How Croatian sounds Izgovor

1 · read it out loud

The trick: Croatian is read as it's written: one letter, one sound, and no silent letters. Learn the five with a mark, č, ć, đ, š and ž, and the three pairs that count as one letter, dž, lj and nj, and you can read any word aloud.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a e i o u	short and clear: cup, bed, bit, hot, book	**ruka / more** hand / sea
č	ch in church, hard: tongue pulled back	**čaj / čovjek** tea / person
ć	a softer ch, tongue flat behind the teeth	**kuća / noć** house / night
dž	j in jam, hard; one letter	**džep / džem** pocket / jam
đ	a softer j, like the d in duty said quickly	**đak / rođendan** pupil / birthday
š	sh in shoe	**škola / šuma** school / forest
ž	s in pleasure	**žena / život** woman, wife / life
c	ts in cats	**cijena / ulica** price / street
j	y in yes	**ja / jaje** I / egg
lj	lli in million, one sound; one letter	**ljubav / ljeto** love / summer
nj	ny in canyon, one sound; one letter	**konj / njegov** horse / his
h	throaty, like ch in Scottish loch, but lighter	**hvala / kruh** thank you / bread
r	a quick tapped or rolled r	**riba / more** fish / sea
ije	ye in yes, as one quick beat	**mlijeko / lijepo** milk / nice
stress	never on the last syllable, with a gentle rise or fall in pitch: learn it with the word	**hvala / doviđenja** HVA-la / do-VI-đe-nja

č · dž

hard: tongue back, lips a little round

čaj tea · **džep** pocket

ć · đ

soft: tongue flat, lighter and thinner

kuća house · **rođendan** birthday

Hard or soft? Many Croatians make the difference clearly, some hardly at all. At first, say them the same and you'll still be understood. 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), vrt (garden), Hrvatska (Croatia). Say a short rolled r and add nothing: HR-vat-ska.

How words work Gramatika

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

Every noun is masculine, feminine or neuter

taj

masculine: usually ends in a consonant

taj grad, town
taj čaj, tea
taj kruh, bread

ta

feminine: usually ends in -a

ta žena, woman
ta kava, 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, ends in -a but is 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

kava coffee: the dictionary form	Pijem kavu. I drink coffee.	bez kave without coffee	s kavom with coffee

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. Doma sam is I'm at home. The short sam, si, je never come first, so it's Doma sam, or Ja sam doma.

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

The first 242 words Prve riječi

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, not what it means.

Greetings and survival

Bok
hi; bye *(casual, very common)*

Dobar dan
hello *(polite, all day)*

Dobro jutro
good morning

Dobra večer
good evening

Laku noć
good night

Doviđenja
goodbye *(polite)*

Vidimo se
see you

Hvala
thank you

Hvala lijepa
thank you very much *(it means nice thanks)*

Molim
please; you're welcome; pardon?

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

Oprostite
excuse me, sorry *(polite)*

Oprosti
sorry *(casual)*

Da
yes

Ne
no; not

Dobro
OK, fine, good

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

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

Dobro sam
I'm fine

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

Ne razumijem
I don't understand

Ne znam
I don't know

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

Dobar tek!
enjoy your meal!

Question words

što
what

tko
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?

Me and you

ja
I

ti
you *(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)*

Little words

i
and

ali
but

ili
or

također
also, too

jako
very

puno
a lot, many

malo
a little

samo
only, just

već
already

još
still, yet, more

ovdje
here

tamo
there

s / sa
with

bez
without

jer
because

možda
maybe

Molim does a lot: it means please, and also you're welcome, and pardon? when you didn't catch something. Hvala. Molim. Thank you. You're welcome.

People and time Ljudi i vrijeme

Family

majka
mother

otac
father

mama
mum

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

brat
brother

sestra
sister

sin
son

kći
daughter *(in speech also kćer)*

baka
grandma

djed
grandpa

ujak
uncle *(your mother's brother)*

teta
aunt

roditelji
parents *(plural)*

obitelj
family *(feminine, with no -a)*

People

čovjek
person, man *(ljudi, people)*

muškarac
man

žena
woman; wife

muž
husband

dijete
child *(djeca, children)*

dečko
boy; boyfriend *(casual, masculine despite the -o)*

cura
girl; girlfriend *(casual)*

prijatelj
friend *(a man)*

prijateljica
friend *(a woman)*

susjed
neighbour

liječnik
doctor *(casual: doktor)*

Things

mobitel
mobile phone

knjiga
book

novac
money *(in speech: novci, pare)*

ključ
key

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

prozor
window

When

danas
today

sutra
tomorrow

jučer
yesterday

sada
now *(in speech: sad)*

uvijek
always

nikad
never

jutro
morning

popodne
afternoon

večer
evening *(feminine, with no -a)*

noć
night *(feminine, with no -a)*

dan
day

sat
hour; also clock, watch

vrijeme
time; also weather

tjedan
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

Numbers

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

10	11	12	20	30	40	50	100	200	1,000
deset	jedanaest	dvanaest	dvadeset	trideset	četrdeset	pedeset	sto	dvjesto	tisuća

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

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

Food, places, verbs Hrana, mjesta, glagoli

Food and drink

voda
water

kava
coffee, a reason to sit for an hour

čaj
tea

mlijeko
milk

pivo
beer

vino
wine

kruh
bread

sir
cheese

meso
meat

piletina
chicken *(the meat)*

riba
fish

burek
flaky pie with meat or cheese, from the bakery

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

pršut
dry-cured ham, sliced thin

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

doma
at home *(also kod kuće)*

posao
work, job

restoran
restaurant

kafić
café, where the day happens

bolnica
hospital

kolodvor
train or bus station

trgovina
shop

grad
town, city

ulica
street

trg
town square

zahod
toilet *(signs say WC)*

Hrvatska
Croatia

By the sea

more
sea

plaža
beach

obala
coast, seafront

otok
island

luka
harbour, port

trajekt
ferry

brod
boat, ship

konoba
tavern, a small family place to eat

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

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

Describing words

dobar / loš
good / bad

velik / malen
big / small *(in speech: veliki, mali)*

topao / hladan
warm / cold

nov / star
new / old

skup / jeftin
expensive / cheap

lak / težak
easy / hard; also light / heavy

lijep
beautiful, nice

odličan
excellent

umoran
tired

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.

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

Show words Riječi iz serija

Reactions

Ajme!
oh no! oh my! *(for shock, pain or joy)*

Stvarno?
really? seriously?

Super!
great!

Bravo!
well done!

Ma daj!
come on! no way! you're kidding!

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

Polako
slowly, take it easy *(see below)*

Fora
cool; also a joke or a trick *(slang)*

Jao!
ouch! oh dear!

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

Ajde!
come on! let's go!

Naravno
of course

Tako je
that's right

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

Gotovo
done, it's over, that's it

Bljak!
yuck!

The big scenes

Volim te
I love you

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

Pusti me na miru
leave me alone *(it means let me be in peace)*

Pazi!
watch out!

Prestani!
stop it!

Upomoć!
help!

Što se dogodilo?
what happened?

What to call people

dušo
darling, honey *(it means soul)*

ljubavi
my love

stari
mate, dude *(it means old one)*

brate
bro *(it means brother)*

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

ekipa
guys, the gang *(Ekipa, idemo! Guys, let's go!)*

Polako is a way of life: it means slowly, and it's also the calm answer to any stress. Polako, polako: take it easy, there's time for another kava. On the coast you'll also hear pomalo.

Calling someone changes the word: Ivan becomes Ivane, duša becomes dušo, brat becomes brate. It sounds warm, not formal, and you'll hear it in every scene.

Swear words are strong: Croatian has strong swear words, and 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. Ajme and jao 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 Croatian out loud, then slide it down to check. Can you read every line without peeking? You've got it.

Questions: raise your voice at the end, or put li after the verb: Imaš li vremena? Do you have time?

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

Read these sentences

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

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

3. Gdje je zahod?
   Where is the toilet?

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

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

6. Govorim malo hrvatski.
   I speak a little Croatian.

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

8. Sutra idemo na more.
   Tomorrow we're going to the seaside.

9. Ćevapi su odlični!
   The ćevapi are excellent!

10. Polako, imamo vremena.
    Take it easy, we have time.

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