How Bosnian sounds Abeceda

1 · 30 letters, read it out loud

The trick: Bosnian has 30 letters, with no q, w, x or y. Learn the eight that English doesn't have, č, ć, dž, đ, š, ž, lj and nj, and you can read any word aloud.

Much as in English | Familiar letter, new sound | Letters of their own

	Letter	Sounds like	Example
1	A a	a in father, short	avion plane
2	B b	b in book	brat brother
3	C c	ts in cats, never k or s	cijena price
4	Č č	ch in chop, hard: tongue pulled back	čaj tea
5	Ć ć	a softer ch, tongue flat behind the teeth	ćevapi grilled meat rolls
6	D d	d in day	dan day
7	Dž dž	j in jam, hard: one sound, one letter	džep pocket
8	Đ đ	a softer j, like the d in duty said quickly	đak pupil
9	E e	e in bed	ekran screen
10	F f	f in fun	film film
11	G g	g in go, always hard	grad town, city
12	H h	throaty, like ch in loch, but lighter	hljeb bread
13	I i	ee in see, short	ime name
14	J j	y in yes	jutro morning
15	K k	k in skip	ključ key
16	L l	l in lamp	lijepo nice
17	Lj lj	lli in million: one sound, one letter	ljubav love
18	M m	m in mum	mlijeko milk
19	N n	n in no	noć night
20	Nj nj	ny in canyon: one sound, one letter	njegov his
21	O o	o in hot, round	oko eye
22	P p	p in spin	pas dog
23	R r	a quick tapped or rolled r	riba fish
24	S s	s in sun, never z	sunce sun
25	Š š	sh in shoe	škola school
26	T t	t in stop	tata dad
27	U u	oo in food, short	ulica street
28	V v	v in van	voda water
29	Z z	z in zoo	zima winter
30	Ž ž	s in pleasure	žena woman, wife

Every letter is said

One letter, one sound, and nothing is silent: write as you speak, read as written. Lj, nj and dž are written with two letters, but each is one sound. In ije and je, as in **mlijeko**, milk, and **dijete**, child, the j glides quickly, like the y in yes.

Hard or soft

Č and dž are hard: tongue back, lips a little round. Ć and đ are soft: tongue flat, lighter: **čaj**, tea; **džep**, pocket; **kuća**, house; **rođendan**, birthday. If they sound alike to you at first, you'll still be understood, and the spelling tells you which one it is.

R can be a vowel

Between two consonants, r carries the syllable on its own: **prst**, finger; **srce**, heart; **vrt**, garden. Say a short rolled r and add nothing: PRST is one beat, SR-ce is two.

Stress, simply

Stress is almost never on the last syllable. In most short words it falls on the first: HVA-la, thank you; VO-da, water; SR-ce, heart. In longer words, learn it with the word: listening does the rest.

How words work Gramatika

No a, no the: Bosnian has no articles, so kuća is a house or the house. Context does the work.

Every noun is masculine, feminine or neuter

taj
masculine: ends in a consonant

taj grad, town
taj čaj, tea
taj hljeb, bread

ta
feminine: usually ends in -a

ta žena, woman
ta kahva, coffee
ta ulica, street

to
neuter: ends in -o or -e

to selo, village
to more, sea
to mlijeko, milk

Mostly, not always: tata, dad, and komšija, neighbour, end in -a but are masculine; so is auto, car, with its -o. Noć, night, and ljubav, love, are feminine with no -a. On the next pages the noun itself wears its gender colour, so you don't have to guess.

Endings change with the job in the sentence

kahva coffee: the dictionary form	Pijem kahvu. I drink coffee.	u Sarajevu in Sarajevo	iz Sarajeva from Sarajevo

That's the case system: the start of the word stays, and only the end changes. Learn the dictionary form first; listening brings the rest.

Ti or Vi

Kako si? ti: friends, family, kids, anyone your age	Kako ste? Vi: strangers, older people, at work; vi is also more than one person

Verbs change with the person: biti, to be, and govoriti, to speak

ja sam I am	ti si you are (casual)	on, ona je he, she is	mi smo we are	vi ste you all are; polite you	oni su they are
govorim I speak	govoriš you speak (casual)	govori he, she speaks	govorimo we speak	govorite you all speak; polite you	govore they speak

No need for ja: the ending already says who. Kod kuće sam is I'm at home. The short sam, si, je never come first, so it's Umoran sam, or Ja sam umoran.

Saying no: put ne before the verb: ne govorim, I don't speak. For biti it joins up: nisam, nisi, nije.

Asking: raise your voice at the end, or start with da li: Da li imaš vremena? Or put li after the verb: Imaš li vremena? Both mean: do you have time?

Close neighbours: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian are very close, and speakers understand each other.

The first 257 words Prve riječi

How: learn five a day, then listen for them in Bosnian films and series. Each noun wears its gender colour: blue, pink or green. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Me and you

ja
I

ti
you *(one person, casual)*

on / ona / ono
he / she / it

mi
we

vi
you all; Vi is the polite you

oni
they

moj / moja
my *(m word / f word)*

tvoj / tvoja
your *(casual)*

taj / ta / to
this, that *(m / f / n)*

Question words

šta
what

ko
who

gdje
where

odakle
where from

kada
when *(also kad)*

zašto
why

kako
how

koliko
how much, how many

koji
which

Koliko košta?
how much is it?

Little words

i
and

ali
but

ili
or

također
also, too

jako
very *(also vrlo)*

mnogo
a lot, many *(also puno)*

malo
a little

samo
only, just

već
already

još
still, yet, more

ovdje
here

tamo
there

sa / s
with

bez
without

jer
because

možda
maybe

Family

majka
mother

otac
father

mama
mum

tata
dad *(masculine, despite the -a)*

brat
brother

sestra
sister

sin
son

kćerka
daughter *(also kći)*

nana
grandma *(also baka)*

djed
grandpa

tetka
aunt

roditelji
parents *(plural)*

porodica
family

People

čovjek
person, man *(ljudi, people)*

muškarac
man

žena
woman; wife

muž
husband

dijete
child *(djeca, children)*

dječak
boy

djevojka
girl, young woman; also girlfriend

prijatelj
friend *(a man)*

prijateljica
friend *(a woman)*

komšija
neighbour *(masculine, despite the -a)*

ljekar
doctor *(in speech: doktor)*

He, she and it: on is he, ona is she and ono is it. Taj, ta and to follow the noun too: taj grad, ta kuća, to selo.

Time and things Vrijeme i stvari

When

danas
today

sutra
tomorrow

jučer
yesterday *(also juče)*

sada
now *(in speech: sad)*

uvijek
always

nikad
never

jutro
morning

popodne
afternoon

noć
night *(feminine, with no -a)*

dan
day

sat
hour; also clock, watch

vrijeme
time; also weather

sedmica
week

mjesec
month; also moon

godina
year

Days of the week

ponedjeljak
Monday

utorak
Tuesday

srijeda
Wednesday

četvrtak
Thursday

petak
Friday

subota
Saturday

nedjelja
Sunday

Things

telefon
phone

knjiga
book

novac
money *(in speech: pare)*

ključ
key

auto
car *(masculine, despite the -o)*

prozor
window

vrata
door *(plural)*

Getting around

autobus
bus

voz
train

stanica
station; also a stop

aerodrom
airport

karta
ticket; also map

lijevo / desno
left / right

pravo
straight on

Describing words

dobar / loš
good / bad

veliki / mali
big / small

topao / hladan
warm / cold

nov / star
new / old

skup / jeftin
expensive / cheap

lak / težak
easy / hard; also light / heavy

lijep
beautiful, nice

umoran
tired

crven / plav / zelen
red / blue / green

bijel / crn
white / black

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
nula	jedan	dva	tri	četiri	pet	šest	sedam	osam	devet

10	11	12	13	20	30	40	50	100	1,000
deset	jedanaest	dvanaest	trinaest	dvadeset	trideset	četrdeset	pedeset	sto	hiljada

One and two change: they follow the gender: jedan grad, jedna kahva, jedno pivo; dva grada, but dvije kahve. 21 is dvadeset jedan.

Days are small: days and months take no capital letter: ponedjeljak, januar. On Monday is u ponedjeljak.

Describing words agree: the list shows the masculine form. Feminine adds -a, neuter -o or -e: dobar dan, dobra kahva, dobro pivo.

Food, places, verbs Hrana, mjesta, glagoli

Food and drink

voda
water

kahva
coffee, a reason to sit for an hour *(in speech also kafa)*

džezva
small long-handled pot for making coffee

čaj
tea

mlijeko
milk

pivo
beer

hljeb
bread *(also kruh)*

sir
cheese

meso
meat

piletina
chicken *(the meat)*

riba
fish

jaje
egg

krompir
potato

ćevapi
small grilled meat rolls *(plural)*, in bread with onion

pita
flaky pie, rolled and baked in a round tin

burek
the pita with meat

sirnica
the pita with cheese

doručak
breakfast

ručak
lunch, the main meal

večera
dinner

Gladan sam
I'm hungry *(a woman says gladna sam)*

Račun, molim
the bill, please

Places

kuća
house

kod kuće
at home

posao
work, job

škola
school

restoran
restaurant

kafić
coffee bar, where the day happens

bolnica
hospital

prodavnica
shop

pijaca
market

čaršija
old town centre, a street of little shops

grad
town, city

selo
village

ulica
street

rijeka
river

toalet
toilet *(signs say WC)*

Sarajevo
Sarajevo, the capital

bosanski
Bosnian, the language

Verbs: dictionary / ja form

biti / sam
be

imati / imam
have

ići / idem
go

doći / dođem
come

jesti / jedem
eat

piti / pijem
drink

vidjeti / vidim
see

gledati / gledam
watch, look

raditi / radim
work; also do

spavati / spavam
sleep

govoriti / govorim
speak

pričati / pričam
talk, chat

razumjeti / razumijem
understand

znati / znam
know

htjeti / hoću
want

moći / mogu
can

voljeti / volim
love; also like

učiti / učim
learn, study

živjeti / živim
live

kupiti / kupim
buy

čekati / čekam
wait

Two forms: the dictionary form ends in -ti or -ći. For I, it usually ends in -m: gledam, govorim. Learn the odd ones by heart: hoću, mogu, idem.

Phrases and show words Zdravo i ćao

Hello and goodbye

Zdravo
hi, hello; also bye

Ćao
hi; bye *(casual, very common)*

Merhaba
hi, hello *(casual and warm)*

Dobar dan
hello *(polite, all day)*

Dobro jutro
good morning

Laku noć
good night

Doviđenja
goodbye *(polite)*

Vidimo se
see you

Kako si?
how are you? *(casual)*

Kako ste?
how are you? *(polite)*

Dobro sam
I'm fine

Šta ima?
what's up? *(it means what is there)*

Drago mi je
nice to meet you *(it means it's dear to me)*

Please, thanks and help

Da
yes

Ne
no; not

Hvala
thank you

Hvala lijepa
thanks a lot *(it means nice thanks)*

Molim
please; you're welcome; pardon?

Izvolite
here you are; can I help you? *(polite)*

Bujrum
come in, sit down, help yourself

Izvinite
excuse me, sorry *(polite)*

Izvini
sorry *(casual)*

Ne razumijem
I don't understand

Ne znam
I don't know

Govorite li engleski?
do you speak English? *(polite)*

Živjeli!
cheers! *(it means may you live)*

Prijatno!
enjoy your meal! *(also a polite bye)*

Reactions

Hajde!
come on! let's go! *(also ajde)*

Stvarno?
really? seriously?

Super!
great!

Fino
nice, good, fine *(Fino sam, I'm fine)*

Može
sure, OK, yes please *(it means it can)*

Nema veze
never mind *(it means no connection)*

Jao!
ouch! oh no! oh dear!

Joj!
oh! *(pain, surprise or delight)*

Naravno
of course

Tačno
exactly, that's right

Polako
slowly; take it easy

Svaka čast!
respect! well done! *(it means every honour)*

Evo
here it is, here you go *(Evo me! Here I am!)*

merak
pleasure, a deep joy in small things

The big scenes

Volim te
I love you

Nedostaješ mi
I miss you *(it means you are missing to me)*

Ostavi me na miru
leave me alone *(it means leave me in peace)*

Pazi!
watch out!

Prestani!
stop it!

Upomoć!
help!

Šta se desilo?
what happened?

Ne brini
don't worry

What to call people

brate
bro *(it means brother)*

jarane
mate, buddy *(from jaran, friend)*

dušo
darling, honey *(it means soul)*

ljubavi
my love

gospodine / gospođo
sir / madam; Mr / Mrs before a name

Bujrum, fino, merak: small words you'll hear all day. Bujrum welcomes you in, Fino is nice or fine, and merak is pleasure, the kind you take in a slow kahva with friends.

Calling someone changes the word: brat becomes brate, jaran becomes jarane, duša becomes dušo. It sounds warm, not formal.

Swear words are strong: you'll hear them a lot on screen, even between friends. They hit harder than the subtitles show: recognise them, but don't say them. Jao and joj are the mild ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice Vježba

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

Read every letter: nothing is silent, so say each one: Ćevapi is ĆE-va-pi, three beats.

Two words, both fine: you'll hear kahva and kafa for coffee, and hljeb and kruh for bread. Both are right, so use the one you hear around you.

Read these sentences

1. Zdravo, ja sam Ana.
   Hi, I'm Ana.

2. Kako se zoveš?
   What's your name?

3. Izvinite, gdje je toalet?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Koliko košta karta?
   How much is the ticket?

5. Jednu kahvu, molim.
   One coffee, please.

6. Govorim malo bosanski.
   I speak a little Bosnian.

7. Danas je lijepo vrijeme.
   The weather is nice today.

8. Sutra idemo u Sarajevo.
   Tomorrow we're going to Sarajevo.

9. Ćevapi su odlični!
   The ćevapi are excellent!

10. Hajde, kasnimo!
    Come on, we're late!

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