Polski

The Polish Alphabet

Printed	Cursive
A a	𝒜 𝒶
Ą ą	𝒜̨ 𝒶̨
B b	ℬ 𝒷
C c	𝒞 𝒸
Ć ć	𝒞́ 𝒸́
D d	𝒟 𝒹
E e	ℰ 𝑒
Ę ę	ℰ̨ 𝑒̨
F f	ℱ 𝒻
G g	𝒢 𝑔
H h	ℋ 𝒽
I i	ℐ 𝒾
J j	𝒥 𝒿
K k	𝒦 𝓀
L l	ℒ 𝓁
Ł ł	Ł ł
M m	ℳ 𝓂
N n	𝒩 𝓃
Ń ń	𝒩́ 𝓃́
O o	𝒪 𝑜
Ó ó	𝒪́ 𝑜́
P p	𝒫 𝓅
R r	ℛ 𝓇
S s	𝒮 𝓈
Ś ś	𝒮́ 𝓈́
T t	𝒯 𝓉

Printed	Cursive	Printed	Cursive
U u	𝒰 𝓊	Z z	𝒵 𝓏
W w	𝒲 𝓌	Ź ź	𝒵́ 𝓏́
Y y	𝒴 𝓎	Ż ż	𝒵̇ 𝓏̇

Polish is one of the Slavic languages that use the Roman alphabet, not the Cyrillic, largely because writing came to the Poles by way of Roman Catholic rather than Greek Orthodox clergy. The letters *q, v,* and *x* are not used in Polish, and the distinctly Polish characters ***ą, ć, ę, ł, ń, ó, ś, ź*** and ***ż*** are considered separate letters of the alphabet, each following its unmodified counterpart (***ą*** after ***a, ć*** after ***c,*** and so on). The ***q, ę, ń,*** and ***y*** never appear initially and thus are seldom capitalized; but since documents sometimes highlight words by spelling them out in upper-case letters, it seems best to show all upper-case forms, even those rarely seen.

The basic vowels of Polish are much as in the Romance languages: ***a*** is like the *a* in "f*a*ther," ***e*** like that in "l*e*t," ***i*** like that in "mach*i*ne," ***o*** somewhat like that in "h*o*t," ***u*** like the *oo* in "b*oo*k," and ***y*** like the short *i* sound in "h*i*t." The vowel ***ó*** is pronounced exactly the same as Polish ***u,*** and some words are spelled either way (*Jakób* vs. *Jakub,* for example). The nasal vowel ***ą*** sounds like English "*own*" with the *n*-sound never quite finished, but before *b* or *p* it sounds more like *om* in "h*o*me." The nasal ***ę*** is generally pronounced like *en* in "m*e*n," again without quite finishing the *n*-sound; before *b* or *p* it sounds more like *em* in "m*e*mory," and in some positions it loses its nasal quality. But generally pronouncing ***ą*** like *on (om)* and ***ę*** like *en (em)* will approximate the correct sound. Polish does not distinguish between long and short vowels.

The ***i*** is special because it often follows consonants as a sign of softening; thus Poles pronounce *ne* as somewhat like "neh," but *nie* more like "nyeh." The consonants ***ć, ń, ś,*** and ***ź*** are spelled that way only when they precede other consonants; before vowels they're spelled ***ci, ni, si,*** and ***zi.*** In either case they are pronounced, respectively, more or less like soft *ch* (as in "*ch*eese"), *ni* (as in "*oni*on"), *sh* (as in "*sh*eep") and the sound of the *s* in "pleasure." In a word like *cicho* (quiet, quietly) the ***i*** not only softens the ***c*** to a *ch*-sound, it also supplies the first syllable's vowel.

Many consonants are pronounced much as in English, but the *l* is more like that in "*l*eaf" than that in "hi*ll*," and the *r* is lightly trilled, as in Italian. Polish ***h*** and ***ch*** are pronounced the same, a little harsher than an initial *h* in English but not quite so guttural as *ch* in German "Ba*ch*." Polish ***w*** sounds like English *v* and Polish ***ł*** is pronounced like English *w* (all of which explains how "Lech Wałęsa" can come out sounding like "Lekh Vawensa"). The ***c*** is pronounced like a combined *ts* (e. g., English "knigh*ts*"), the ***g*** is always as in "*g*one" (never as in "*g*ym"), and the ***j*** is always pronounced like *y* in "*y*ield." The ***s*** is pronounced as it is in English "*s*oon," and ***z*** is pronounced as in "*z*ebra" (but remember the softened pronunciation of *ci, ni, si,* and *zi*).

The ***cz, rz, sz*** combinations are similar to ***ć, ź,*** and ***ś,*** respectively, but are articulated differently; ***ż*** is pronounced the same as ***rz.*** The combination ***dź*** or ***dzi*** sounds like an English *j* in "*j*ail." In Polish the accent almost always falls on the next-to-last syllable of any given word. Mastering certain sound combinations can be difficult for non-Poles, but once you do master them you'll find Polish words are pronounced exactly as they're spelled!

Source: Shea, Jonathan D., and William F. Hoffman. *Following the Paper Trail: A Multilingual Translation Guide.* Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 1994.