

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Recognizing what English and Portuguese have in common
- » Spell it out: Saying the alphabet
- » Looking at vowels and consonants: Basic Portuguese sounds
- » Listening for regional variations in accent

Chapter **1**

You Already Know Some Portuguese!

Much like English, the Portuguese language comes in several different versions. The accent you hear in Brazil is pretty different from the Portuguese that's spoken in Portugal. In fact, some Brazilian tourists in Portugal say they can't understand a word that's spoken there! The situation is similar to a conversation among English speakers from Texas, South Africa, and Ireland: It would probably sound like they were speaking three different languages. No doubt they'd struggle to understand each other.

Within Brazil, there are also regional differences in the way people speak — just as accents differ in various regions of the United States. Think about the accents of people in Alabama, Minnesota, and New York. So it is in Brazil. People in **São Paulo** (sah-oooh pah-oooh-loh), **Rio de Janeiro** (hee-oooh dee zhah-nay-roh), and the touristy city of **Salvador** (sahl-vah-doh) have different twangs to their speech, but it's still pretty easy to understand all of them if you know Portuguese.

Written Portuguese, however, is pretty standard, especially the writing you find in a newspaper or other type of publication. A Brazilian can understand a Portuguese newspaper or read the works of Portugal's Nobel Prize-winning author **José Saramago** (zhoh-zeh sah-rah-mah-goh), no problem.

The Portuguese in this book is Brazilian Portuguese, as opposed to the Portuguese spoken in Portugal and countries in Africa, including **Cabo Verde** (*kah-boh veh-jee*) (*Cape Verde*; islands off northwestern Africa), **Moçambique** (*moh-sahm-bee-kee*) (*Mozambique*; on the coast of southeast Africa), **Guiné-Bissau** (*gwee-neh bee-sah-ooh*) (*Guinea Bissau*; in western Africa), **Angola** (*ahn-goh-lah*) (in southwestern Africa), and **São Tomé e Príncipe** (*sah-ooh toh-meh ee preen-see-pee*) (*Sao Tome and Principe*; islands off western Africa).

Exploring the Roots of Portuguese

The beautiful Portuguese language belongs to a linguistic family known as the Romance languages. Back when the Roman Empire was around, Rome was the center of a wide swath of Europe, northern Africa, and parts of Asia. With Rome's influence came its language — Latin.

The closer a place was to Rome, the more likely it was to absorb Latin into its language. This was the case with Portugal — where the Portuguese language originates — as well as the language of places like France, Spain, and even Romania.

So how did Portuguese get all the way to Brazil? A Portuguese conquistador named **Pedro Álvares Cabral** (*peh-droh ahl-vah-reez kah-brah-ooh*) landed in modern-day Brazil on April 22, 1500, and is the person credited for having “discovered” Brazil. Many indigenous people were already living in the area, of course, many of whom spoke languages that are part of a linguistic family today called **Tupi-Guarani** (*too-pee gwah-rah-nee*).



CULTURAL
WISDOM

Brazilian Portuguese uses some **Tupi-Guarani** words, which commonly appear as names of towns in Brazil — **Ubatuba** (*ooh-bah-too-bah*), for example, is a pretty beach town in **São Paulo** (*sah-ooh pah-ooh-loh*) state. The town is nicknamed **Uba-Chuva** because **chuva** (*shoo-vah*) means *rain* and it rains there a lot! **Tupi-Guarani** words also name native plants and animals. *Armadillo*, for example, is **tatu** (*tah-too*). After you get used to speaking Portuguese, figuring out whether a word is Latin-based or **Tupi-Guarani**-based is pretty easy.

Still other words in Brazilian Portuguese are based on African languages, a result of the vast influence that Africans had on creating modern-day Brazil and its culture.

While the development of the modern-day English language wasn't influenced by **Tupi-Guarani** or African languages, what you may not realize is that it has a lot of Latin influence. Linguists consider English to be a Germanic language, and it technically is. But due to the on-and-off French occupations of the British Isles,

many of those French (Latin-based) words rubbed off on English. Some people say as much as 60 to 70 percent of English is Latin-based.

That's great news for you. It means that many Portuguese words have the same root as English words. The root of a word is usually the middle of the word — those few sounds that really define the meaning of a word. Some examples of Portuguese words that resemble English words and have the same meaning include **experimento** (eh-speh-ree-men-toh) (*experiment*), **presidente** (preh-zee-dang-chee) (*president*), **economia** (eh-koh-noh-mee-ah) (*economy*), **decisão** (deh-see-zah-ooh) (*decision*), **computador** (kom-poo-tah-doh) (*computer*), **liberdade** (lee-beh-dah-jee) (*liberty*), and **banana** (bah-nah-nah) (*banana*). And that's only to name a few!

Another benefit: **O português** (ooh poh-too-geh-z) (*Portuguese*), like all Latin languages, uses the Roman alphabet. Accent marks that you don't find in English appear over some of the vowels, but they add to the charm of Portuguese. Learning Portuguese is much easier for English-speaking people than learning Japanese or Arabic, which use totally different alphabets.

Finally, due to the modern influence of the United States throughout the world — which, in many ways, is much greater than Rome's ancient influence — English words are used in Portuguese, with no adaptation in the way they're written. Examples include **email** (ee-may-oh), **shopping** (shoh-ping) (in Brazil, **shopping** is a noun that means “shopping mall”), and **show** (shoh) (*show/performance*).

Reciting Your ABCs

A few of the sounds in Brazilian Portuguese can be difficult to imitate at first, because the sounds aren't used in English. But most Brazilians can understand what you're saying, even if you don't say every **palavra** (pah-lahv-rah) (*word*) perfectly. Many Brazilians think a foreign **sotaque** (soh-tah-kee) (*accent*) is charming, so don't worry about it.

On the upside, the way that phonetic sounds correspond to letters in Brazilian Portuguese is very systematic — much more so than in English. This means that after you get used to the way a letter or combination of letters sounds in Brazilian Portuguese, you can get the hang of the language pretty quickly. There are few surprises in the **pronúncia** (proh-noon-see-ah) (*pronunciation*) of this beautiful language.



AUDIO
ONLINE

The set of online audio files that accompany this book contains a pronunciation guide to give you a better feel for Portuguese sounds.

At the beginning of this chapter, did you notice that the pronunciation is shown in parentheses after the Portuguese word? That's how this book shares the pronunciation of all new words. The italicized part is where you put the emphasis on the word as you speak it.

Are you ready to discover the basics of **português** (poh-too-geh-z) (*Portuguese*)? You can start with the alphabet. Practice spelling your name:

- » **a** (ah)
- » **b** (beh)
- » **c** (seh)
- » **d** (deh)
- » **e** (eh)
- » **f** (*eh-fee*)
- » **g** (zheh)
- » **h** (ah-*gah*)
- » **i** (ee)
- » **j** (*zhoh-tah*)
- » **k** (kah)
- » **l** (*eh-lee*)
- » **m** (*eh-mee*)
- » **n** (*eh-nee*)
- » **o** (awe)
- » **p** (peh)
- » **q** (keh)
- » **r** (*eh-hee*)
- » **s** (*eh-see*)
- » **t** (teh)
- » **u** (ooh)
- » **v** (veh)

- » **w** (*dah-bli yoo*)
- » **x** (*sheez*)
- » **y** (*eep-see-lohn*)
- » **z** (*zeh*)



TIP

When I refer to the sound *zh* as part of a phonetic transcription (the pronunciation guide in parenthesis), think of the *s* sound in the word *treasure*. That's the *zh* sound I'm talking about.

Conquering Consonants

Getting through this book should be a cinch after you go through the basic pronunciation guide in this section. Skipping the guide is okay, too — you can get the gist by listening to the online audio files and reading the pronunciations of words in other chapters aloud. But if you want to get a general idea of how to pronounce words that don't show up in this book, this is a great place to begin. I start with the consonants — you know, all those letters in the alphabet that aren't vowels.



SOUND
NATIVE

Here's a fun aspect of Brazilian Portuguese. When a word ends in a consonant — most of these words are foreign (and mostly English) terms that Brazilians have adopted — it's pronounced with an added *ee* sound. Some examples are **club** (*kloo-bee*), **laptop** (*lahp-ee-top-ee*), **hip-hop** (*heep-ee-hoh-pee*), **rap** (*hah-pee*), and **rock** (*hoh-kee*).

That said, most consonants in Brazilian Portuguese have the same sound as in English. I point out the exceptions in the following sections.

Ready? Here we go!

The letter C

A *c* that begins a word usually sounds like a *k*:

- » **café** (*kah-feh*) (*coffee*)
- » **casa** (*kah-zah*) (*house*)

If the **c** has a hook-shaped mark under it, like this — **ç** — it makes an *s* sound:

- » **França** (*frahñ-sah*) (*France*)
- » **serviço** (*seh-vee-soo*) (*service*)

The most common use of this type of **c**, called the **cedilha** (*seh-deel-yah*) (*cedilla*), is when a **c** comes at the end of a word that's followed by **-ão**. It's the Brazilian equivalent of the English *-tion* ending.

- » **evolução** (*eh-voh-loo-sah-ooh*) (*evolution*)
- » **promoção** (*proh-moh-sah-ooh*) (*sale/discount/sales promotion*)

The letter D

If a word begins with a **d**, the sound is a hard *d*, like in English:

- » **dançar** (*dahn-sah*) (*to dance*)
- » **data** (*dah-tah*) (*date* — as in calendar date)

The word **de** (*jee*), which means *of*, is an exception.

If the **d** comes in the middle of a word, it can have either a hard *d* sound or a *j* sound — as in the English word *jelly*.

- » **advogado** (*ahj-voh-gah-doh*) (*lawyer*)
- » **estado** (*eh-stah-doh*) (*state* — as in a state in a nation)
- » **liberdade** (*lee-beh-dah-jee*) (*freedom*)
- » **modelo** (*moh-deh-loo*) (*model*)
- » **pedir** (*peh-jee*) (*to ask for*)

The letter G

The **g** in Portuguese usually is a hard *g*, like in the English word *go*:

- » **gato** (*gah-too*) (*cat*)
- » **governo** (*goh-veh-noo*) (*government*)
- » **segundo** (*seh-goön-doh*) (*second*)

But **g** takes a *zh* sound, like the *s* in *treasure*, when followed by an **e** or **i**:

- » **biologia** (bee-oh-loh-zhee-ah) (*biology*)
- » **gente** (zhang-chee) (*people*)

The letter H

The Brazilian Portuguese **h** is a pretty versatile consonant. If the word begins with an **h**, the letter is silent:

- » **honesto** (oh-neh-stoh) (*honest*)
- » **hora** (oh-rah) (*hour*)

In the cases of words that contain **lh** or **nh**, the **h** sounds like a *y*:

- » **companhia** (kohm-pahn-yee-ah) (*company*)
- » **Espanha** (eh-spahn-yah) (*Spain*)
- » **maravilhoso** (mah-rah-veel-yoh-zoo) (*marvelous/amazing*)
- » **palhaço** (pahl-yah-soh) (*clown*)

The letter J

The **j** in Portuguese always sounds like the *zh* sound an *s* makes in the English word *treasure*:

- » **joelho** (zhoh-el-yoh) (*knee*)
- » **Jorge** (zhoh-zhee) (*George*)
- » **julho** (zhool-yoh) (*July*)
- » **loja** (loh-zhah) (*store*)

The letter L

The **l** in Portuguese normally sounds like the *l* in English:

- » **gelo** (zheh-loo) (*ice*)
- » **líder** (lee-deh) (*leader*)

But if it comes at the end of a word, the **l** sounds like *ooh*:

- » **mil** (mee-ooh) (*one thousand*)
- » **Natal** (nah-tah-ooh) (*Christmas*)

The letters M and N

The **m** and **n** in Portuguese generally sound like *m* and *n* in English:

- » **janela** (zhah-neh-lah) (*window*)
- » **medo** (meh-doo) (*fear*)
- » **mel** (meh-ooh) (*honey*)
- » **não** (nah-ooh) (*no*)

But at the end of a word, an **m** or **n** takes on an *ng* sound:

- » **cem** (sang) (*one hundred*)
- » **homem** (oh-mang) (*man*)

The letter R

If the word begins or ends with an **r**, the **r** sounds like an *h*:

- » **Roberto** (hoh-beh-too) (*Robert*)
- » **rosa** (hoh-zah) (*pink*)

If *r* comes in the middle of a word, on the accented syllable, it sounds like an even stronger **h**. In the words **porta** and **carta** that follow, use your belly to push air out of your mouth as you say the *h*. It's a breathy *h*, not a guttural sound.

- » **carta** (kah-tah) (*letter*)
- » **porta** (poh-tah) (*door*)

If a word has two **r**'s (**rr**), they make an *h* sound, as in **burro** (boo-hoh) (*dumb*). If the **r** comes at the end of a word, it also makes an *h* sound like in **burro**:

- » **caminhar** (kah-ming-yah) (*to walk*)
- » **gostar** (goh-stah) (*to like*)

The letter S

The Portuguese **s** is generally pronounced the same as the English **s**, except it often becomes a **z** sound at the end of a word:

- » **dedos** (deh-doos) (*fingers*)
- » **olhos** (ohl-yooz) (*eyes*)

An **s** between two vowels also makes a **z** sound:

- » **casa** (kah-zah) (*house*)
- » **coisa** (koh-ee-zah) (*thing*)

The letter T

The **t** in Portuguese has a soft *t* sound in general. In English, you don't use the soft *t* sound very often.



TIP

Say *ta, ta, ta* in a quiet voice, without making a soft 'h' as if you're marking a rhythm. That's the soft *t* of Portuguese.

- » **atuar** (ah-too-ah) (*to act*)
- » **motocicleta** (moh-too-see-kleh-tah) (*motorcycle*)
- » **Tailândia** (tah-ee-lahn-jee-ah) (*Thailand*)

But **t** sounds like *ch* when followed by an **e** or an **i**:

- » **forte** (foh-chee) (*strong*)
- » **notícia** (noh-chee-see-ah) (*news*)
- » **passaporte** (pah-sah-poh-chee) (*passport*)
- » **time** (chee-mee) (*team*)

The letter W

The letter **w** doesn't naturally occur in Portuguese, but when it does, it sounds like a **v**. The only places you really see a **w** is in a person's name.

- » **Wanderlei** (*vahn-deh-lay*)
- » **Wanessa** (*vah-neh-sah*)

The letter X

The **x** generally has a *sh* sound in Portuguese:

- » **axé** (*ah-sheh*), a popular Brazilian musical and dance genre
- » **bruxa** (*broo-shah*) (*witch*)
- » **lixo** (*lee-shoo*) (*garbage*)
- » **taxa** (*tah-shah*) (*rate*)

The letter **x** can also have a *ks* sound, as in English: **tóxico** (*tohk-see-koh*) (*toxic*).

And the **x** can also sound like a *z* in some cases, such as **exame** (*eh-zahm-ee*) (*exam*).

Exercising Your Jowls with Vowels

In this section, I go over all five vowels in Portuguese, including the ones with accent marks.

The letters A and Ã

The letter **a** normally has an *ah* sound:

- » **ajuda** (*ah-zhoo-dah*) (*help*)
- » **amigo** (*ah-mee-goo*) (*friend*)
- » **Tatiana** (*tah-chee-ah-nah*), a woman's name



TIP

If the **a** has a squiggly mark, or **til** (*chee-ooh*) (*tilde*), on top of it (**ã**), then the letter makes a nasal sound. Instead of opening your mouth to say *a*, as in the English word *at*, try closing your mouth almost completely while you make the same sound. Do you hear that? It becomes more of an *uh* than an *ah*. Then try to open your mouth (making the same sound) without bringing your lips farther apart. Yes, that's the **ã** sound!

The **ã** is very common in Brazilian Portuguese, but it took me more than a year to say it like a Brazilian. If you're in the same boat, don't sweat it; most Brazilians can understand what a person's trying to say even if the **ã** is pronounced wrong.

The **ã** occasionally comes at the end of a word:

- » **maçã** (*mah-sah*) (*apple*)
- » **Maracanã** (*mah-rah-kah-nah*), a soccer stadium in Rio



TIP

Most often, **ã** is followed by an **o** (**ão**). Together, these letters make an *ah-ooh* sound. But say it fast — *Ow!* — like you've hurt yourself and with the nasal sound you just practiced.

- » **informação** (*een-foh-mah-sah-ooh*) (*information*)
- » **não** (*nah-ooh*) (*no*)

The letters E and Ê

In general, the letter **e** sounds like *eh*, as in *egg* or *ten*:

- » **dedo** (*deh-doo*) (*finger*)
- » **elefante** (*eh-leh-fahn-chee*) (*elephant*)

If it comes at the end of a word, though, **e** usually has an *ee* sound:

- » **boate** (*boh-ah-chee*) (*nightclub*)
- » **dificuldade** (*jee-fee-kool-dah-jee*) (*difficulty*)

If the **e** has a hat on it (**ê**), don't worry; it's still the *eh* sound:

- » **gêmeo** (*zhem-ee-oh*) (*twin*)
- » **três** (*trehz*) (*three*)

The letter I

The letter **i** has an *ee* sound, pretty much without exception:

- » **inglês** (eeng-glehzh) (*English*)
- » **livro** (leev-roh) (*book*)

The letters O and Ô

The letter **o** by itself has an easy-to-make *oh* sound.

- » **onda** (ohn-dah) (*wave*)
- » **ontem** (ohn-tang) (*yesterday*)

At the end of a word, though, it usually sounds like *oo*:

- » **Gramado** (grah-mah-doo), a city in Rio Grande do Sul state that's famous for its film festival
- » **tudo** (too-doo) (*everything/all*)

The **o** also comes with a hat (the circumflex) on it (**ô**), which makes an *oh* sound. The accent mark doesn't change the pronunciation of the letter.

- » **Alô?** (ah-loh?) (*Hello?*)
- » **ônibus** (oh-nee-boos) (*bus*)

The letter U

The **u** has an *ooh* sound:

- » **ou** (ooh) (*or*)
- » **urso** (ooh-soo) (*bear*)
- » **útil** (ooh-chee-ooh) (*useful*)

Differentiating Regional Accents

The Portuguese pronunciation I describe in this book works for most of Brazil, and it's certainly understandable to any Brazilian. But there are some minor differences in accent by region. Usually the difference is how people of a region say a certain sound and the intonation or musicality. In this section, I point out a few hallmarks of certain regional accents so you can tell which part of Brazil your conversation partner is from.

Rio de Janeiro

Cariocas (kah-ree-oh-kahs), people from the city of **Rio**, are famous for saying *sh* instead of *s*.

Word	Rio Pronunciation	Standard Pronunciation	Meaning
esquina	eh-shkee-nah	eh-skee-nah	corner
mulheres	mool-yeh-reesh	mool-yeh-reez	women

Interior of São Paulo state

People from inland **São Paulo** state (not the city of **São Paulo**, which is close-ish to the coast, compared with the rest of the state) — along with people in rural parts of the bordering state of Minas Gerais — are famous for sounding like Americans speaking bad Portuguese because they pronounce the Portuguese *r* in an accented syllable like a hard English *r* instead of a strong *h*.

Word	Interior of São Paulo Pronunciation	Standard Pronunciation
interior	een-teh-ree-or	een-teh-ree-oh
porta	por-tah	poh-tah

Northeastern Brazil

In this part of the country, which includes the big cities of **Natal** and **Fortaleza**, most people (**Bahia** state is an exception) say a hard *d* for **d** instead of *j* as in *jelly*. And their *t* is similar to a snappy English *t* instead of the *ch* sound made in the rest of Brazil.

Word	Northeastern Pronunciation	Standard Pronunciation	Meaning
bom dia	boh-oong <i>dee</i> -ah	boh-oong <i>jee</i> -ah	<i>good morning</i>
forte	<i>foh</i> -tee	<i>foh</i> -chee	<i>strong</i>

Rio Grande do Sul

Gaúchos (gah-*ooh*-shohz), people from **Rio Grande do Sul** state, are known for talking in a sing-song voice that goes up and down a lot. These people live near the borders of Argentina and Uruguay, so their accents sound more Spanish and Italian (many Italian immigrants settled in Argentina/Uruguay, as well as Spaniards) than Brazilian.

Recognizing the Sound of Portugal's Portuguese

The Portuguese tend to use the *sh* sound for the letter **s**, as people from **Rio** do. European Portuguese speakers also often drop the *e* from the end of words; **especialmente** (*especially*) becomes eh-*speh*-see-ah-ooh-*ment* in Portugal. In Brazil you hear eh-*speh*-see-ah-ooh-*men*-chee.

Slang is different in Portugal, too. For example, the Portuguese say **fixe** (feesh) instead of **legal** (lay-gow) to say *cool*, as in *That's cool, dude*. See Chapter 20 for more Portuguese slang.

FUN & GAMES

Try to match these Portuguese letters with the sound they generally make in English.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. a | a. <i>s</i> |
| 2. u | b. <i>ch</i> |
| 3. t | c. <i>ooh</i> |
| 4. ç | d. <i>v</i> |
| 5. w | e. <i>ah</i> |

See Appendix C for the answer key.
