

COMMON DIACRITICAL MARKS

Diacritical markings are added to the top or bottom of a letter to indicate appropriate stress, special pronunciation, or unusual sounds not common in the Roman alphabet.

Acute accent: This diacritic (´) often indicates primary stress (as in *ópera* or *operátic*) in many English dictionaries. Additionally, it indicates spelling in some languages such as Spanish *Qué?* ("What?"). The acute accent has its base on the left-hand side, but its top tilts toward the right. Contrast with the grave accent, below.

Grave accent: This diacritic (`) often indicates secondary stress (as in *opèrâte*) in many English dictionaries. Additionally, it indicates spelling in some languages, such as French *père*. Note that the acute accent has its base on the right-hand side, but its top tilts toward the left. Contrast with the acute accent, above.

Cedilla: The cedilla can be attached to the bottom of the letter *c* in French-loan words indicates a "soft" *c*. The word *façade* is one example. In Romanian, the cedilla indicates a *-sh* sound when it is stuck on the bottom of a letter *s* or a "ts" sound (as in *tse-tse fly*) when the diacritical is attached to the bottom of the letter *t*.

Circumflex accent: This diacritic (ˆ) often indicates reduced primary stress. *Algeo* offers as an example *élevàtor* *ôperàtor*. French writers also use this mark in writing words such as *rôle* or *île*.

Umlaut (also called **dieresis**): A superposed pair of dots indicating vowel quality in Germanic languages. In older English spelling, the umlaut can also indicate that each vowel is pronounced separately rather than blended together. (For example, *coöperate* and *preëminent* each have four syllables, but some readers might theoretically blend the vowels *oo* and *ee* together and pronounce these words trisyllabically without this visual marker.)

Tilde: In Spanish loan words, the tilde indicates a /y/ sound added to a consonant. An example might be *cañon* or *piña colada*. In Portuguese loan words, the tilde indicates nasalized vowels, such as in *São Paulo*.

Swedish and Norse words may also use the circle marking above certain vowels (å), and Czechoslovakian words may use the **haček** a wedge-shaped symbol to indicate a "ch" sound as in English *chill*.