How Basque sounds Ahoskera

The trick: Basque is spelled the way it sounds, so once you know the letters you can read any word. Every vowel is said, and c, q, v, w and y only turn up in a few borrowed words and names.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a e i o u	short and clear: a in father, e in bed, i in machine, o in hot, u in rule	**ume / ate** child / door
ai, ei, au	two vowels in one beat: ai as in eye, ei as in day, au as in cow	**bai / gau** yes / night
z	a plain s, as in see	**zu / zazpi** you / seven
s	a hushed s: lift the tip of your tongue, halfway to sh	**su / sagar** fire / apple
x	the sh in shop	**kaixo / xake** hello / chess
tz	the ts in cats	**zortzi / hotz** eight / cold
ts	a hushed ts, between ts and ch	**itsaso / otso** sea / wolf
tx	the ch in chips	**txakur / txiki** dog / small
tt, dd	t or d with the tongue flat on the roof of the mouth; rare	**pottoka / Maddi** Basque pony / a girl's name
ll, ñ	ll is the lli in million, ñ the ny in canyon; both are rare	**andereño / Iñaki** teacher / a boy's name
j	varies by region: the y in yes, or the ch in Scottish loch	**jan / joan** eat / go
h	silent for most speakers; some, mostly in the north, breathe it	**hiru / hau** three / this
r, rr	r between vowels is a quick tap; rr is rolled	**ura / hurra** the water / the hazelnut
g, k	g always as in go, k as in kite	**gela / kale** room / street
stress	light, and it changes from place to place	**etxea / mendia** the house / the mountain

z · s · x

three s sounds: plain, hushed, and sh

zazpi sas-pee · **su** a hushed soo · **xake** sha-keh

tz · ts · tx

the same three with a t in front

zortzi sor-tsee · **itsaso** ee-tsa-so · **txakur** cha-koor

Three s sounds: z is the s of see. For s, lift the tip of your tongue a little and it sounds hushed, halfway to sh. X is a full sh. In some areas s and z sound the same, so don't worry if you can't hear the difference at first.

J, h and r: j is a y sound in some areas and a throaty ch, as in loch, in others; both are right. H is silent for most speakers. A single r between vowels is a quick tap and rr is rolled, which can change the word: ura, the water; hurra, the hazelnut.

Stress: it's light and it changes from place to place, so there's no single rule to learn. Say every syllable clearly and evenly and you'll be understood.

How words work Gramatika

Basque on its own: euskara is spoken on both sides of the western Pyrenees and isn't related to any other known language. The verb usually comes last: Amak ogia erosi du, mum has bought the bread, word for word mum the bread bought has. There's no gender at all: hura is he, she and it.

The is an ending: -a

etxe house, as in the dictionary	etxea the house	etxeak the houses
etxe bat a house: bat, one, comes after	etxe handia the big house	etxe handiak the big houses

The -a goes on the last word: describing words come after the noun, so etxe handia is the big house, and the plural ending is -ak. A word that already ends in a doesn't double it: neska is a girl or the girl.

Words in colour

noun
a thing, a person or a place
etxe house · **lagun** friend

describing word
comes after the noun
handi big · **berri** new

verb
in the dictionary form
jan eat · **joan** go

other
little words and phrases
eta and · **gaur** today

Endings do the work of in, to, from and with

etxean in the house: -n	etxera to the house, home: -ra	etxetik from the house: -tik	lagunarekin with the friend: -rekin

-k marks who does it, when the verb has an object: Gizona etorri da, the man has come; Gizonak ogia jan du, the man has eaten the bread. With more than one, the endings change a little: etxeetan, in the houses.

Izan, to be, and the I have verb

ni naiz I am	zu zara you are	hura da he, she, it is	gu gara we are	zuek zarete you are, to more	haiek dira they are
dut I have	duzu you have	du he, she has	dugu we have	duzue you have, to more	dute they have

One example: Katu bat dut, I have a cat. The same verb helps others: Ogia jan dut, I've eaten the bread.

Bai and ez: bai is yes and ez is no. To say not, ez goes first and pulls the verb forward: Irakaslea naiz, I'm a teacher; Ez naiz irakaslea, I'm not a teacher. Ogia jan dut becomes Ez dut ogia jan.

The first 260 words Lehen hitzak

How: learn five a day, then listen for them in Basque films and series. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Kaixo
hello, hi

Egun on
good morning *(it means good day)*

Arratsalde on
good afternoon, good evening

Gabon
good night

Agur
goodbye

Gero arte
see you later

Eskerrik asko
thank you

Mila esker
thanks a lot *(it means a thousand thanks)*

Ez horregatik
you're welcome, don't mention it

Mesedez
please

Barkatu
sorry; also excuse me

Zer moduz?
how are you? how's it going?

Ondo, eta zu?
fine, and you? *(the answer)*

Ongi etorri
welcome

Nola duzu izena?
what's your name?

... naiz
I'm ... *(Ane naiz, I'm Ane)*

Ingelesez hitz egiten duzu?
do you speak English?

Ez dut ulertzen
I don't understand

Ez dakit
I don't know

Ados
OK, agreed

bai / ez
yes / no

Question words

nor
who

zer
what

non
where *(Non dago? Where is it?)*

nora / nondik
where to / where from

noiz
when

zergatik
why

nola
how

zenbat
how much, how many *(Zenbat da? How much is it?)*

zein
which

Nongoa zara?
where are you from?

Me and you

ni
I, me

zu
you, to one person

hura
he, she, it: one word for all three

gu
we, us

zuek
you, to more than one

haiek
they, them

nire
my *(nire etxea, my house)*

zure
your *(zure izena, your name)*

gure / zuen / haien
our / your, to more than one / their

Little words

eta
and

ere
also, too *(ni ere, me too)*

baina
but

edo
or

oso
very, before the word *(oso ondo, very well)*

asko
a lot, many, after the word *(eskerrik asko)*

pixka bat
a little bit

hemen / hor / han
here / there, near you / over there

hau / hori
this / that, after the noun *(etxe hau, this house)*

orain
now

gero
later, then

beti
always

agian
maybe

gabe
without, after the word *(azukrerik gabe, without sugar)*

ezta?
isn't it? right? *(at the end)*

Hello and goodbye: kaixo is hi to anyone, any time of day. Agur is goodbye, and gero arte, until later, is the friendly see you.

Please and thanks: mesedez is please, eskerrik asko is thank you, and the answer is ez horregatik, it's nothing. Barkatu is both sorry and excuse me.

People and time Jendea eta denbora

Family

ama
mum, mother

aita
dad, father

anaia
brother *(a woman may also say neba)*

arreba / ahizpa
sister: a man's / a woman's

seme
son

alaba
daughter

amona
grandmother, gran

aitona
grandfather, grandad

osaba
uncle

izeba
aunt

gurasoak
parents *(plural)*

familia
family

haur / ume
child: both are common

senar
husband

emazte
wife

People

gizon
man

emakume
woman

mutil
boy

neska
girl

lagun
friend

mediku
doctor

irakasle
teacher

ikasle
student, pupil

jende
people *(jendea, the people)*

euskaldun
Basque speaker

Things

telefono
phone *(a mobile is mugikor)*

liburu
book

diru
money

giltza
key

auto
car

leiho
window

txartel
ticket, card

ohe
bed

mahai
table

When

gaur
today

bihar
tomorrow

atzo
yesterday

goiz
morning; also early

arratsalde
afternoon, evening

gau
night

egun
day

ordu
hour *(Zer ordu da? What time is it?)*

denbora
time

aste
week

hilabete
month

urte
year

asteburu
weekend

Days of the week

astelehena
Monday *(aste is week)*

asteartea
Tuesday

asteazkena
Wednesday

osteguna
Thursday

ostirala
Friday

larunbata
Saturday

igandea
Sunday

Getting around

autobus
bus

tren
train

hegazkin
plane

aireportu
airport

geltoki
station, stop

ezkerrera / eskuinera
to the left / to the right

zuzen aurrera
straight ahead

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	20
zero	bat	bi	hiru	lau	bost	sei	zazpi	zortzi	bederatzi	hamar	hamaika	hamabi	hogei

21	30	40	50	100	1,000
hogeita bat	hogeita hamar	berrogei	berrogeita hamar	ehun	mila

Counting in twenties: 20 is hogei, 40 is berrogei, two twenties, and 30 is hogeita hamar, twenty and ten. After a number the noun takes no -a: bi katu, two cats. Bat, one, comes after the noun: katu bat, a cat.

Days are written small: astelehena is Monday. On Monday is astelehenean, and see you on Monday is Astelehen arte!

Food, places, verbs Jan, joan, egin

Food and drink

ur
water *(ura, the water)*

kafe
coffee

te
tea

esne
milk

garagardo
beer

ardo
wine

sagardo
cider *(it means apple wine)*

janari
food

ogi
bread

gazta
cheese

haragi
meat

arrain
fish

arrautza
egg

sagar
apple

pintxo
a small snack on bread, served at the bar

gosari
breakfast

bazkari
lunch

afari
dinner, supper

Gose naiz
I'm hungry

Egarri naiz
I'm thirsty

On egin!
enjoy your meal!

Kontua, mesedez
the bill, please

Places

etxe
house, home *(etxera, home, going home)*

eskola
school

ikastola
a school that teaches in Basque

denda
shop

jatetxe
restaurant *(it means eating house)*

taberna
bar, pub

ospitale
hospital

hiri
city

herri
town, village

kale
street

komun
toilet

itsaso
sea

mendi
mountain

ibai
river

hondartza
beach

baserri
farmhouse, the old Basque farm

euskara
Basque, the language

Verbs, in the dictionary form

izan
be

joan
go

etorri
come

egin
do, make

jan
eat

edan
drink

ikusi
see

lan egin
work

lo egin
sleep

hitz egin
speak, talk

esan
say, tell

ulertu
understand

erosi
buy

ordaindu
pay

irakurri
read

idatzi
write

ikasi
learn, study

bizi izan
live *(Bilbon bizi naiz, I live in Bilbao)*

entzun
hear, listen

itxaron
wait

nahi izan
want *(nahi dut, I want)*

maite izan
love

gustatu
like *(gustatzen zait, I like it)*

jakin
know a fact

ezagutu
know a person or place

Describing words

on / txar
good / bad

handi / txiki
big / small

bero / hotz
hot, warm / cold

berri / zahar
new / old

garesti / merke
expensive / cheap

erraz / zail
easy / hard

polit
pretty, nice

goxo
tasty; also sweet

gorri / urdin / berde
red / blue / green

zuri / beltz
white / black

The dictionary form plus a helper verb: Kafea edan dut, I've drunk the coffee; Etxera joan naiz, I've gone home. For every day, -tzen or -ten goes on the verb: Kafea edaten dut, I drink coffee.

Describing words come after the noun: ardo gorria, the red wine; etxe berri bat, a new house. The -a goes on the last word, never on both.

Show words Telebistako hitzak

Reactions

Benetan?
really? seriously?

Ederra!
lovely! great!

Primeran!
brilliant! perfect!

Oso ondo!
well done! very good!

Noski
of course

Topa!
cheers! when you raise a glass

Hala da
that's right

Zorionak!
congratulations! also happy birthday!

Ez dago arazorik
no problem

Berdin dio
never mind, it doesn't matter

Ezta pentsatu ere!
no way! don't even think about it!

Aupa!
hi! between friends; also come on! *(see below)*

Aizu!
hey! listen! to get someone's attention

Beno
well, OK *(see below)*

Tira
come on; oh well *(see below)*

The big scenes

Maite zaitut
I love you

Faltan botatzen zaitut
I miss you

Kontuz!
careful! watch out!

Lagundu!
help!

Zer gertatu da?
what happened?

Zer gertatzen da?
what's going on? what's wrong?

Lasai
don't worry, calm down *(it means calm)*

Dena ondo egongo da
it'll all be fine

Zatoz hona!
come here!

Azkar!
quick! hurry up!

Zorte on!
good luck!

Urte askotarako!
many happy returns! *(it means for many years)*

What to call people

maitea
love, darling *(it means the loved one)*

jauna / andrea
Mr / Mrs, Ms, after the surname

Kaixo guztioi!
hi, everyone!

Beno and tira: beno is well; it opens a sentence and fills a pause: Beno, ez dakit. Well, I don't know. Tira is come on, or oh well: Tira, goazen! Come on, let's go!

Aupa and kaixo: kaixo is hello to anyone. Aupa! is a casual hi between friends, and it's also how a crowd cheers a team on.

Zu and hi: zu is you to one person, friend or stranger. On screen you'll also hear hi, a very close you between friends, with its own verb forms. Learn zu first; everyone will understand it.

Practice Ariketak

How: cover the grey lines with a strip of paper. Read the Basque out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Questions: the words can stay the same; just let your voice go up: Etxean zaude? Are you at home? In writing you'll often see al before the verb: Etxean al zaude?

Two verbs for be: izan says what something is, egon where or how it is: Irakaslea naiz, I'm a teacher; Etxean nago, I'm at home; Ondo nago, I'm fine.

Want and like: Kafe bat nahi dut. I want a coffee. Kafea gustatzen zait. I like coffee, word for word coffee pleases me.

Read these sentences

1. Kaixo, Ane naiz.
   Hi, I'm Ane.

2. Bilbon bizi naiz.
   I live in Bilbao.

3. Barkatu, non dago komuna?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Zenbat da txartela?
   How much is the ticket?

5. Kafe bat, mesedez.
   A coffee, please.

6. Euskara ikasten ari naiz.
   I'm learning Basque.

7. Gaur oso hotz egiten du.
   It's very cold today.

8. Bihar hondartzara goaz.
   We're going to the beach tomorrow.

9. Pintxo hau oso goxoa da!
   This pintxo is really tasty!

10. Lasai, denbora asko dugu.
    Don't worry, we have plenty of time.

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.