Diptongos — Boot Camp Support Document (Module Two)

Understanding How Vowels Merge in Spanish

1. Overview

Spanish has **pure vowels**, and when two vowels appear together, they either:

- **merge into one syllable** → *diptongo*
- **separate into two syllables** → *hiato*

This page summarizes the predictable system behind diptongos.

2. The Vowel Categories (The Key to Everything)

Spanish vowels fall into two groups:

Strong Vowels

- **a**, **e**, **o**

Weak Vowels

- **i**, **u**

This classification determines whether vowels **cling** (merge) or **escape** (separate).

3. When a Diptongo Happens

A **diptongo** forms when:

Weak + Strong

- *cielo* → **cie-lo**
- *causa* → **cau-sa**

Weak + Weak

- *ciudad* → **ciu-dad**
- *viuda* → **viu-da**

Strong + Strong → NOT a diptongo

- *poeta* → **po-e-ta**
- *feo* → **fe-o**

Strong vowels refuse to merge with each other.

4. Accents Change Everything (Hiato)

A written accent on a **weak vowel** forces separation, even if the vowels would normally merge.

- *país* → **pa-ís**
- *oír* → **o-ír**
- *Raúl* → **Ra-úl**

This is the only time a weak vowel refuses to cling.

5. Common Diptongo Combinations

Weak + Strong

- **ia** → *familia*
- **ie** → *tierra*
- **io** → *nación*
- **ua** → *cuadro*
- **ue** → *puedo*
- **uo** → *continuo*

Weak + Weak

- **iu** → *viuda*
- **ui** → *ruido*, *muy*

These are the combinations you will see most often.

6. Why Diptongos Matter for Learners

- They **change syllable count**
- They **affect stress placement**
- They explain why Spanish sometimes **sounds shorter** than it looks
- They make Spanish spelling **predictable**
- They help decode "mystery words" like *cielo*, *tierra*, *nación*, *cuadro*

7. Mini Reference Chart

Vowel Pair	Diptongo?	Example	Syllables
ia	✓	*familia*	fa-mi-lia
ie	✓	*tierra*	tie-rra
io	✓	*nación*	na-ción
ua	✓	*cuadro*	cua-dro
ue	✓	*puedo*	pue-do
iu	✓	*viuda*	viu-da
ui	✓	*ruido*	rui-do
ae	❌	*caer*	ca-er
eo	❌	*feo*	fe-o
aí	❌ (accent)	*país*	pa-ís
oí	❌ (accent)	*oír*	o-ír

8. One-Sentence Takeaway

A diptongo is when a **weak vowel clings** to another vowel and they form **one syllable** — unless an **accent** forces it to escape.

9. Practice Words for Class

- cielo
- tierra
- cuadro
- puedo
- nación
- viuda
- ruido
- país
- oír
- Raúl