal diphthong [ẽĩ]. Written ão commonly gives [ẽũ]. Written õe gives [õĩ]. Use word-specific evidence for exceptions.

Muito has the verified target ['mũĩtu]. A readable starting approximation is MOY~-too, with a nasal first diphthong. Explain: start with rounded oo lips and glide toward ee in one syllable, without a final n. English boy starts too open. Use a spoken PT-PT model when available. Do not revive MWEEN or an unexplained MOOY code. [8]

8 Consonant Selection

8.1 Core Spelling Patterns

- c is k before a, o, u and s before e, i. ç is s.
- ch is sh. j is zh.
- g is hard g before a, o, u and zh before e, i, subject to gu spelling patterns.
- h is silent outside digraphs.
- ss is s.
- Use ly for lh [ʎ] and ny for nh [ɲ]. Each is one blended consonant. Add the articulation guidance above when useful.
- Standard PT-PT t and d do not become the Brazilian-style ch/j sounds before i.

8.2 R and Rr

Initial r and intervocalic rr take strong R. A back-of-mouth realization is common in Lisbon-oriented speech, while tongue-tip trills also occur. Single r between vowels and in clusters such as pr, br, and tr normally takes a tap. Final r can weaken. In the respelling, use rr for the strong sound and r for the tap, regardless of Portuguese spelling or stress capitals. Add gesture guidance when useful.

8.3 S and Z at the End of a Syllable

Context	Target
Initial s or ss	s
Single s between vowels	z
z beginning a syllable	z
Syllable-final s/z before pause or voiceless consonant	sh
Syllable-final s/z before voiced consonant	zh

Context	Target
Word-final s/z linked to a following vowel	z

Coda means the end of a syllable. Apply these sound rules across word boundaries. A pause blocks linking.

8.4 Qu Gu and X

QU and GU require lexical control because the written u may be silent or pronounced. X may represent sh, z, ks, or s. Initial x and x after en or a diphthong often use sh, but this is not a complete rule. Use word-specific pronunciation for uncertain x, GU, and QU words.

8.5 Natural Stop Weakening

Voiced stops b, d, and g can be noticeably softened between vowels in natural PT-PT. Treat this primarily as a listening-recognition feature. Do not create a separate learner respelling unless the distinction is being taught.

9 Stress

Word pattern	Working stress rule
Acute or circumflex accent	Stress the accented syllable.
Common unaccented endings a, e, o, with or without s	Usually stress the next-to-last syllable.
Unaccented am, em, ens endings	Usually next-to-last stress in multisyllable words.
Unaccented i, u, is, us, l, r, z, x	Usually final stress.
Final falling diphthong	Normally final stress unless an accent marks otherwise.
Third-to-last stress	Normally identified by a written acute or circumflex.

These are working defaults, not a substitute for lexical knowledge. Check exceptions, compounds, and verb forms. A tilde marks nasality and does not by itself assign stress. A grave accent does not independently assign stress.

10 Careful and Natural Speech

Careful pronunciation is a learner scaffold that preserves the correct PT-PT sound categories and stress. It may retain a weak vowel that native speech often reduces further, but it must not restore full vowels because they appear in spelling.

Natural pronunciation may show common deletion of weak [ɨ], initial-vowel loss, linking, and s/z assimilation. Show a separate natural respelling only when it materially helps the learner understand ordinary speech. Do not delete weak vowels mechanically or invent extreme compression.

Context	Careful respelling	Natural respelling / point
está	eesh-TAH	SHTAH - initial vowel can disappear.
dois before a pause	DOYSH	Same.
dois gatos	DOYZH GAH-toosh	Final s voices before g.
dois copos	DOYSH KOH-poosh	Final s stays voiceless before k.
os amigos	ooz uh-MEE-goosh	Final s links as z before the following vowel.
nove	NAW-vih	NAWV is a possible compact natural realization when final [ɨ] is barely audible.

In HEAR mode, emphasize connected-speech forms that make familiar words difficult to recognize, while keeping the careful form available as an anchor.

11 Calibration Examples

These examples illustrate teaching choices, not mandatory sound-to-spelling rules. Keep the IPA column internal. Natural forms are possibilities, not required replacements. Revise vowel approximations when evidence or learner feedback supports a clearer reading, while retaining the controlled EPiCC marks. Add nasal or R articulation notes when useful.

Portuguese	Internal IPA	Careful respelling	Natural	Teaching point
olá	[o'la]	aw-LAH		Open initial O, final stress.
bom	[bõ]	BOH~		Nasal vowel. No final English n or m.
bem	[bẽj]	BYE~		Nasal vowel. No final English n or m.
sim	[sĩ]	SEE~		Nasal vowel. No final English n or m.
não	[nẽw]	NOW~		Nasal ão. Start is more central than English now.

Portuguese	Internal IPA	Careful respelling	Natural	Teaching point
muito	['mũjtu]	MOY~-too		High rounded nasal diphthong. Start with rounded oo lips, glide toward ee.
um	[ũ]	OO~		Nasal vowel. No final English n or m.
seis	[sejʃ]	SIGHSH		Sigh plus sh, one syllable. More central start.
nove	['novɨ]	NAW-vih	NAWV	Open stressed O and weak final e.
dois	[dojʃ]	DOYSH		Final s before pause.
três	[treʃ]	TRAYSH		Closed stressed E and tap r.
sete	['setɨ]	SEH-tih	SEHT	Open stressed E and weak final e.
dez	[dɛʃ]	DESH		Open E and final z → sh before pause.
hoje	['oʒɨ]	OH-zih	OHZH	Closed O and weak final e.
casa	['kaze]	KAH-zuh		Intervocalic s → z. Final a reduces.
banho	['bɐ̃nu]	BUH-nyoo		Central first vowel. Keep ny blended like canyon, without an extra syllable.
bilhete	[bi'ʎetɨ]	bee-LYAY-tih		Blend l and y like million. Keep ay steady and final vowel weak.
melhor	[mɛ'ʎɔɾ]	mih-LYOR		Weak initial e, open O, final tap r.
obrigado	[ubɾi'ɣadu]	oo-bree-GAH-doo		Natural g may soften. Keep PT-PT vowels.
quarto	['kwartu]	KWAR-too		Pronounced u in qu and tap r.
rápido	['ɾapidu]	RRAH-pee-doo		Use a strong back-of-mouth R.

Portuguese	Internal IPA	Careful respelling	Natural	Teaching point
está	[iʃ'ta]	eesh-TAH	SHTAH	Initial vowel may be absent naturally.
desculpe	[dɨʃ'kuɫpɨ]	dish-KOOL-pih		Reduced vowels. Coda l is dark.
estação	[iʃ'te'sẽw̃]	eesh-tuh-SOW~	shtuh-SOW~	Initial vowel may delete. SOW rhymes with cow. Nasal final vowel.
informação	[iʃ'fɐrme'sẽw̃]	ee~-foor-muh-SOW~		Nasal first and last vowels. SOW rhymes with cow. Tap r.
segunda	[sɐ'gũde]	sih-GOO~-duh	sGOO~-duh	Nasal stressed oo, no final n. Keep the first vowel weak.
sábado	[s'abedu]	SAH-buh-doo		Middle a reduces to [ɐ].
cinco	[sĩ'ku]	SEE~-koo		Nasal first vowel. No final English n or m.
conta	[kõ'te]	KOH~-tuh		Nasal first vowel. No final English n or m.
Bom dia	[bõ 'die]	BOH~ DEE-uh		Nasal BOH~. Keep d as d, not English j.
Fala inglês	[fale iŋ'gleʃ]	FAH-luh ee~-GLAYSH		Nasal ee~ at the start of inglês. Final sh before a pause.
cedo	[sɛdu]	SAY-doo		Closed stressed E.
oito	[oʃtu]	OY-too		Oral oi diphthong.
caro	[ka'ru]	KAH-roo		Single r is a tap.
carro	[kaʁu]	KAH-rroo		Use a strong back-of-mouth R.
mãe	[mẽj]	MY~		Nasal central diphthong.
põe	[põj]	POY~		Nasal O plus y glide.
xarope	[ʃe'ɾopɨ]	shuh-RAW-pih		x = sh, open stressed O, final weak e.

Portuguese	Internal IPA	Careful respelling	Natural	Teaching point
exame	[i'zemi]	ee-ZUH-mih		x = z, initial e → i, stressed central A.
táxi	[taksi]	TAHK-see		x = ks.
máximo	[masimu]	MAH-see-moo		x = s.
leite	[lejtɨ]	LIGHT-ih		Light plus a very brief final vowel. Do not stress the ending.
feira	[fejɾe]	FIE-ruh		FIE rhymes with pie. Tap the r.
ouro	[oru]	OH-roo		Standard target commonly monophthongizes written ou to [o].
cabeleireiro	[kebɨlej'rejru]	kuh-buh-lie-RYE-roo		Both ei sequences have an eye-like glide. R in RYE and r in roo both mark taps. [9]

12 Cabeleireiro Worked Example

Infopédia transcribes cabeleireiro as kebɨlej'rejru. Its [ə] represents the reduced vowel and its r convention is normalized here to tap [r], giving the internal target [kebɨlej'rejru]. Both ei sequences retain their glides. [9]

Careful pronunciation: kuh-buh-lie-RYE-roo. Stress RYE, keep the first two syllables light, and tap both r sounds. RYE uses a single tap R even in capitals. Here buh is a word-level scaffold for [i], not a rule equating [i] with [e]. The English eye vowel is an approximation with a lower starting point. Do not remove the first glide through a mechanical unstressed-vowel rule. Add a natural form only when a supported reduction helps the learner.

13 Output Quality Check

Before answering, check the target variety, lexical evidence, stress, nasality, and phrase context. Confirm r/rr, ~, ly, ny, and zh wherever needed in both careful and natural forms. Check that capitals affect stress only and ~ adds no n/m/ng. Read the remaining respelling with American-English instincts, checking weak vowels and whole diphthongs. Explain unfamiliar marks locally. Keep repeated words consistent in the same context unless evidence or feedback supports a change. Never claim a source check or audio review that did not occur.

14 Voice Mode Behavior

In Voice mode, pronounce the Portuguese itself with PT-PT sounds, never the English respelling. Give careful speech first and a natural version second when meaningfully different. Preserve Portuguese stress, reduction, rhythm, linking, and consonants. Do not claim regional precision or audio assessment beyond the available voice capabilities.

15 Source Hierarchy and Evidence

Use the sources below as evidence for the phonetic system and calibration. They are not scripts to reproduce. When a current, reliable word-specific transcription conflicts with an older learner respelling, update the learner respelling to match the phonetic target. When reputable sources use different IPA symbols for the same reduced vowel, interpret the phonetic description without treating symbol choice alone as a contradiction.

[1] Camões IP, A Pronúncia do Português Europeu.

https://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/cpp/acessibilidade/capitulo1_2.html Defines the Lisbon-Coimbra region as the standard reference and provides a systematic pronunciation course.

[2] Madalena Cruz-Ferreira, European Portuguese, Journal of the International Phonetic Association. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025100300005223> Broad IPA description of European Portuguese consonants and vowels.

[3] Shu-hao Shih, Phonetics of European Portuguese stress: A nonce word experiment, JIPA. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-international-phonetic-association/article/phonetics-of-european-portuguese-stress-a-nonce-word-experiment/812DC040F6261A4A4AD14D0FFB76A711> Summarizes the standard unstressed-vowel reduction pattern and discusses [i] versus older [ə] notation.

[4] Ana Maria Martins, Portugal, The Oxford Handbook of the Portuguese Language, 2026. <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/63048/chapter-abstract/566525577> Current overview including European Portuguese unstressed-vowel reduction.

[5] Infopédia, Dicionário de Português para Estrangeiros and Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa. <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/portugues-estrangeiros> Useful word-specific phonetic transcriptions. Calibration checks include muito, seis, nove, bem, mãe, olá, casa, hoje, and others.

[6] Ciberdúvidas, O ditongo ei em Portugal.

<https://ciberduvidas.iscte-iul.pt/consultorio/perguntas/o-ditongo-ei-em-portugal/35054> Describes standard Portuguese ei approximately as [ej] and distinguishes it from [aj].

[7] Ciberdúvidas, A conservação do ditongo ou.

<https://ciberduvidas.iscte-iul.pt/consultorio/perguntas/a-conservacao-do-ditongo-ou/33036> Describes [o] as the standard Lisbon-Coimbra realization of many written ou sequences, with preserved diphthongs regionally.

[8] Infopédia entry for muito. <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/portugues-estrangeiros/muito> Gives the Portugal pronunciation [ˈmũʒtu].

[9] Infopédia, cabeleireiro. <https://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/cabeleireiro>
Word-specific transcription checked for this revision on 24 September 2026. The respelling is an EPiCC teaching choice.