

SPANISH HANDWRITING AND SPELLING

As an extractor, you will need to develop an ability to read the handwriting styles of the various record keepers. To develop that ability will require that you learn to distinguish easily confused letters from one another, identify basic elements of handwriting style, recognize variations in spellings of words, and interpret abbreviations.

Your success as an extractor will greatly depend upon your ability to adjust to each new style of handwriting. It would be totally impractical to provide a sample alphabet of each record keeper's handwriting, or even to give complete representations of various styles, because that would require review of all the records first. Nevertheless, as you begin to

extract from the records you will find that practically all of the questions you may have regarding a record keeper's handwriting and spelling can be answered by carefully analyzing and comparing the various record entries.

The purpose of this chapter is to present some basic concepts and guidelines for reading old Spanish writing. It consists of the following sections:

- Section 1 – Easily Confused Letters
- Section 2 – Elements of Spanish Handwriting Style
- Section 3 – Variations in Word Spelling



Section One

EASILY CONFUSED LETTERS

Below are described some of the letters that may cause you the most confusion. They are arranged in alphabetical order, not necessarily in the order of frequency or importance.

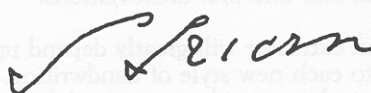
Because every scribe's handwriting is unique, you will find letters or forms of letters not described here. But if you always work from the known to the unknown, in other words use sample letters you are sure of to identify other letters, you should be able to decipher almost any document.

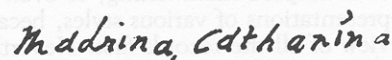
The Letter A

The letter *a* sometimes resembles an *o* followed by an undotted *i*: *oi*.

Although some scribes did not dot their *i*'s, if there is no dot you should suspect that what looks like an *i* might be some other letter.

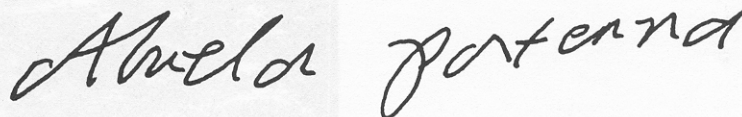
Study the *a*'s in the words below:

S Juan 

Madrina, Catharina 


Juan 

On the other hand, do not mistake *oi* or *os* for *a*, as in the words *Abuelos paternos*, below:



The Letter D

The letter *d* is composed of two parts: a round body, and an ascender (the part that rises above the line of writing).

Many scribes made the ascender curve back to the left: . Others made a loop for the ascender. If the

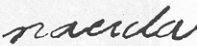
loop is small enough, you may mistake such a *d* for an

o: , . Still other scribes separated the two

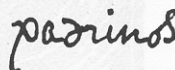
parts of the *d*, making the letter look like the letters *oi*: .

Study the *d*'s in the following words:

Catedral 

nacida 

Yndios 

padrinos 

dos 

Sauceda 

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers against those below.

1. *nacida*

2. *vecindad*

3. *fue su padrino*

4. *en dicho día*

5. *Dolores Delgado*

Answers

1. nacida 2. vecindad 3. fue su padrino 4. en dicho día 5. Dolores Delgado

The Letter G

Capital G sometimes resembles the letter S, as in the following words:

García *Sarcía*

Gonzales *Gonzaly*

Giyerna *Siyerna*

Gustamante *Sustamante*

Lowercase g's were sometimes written like our modern printed g: *g*.

Some scribes did not connect the circular body of the g and its tail. You might mistake their g's for o's.

Some scribes were not careful to distinguish between g's and q's. However, you will usually be able to determine the letter by the way it is used in the word.

Study the g's in the following words:

Religioso *Religiosso*

Agosto *Agosto*

sigtes *sigtes*

mugr *mugr*

The Letter H

Lowercase h has several forms in Spanish records. You may mistake one of its forms for an s or b: *h* or *h*.

In records before about 1700, you may see an early form of h, called a "secretary" h: *h*. This h may trouble you until you get used to it.

Study the h's in the following words:

hijo *hijo*

ocho *ocho*

hijo *hijo*

ocho *ocho*

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers against those below.

1. *Gerardo Lopez*

2. *Padres no conocidos*

3. *hize*

4. *Savina Gillen*

5. *Hijo de la yglesia*

Answers

1. Gerardo Lopez 2. Padres no conocidos 3. hize 4. Savina Gillen 5. Hijo de la yglesia

The Letter J

In modern handwriting, j's extend below the line of writing and are dotted like i's. In old Spanish handwriting, however, they may extend above the line of writing, below it, or, often, both above and below it; and often they are not dotted. Study the j's in the following words:

hija *hiJa*

hijo *hiJo*

hijo *hiJo*

hija *hiJa*

The Letters J, T, and F

The capital letters, J, T, and F all have the same basic form:

J *J* T *T* F *F* F *F* F *F*

J's are unadorned, but T's and F's are both crossed. You can usually distinguish F's from T's by the cross stroke. The cross strokes of F's are usually hooked or curved and often extend only to the right of the letter.

Capital J sometimes resembles S:

Joachin

Joachin

Solemnem^{te}

Solemnem^{te}

Study the J's, T's, and F's in the following words. Words on the same line were written by the same scribe.

Jose

Jose

Timoteo

Timoteo

Feb.

Feb.

Juan

Juan

Francisco

Francisco

Timotea

Timotea

Jesus

Jesus

Tagle

Tagle

Fran.^{co}

Fran.^{co}

Fernando

Fernando

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1. *hijas*

2. *Juana María Gomes*

3. *hijo de José Thomas*

4. *Fran^{co} Quintana*

5. *Fr. José Delgado*

6. *Hijo leg^o*

7. *Julio*

8. *Eugenio*

9. *de José Felipe Villegas*

10. *hija de la yglesia*

Answers

1. hijas 2. Juana María Gomes 3. hijo de José Thomas
4. Fran^{co} Quintana 5. Fr. José Delgado
6. Hijo leg^o 7. Julio 8. Eugenio 9. de José Felipe Villegas
10. hija de la yglesia

The Letter L

Capital L sometimes resembles S, E, or G, as in the following words:

El Liz.do
El Liz.do

Laborio
Laborio

Luiza
Luiza

Lopez
Lopez

The Letter M

The following form of M may be hard to recognize: *M*.

You may mistake it for 11, or, if it is crossed, Al. Study the

M's in the following words:

Maio
Maio

Martin.z
Martin.z

María
María

Marzo
Marzo

The Letter N

Lowercase n's and r's are sometimes confused.

The way uppercase N's were written by some scribes, they resemble H's or, occasionally, V's:

Noviemb.e
Noviemb.e

Nicolas
Nicolas

Naturales
Naturales

Nicolás Vasq.s
Nicolás Vasq.s

The Letter P

P sometimes resembles V and sometimes X, as in the following words:

parentesco
parentesco

palacio
palacio

o campo
o campo

perez
perez

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1. *Noviembre*

2. *M^a Fermina Rangel*

3. *Luis*

4. *M^a Pilar Marq.^z*

5. *Phelipe*

Answers

1. Noviembre 2. M^a Fermina Rangel 3. Luis
4. M.^a Pilar Marq.^z 5. Phelipe

The Letters R, X, N, and Z

Until you get used to it, the letter *r* will probably give you more trouble than any other letter in Latin American records. Its basic form is the same as a modern handwritten *x*: *X*. (This form is by far the most common of the letter forms described in this section.)

The scribes who made their *r*'s in this way usually made their *x*'s without lifting their pens from the paper: *X*. You can tell these *x*'s and *r*'s apart, then, because the *x*'s are closed on the right side.

Other scribes made their *r*'s without lifting their pens: *X*. These *r*'s are often confused with *n*'s and *z*'s, as well as with *x*'s. They may also resemble the numeral 2. You can usually tell from the context of the record that they are *r*'s.

You may also confuse a second form of *r* with the letter *z*: *Z*.

Study the *r*'s, *x*'s, *n*'s, and *z*'s in the following words.

Exorcicé
exorcicé

Marzo
Marzo

Casimira
Casimira

Rodriguez
Rodriguez

Espuria
espuria

Guerrero
Guerrero

There are other forms of *r* in Spanish records, but you should have little trouble recognizing them because they are like our modern handwritten *r*'s: *r* *rr*.

Until you are used to the *x*-shaped *r*, whenever you find a word that appears to have an *x*, *n*, or *z*, substitute an *r* and see if the word makes more sense.

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1.

Maria

2.

Doctrinar

3.

Barraza

4.

Natural



5.

Xavier


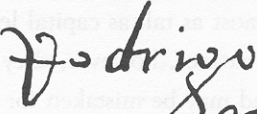
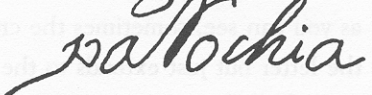
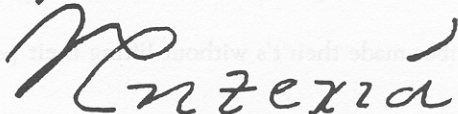
Answers

1. Maria
2. Doctrinar
3. Barraza
4. Natural
5. Xavier

The Letter R


Double r (rr) is a single letter in Spanish. In most records, it is written as two r's. But in some early records (pre-1700), it has the following form: . At the beginning of a word,  could stand for capital R, since rr and R were interchangeable.



In some records, a single, large r stands for rr or R. Study the R's and rr's in the following examples:


Reverendo 
 Rodrigo 
 parrochia 
 Renteria 


The Letter S


The letter s has more basic forms than perhaps any other letter in Latin American records. You may confuse s with a number of other letters, depending on the particular form.



The letter s is sometimes written on its side, resembling a v: .

It is sometimes written as a short, slanted line, with practically no curve: . It may have a loop at the top or a hook at the bottom: .



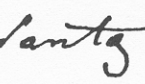


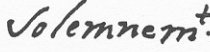
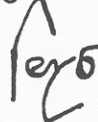
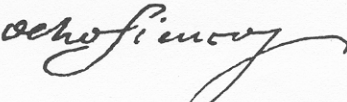
It may resemble a z: . To determine if a particular letter is an s or a z, you must compare letters. Even then, you may not be able to tell for sure, since the two letters were interchangeable.

When s comes at the end of a word, it may have a long tail: . You might mistake this form for a y, j, or g.

Often at the end of a word and even sometimes in the middle, s may resemble an f: .

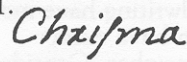

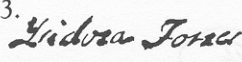
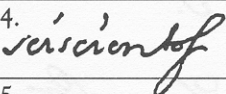
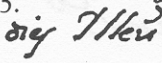
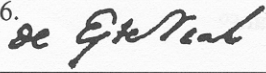
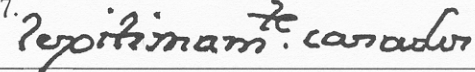
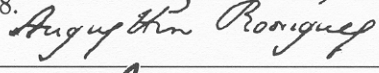
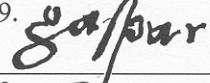
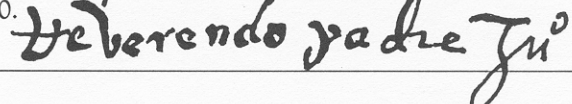
Records from the 1500s and 1600s have two other forms of s. One resembles a printed f: . The other, usually used at the end of words, resembles the numeral 6: .

Study the s's in the following words:

Jesus  mes 
 santos  sus 
 esta  solemnem^t 
 seys  ochosientos 

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Answers

- Chrisma
- Jossepha
- Ysidora Torres
- Seiscientos
- Dies Ysseis
- de Esterreal or EsteReal
- Lexitimam^{te} casados
- Augusttin Rodrigues
- Gaspar
- Reverendo (or rreverendo) padre Juo

The Letter T

In modern handwriting, lowercase *t*'s are taller than most other lowercase letters—almost as tall as capital letters. In many records that you will extract, however, they are no taller than a lowercase *c* and may be mistaken for *c*'s or *r*'s: *t*. And, as you can see, sometimes the cross stroke does not cross the letter but just extends to the right.

Some scribes made their *t*'s without lifting their pens: *t*.

Study the *t*'s in the following words:

viente *veinte*

cuarenta *cuarenta*

veinte *veinte*

veintitres *veintitres*

Capital Letters

As a rule, capital letters in Spanish handwriting have more variety than lowercase letters. They often have extra flourishes that may make them hard to decipher. Consider the context of the word, and compare letters to decipher them. Study the following examples:

Pedro

Pedro

El B. D.

El B. D.

El Pbro

El Pbro

D. Franco

D. Franco

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1. *Trientay vno de Diz^{re}*

2. *Padrinos*

3. *Da Martina Marrieta*

4. *María Santos*

5. *Bautizó solemnem^{te}*

Answers

1. Trientay vno de Diz^{re} 2. Padrinos 3. Da Martina Marrieta 4. María Santos 5. Bautizó solemnem^{te}