How Czech sounds Výslovnost

The trick: Czech is read as it's written, and each letter keeps its sound. A čárka (á) or a little ring, the kroužek (ů), only makes a vowel longer. A háček (č) makes a new sound; on d and t it looks like a small comma: ď, ť.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a e i o u y	short and clear: cup, bed, bit, hot, book. y sounds just like i	**ruka / my** hand / we
á é í ó ú ů ý	the same vowels, just held longer. í and ý are ee in see; ú and ů are oo in food	**máma / dům** mum / house
č	ch in church	**čaj** tea
š	sh in shoe	**škola** school
ž	s in pleasure	**žena** woman, wife
ř	a rolled r and ž at the same time (see below)	**řeka / tři** river / three
ě	ye in yes after b, p, v, f; mě is said mňe	**pět / město** five / town
dě, tě, ně	soft d, t, n before e: ďe, ťe, ňe	**děti / něco** children / something
ď, ť, ň	soft d, t, n, with the tongue pressed up; ň is ny in canyon	**teď / kůň** now / horse
di, ti, ni	soft too, like ďi, ťi, ňi; but dy, ty, ny stay hard	**ticho / ty** quiet / you
c	ts in cats	**co** what
ch	ch in Scottish loch; its own letter, after h in the dictionary	**chléb** bread
h	a breathy h, softer than ch, with the voice on	**hrad** castle
j	y in yes	**jídlo** food
r	a quick tapped or rolled r	**ryba** fish
ou	oh in go, as one sound	**mouka** flour
stress	always on the first syllable, long vowel or not	**dobrý** good: DO-brý

Ř, the famous one: roll an r and say ž at the same time. Keep the tip of the tongue gentle, so it flutters once or twice while you buzz. It's the last sound Czech kids learn, so give it time. Until then, a plain rolled r is understood: tři, řeka, Dvořák.

Words with no vowels: r and l can carry a syllable on their own: vlk (wolf), krk (neck), prst (finger). Czechs love to test you with strč prst skrz krk, stick a finger through your neck. Say it slowly, then smile.

How words work Gramatika

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

Every noun is masculine, feminine or neuter

ten
masculine: often ends in a consonant

ten dům, house
ten čaj, tea
ten chléb, bread

ta
feminine: often ends in -a or -e

ta žena, woman
ta káva, coffee
ta ulice, street

to
neuter: often ends in -o, -e or -í

to okno, window
to moře, sea
to náměstí, square

Tendencies, not rules: táta, dad, ends in -a but is masculine. Noc, night, is feminine with no -a. And -e can be feminine (ulice) or neuter (moře). 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

káva coffee: the dictionary form	Dám si kávu. I'll have a coffee.	bez kávy without coffee	s kávou with coffee

That's the case system: the start of the word stays, and usually only the end changes. Don't learn the tables yet. Learn the dictionary form first; listening brings the rest.

Ty or vy

Jak se máš? ty: friends, family, kids, anyone your age	Jak se máte? vy: strangers, older people, at work, and more than one person

Not sure? Say vy and wait to be offered ty. Czechs notice, and they like it.

Verbs change with the person

já jsem I am	ty jsi you are (casual)	on, ona je he, she is	my jsme we are	vy jste you are (polite, or all of you)	oni jsou they are

No need for já: the ending already says who. Jsem doma is I'm at home. Add já only to stress it.

Saying no: ne joins the front of the verb: nejsem, I'm not; nemám, I don't have. One to watch: he isn't is není.

The first 231 words První slova

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

Ahoj
hi; bye *(casual)*

Čau
hi, bye *(casual, like ciao)*

Dobrý den
hello *(polite, all day)*

Dobré ráno
good morning

Dobrý večer
good evening

Dobrou noc
good night

Na shledanou
goodbye *(polite)*

Děkuji
thank you

Díky
thanks *(casual)*

Prosím
please; you're welcome; here you are; pardon?

Promiň / Promiňte
sorry, excuse me *(casual / polite)*

Ano
yes

Ne
no; not

Dobře
OK, fine, well

Jak se máš?
how are you? *(casual)*

Jak se máte?
how are you? *(polite)*

Mám se dobře
I'm fine

Těší mě
nice to meet you

Nerozumím
I don't understand

Nevím
I don't know

Na zdraví!
cheers! bless you!

Dobrou chuť!
enjoy your meal!

Question words

co
what

kdo
who

kde
where

odkud
where from

kdy
when

proč
why

jak
how

kolik
how much, how many

který
which

Kolik to stojí?
how much is it?

Me and you

já
I

ty
you *(casual)*

on
he

ona
she

ono
it

my
we

vy
you *(polite, or all of you)*

oni
they

můj / moje
my *(m word / f or n word)*

tvůj / tvoje
your *(casual)*

váš / vaše
your *(polite, or all of you)*

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

Little words

a
and

ale
but

nebo
or

taky
also, too

moc
very, a lot; also too much

trochu
a little

jen
only, just

už
already

ještě
still, yet, more

tady
here

tam
there

s
with

bez
without

protože
because

možná
maybe

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

People and time Lidé a čas

Family

matka
mother

otec
father

máma
mum

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

bratr
brother

sestra
sister

syn
son

dcera
daughter

babička
grandma

dědeček
grandpa *(casual: děda)*

strýc
uncle

teta
aunt

rodiče
parents *(plural)*

rodina
family

People

člověk
person, human

lidé
people *(the plural of člověk; in speech lidi)*

muž
man; husband

žena
woman; wife

dítě
child *(děti, children)*

kluk
boy; boyfriend *(casual)*

holka
girl; girlfriend *(casual)*

kamarád
friend *(a man)*

kamarádka
friend *(a woman)*

soused
neighbour

lékař
doctor *(casual: doktor)*

učitel
teacher *(a man)*

Things

telefon
phone *(casual: mobil)*

kniha
book

peníze
money *(plural in Czech)*

klíč
key

auto
car

okno
window

When

dnes
today *(casual: dneska)*

zítra
tomorrow

včera
yesterday

teď
now

vždycky
always

nikdy
never

ráno
morning; also in the morning

odpoledne
afternoon; also in the afternoon

večer
evening; also in the evening

noc
night *(feminine, with no -a)*

den
day

hodina
hour

čas
time

týden
week

měsíc
month; also moon

rok
year

Days of the week

pondělí
Monday

úterý
Tuesday

středa
Wednesday

čtvrtek
Thursday

pátek
Friday

sobota
Saturday

neděle
Sunday

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
nula	jeden	dva	tři	čtyři	pět	šest	sedm	osm	devět

10	11	12	20	30	40	50	100	200	1,000
deset	jedenáct	dvanáct	dvacet	třicet	čtyřicet	padesát	sto	dvě stě	tisíc

One and two change: they follow the gender: jeden dům, jedna káva, jedno pivo; dva domy, but dvě kávy. 21 is dvacet jedna.

Days are small: days and months take no capital letter: pondělí, leden. On Monday is v pondělí.

Food, places, verbs Jídlo, místa, slovesa

Food and drink

voda
water

káva
coffee

čaj
tea

mléko
milk

pivo
beer, the national drink

víno
wine

chléb
bread *(casual: chleba)*

sýr
cheese

maso
meat

kuře
chicken

ryba
fish

polévka
soup

knedlíky
bread dumplings *(plural)*, with sauce

snídaně
breakfast

oběd
lunch, the main meal

večeře
dinner, supper

Mám hlad
I'm hungry *(it means I have hunger)*

Zaplatím
the bill, please *(it means I'll pay)*

Places

dům
house

doma
at home

škola
school

práce
work, job

restaurace
restaurant

hospoda
pub, the local beer place

nemocnice
hospital

nádraží
train or bus station

obchod
shop

město
town, city

ulice
street

náměstí
town square

záchod
toilet *(signs say WC)*

Praha
Prague

Česko
Czechia

Verbs: dictionary / já form

být / jsem
be

mít / mám
have

jít / jdu
go *(on foot)*

jet / jedu
go *(by car, bus, train)*

jíst / jím
eat

pít / piju
drink

vidět / vidím
see

dívat se / dívám se
watch, look

dělat / dělám
do, make

spát / spím
sleep

mluvit / mluvím
speak, talk

rozumět / rozumím
understand

vědět / vím
know *(a fact)*

znát / znám
know *(a person, a place)*

chtít / chci
want

moct / můžu
can

milovat / miluju
love

mít rád / mám rád
like *(a woman says mám ráda)*

pracovat / pracuju
work

učit se / učím se
learn

Describing words

dobrý / špatný
good / bad

velký / malý
big / small

teplý / studený
warm / cold

nový / starý
new / old

drahý / levný
expensive / cheap

lehký / těžký
easy / hard; also light / heavy

hezký
nice, pretty

výborný
excellent, delicious

unavený
tired

Two forms: the dictionary form ends in -t. For I, the ending is usually -m or -u: dělat, dělám; pít, piju. Learn the odd ones by heart: jsem, chci, můžu, vím.

Describing words agree: the list shows the masculine form. With a feminine noun -ý becomes -á, with a neuter one -é: dobrý den, dobrá káva, dobré pivo.

Show words Slova ze seriálů

Reactions

Jo!
yeah! *(casual yes)*

No
yeah, well *(careful: it means yes)*

Fakt?
really? seriously?

Super!
great!

Hustý!
cool! wicked! *(slang, it means thick)*

No jo
oh well; yeah, yeah

Jasně
sure, of course

Ty jo!
wow! *(it means you yes)*

Ježiš!
jeez! oh my God!

To snad ne!
no way! you can't be serious!

Bezva!
great! *(a bit old-school)*

Pohoda
all good, chill, no stress

V pohodě
it's fine, no problem

Hele!
look! hey! *(to get attention)*

Sakra!
damn! *(mild)*

Fuj!
yuck!

Pojď!
come on! come here!

The big scenes

Miluju tě
I love you

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

Nech mě být
leave me alone *(it means let me be)*

Pozor!
watch out!

Přestaň!
stop it!

Pomoc!
help!

What to call people

miláčku
darling, honey *(when you call someone)*

zlato
sweetie *(it means gold)*

kámo
mate, dude *(to a friend)*

pane / paní
sir / madam; Mr / Mrs before a name

mami, tati
mum, dad *(when you call them)*

lidi
guys, people *(Lidi, jdeme! Guys, let's go!)*

No means yes: on its own, no is a casual yes: No jasně! Yeah, sure! The Czech no is ne.

Calling someone changes the word: Petr! becomes Petře!, Jana becomes Jano!, miláček becomes miláčku. Shows use it in every scene.

Swear words are strong: Czech 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. Sakra and ty jo are the mild ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice Procvičování

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

Stress it right: always the first syllable: DĚ-ku-ji, RE-stau-ra-ce. A short word in front takes the stress with it: NA-shle-da-nou.

Questions: keep the same word order and raise your voice at the end: Máš čas? Do you have time?

Read these sentences

1. Ahoj, jmenuju se Petra.
   Hi, my name is Petra.

2. Jak se jmenuješ?
   What's your name?

3. Kde je záchod?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Kolik to stojí?
   How much is it?

5. Jedno pivo, prosím.
   One beer, please.

6. Mluvím trochu česky.
   I speak a little Czech.

7. Dnes je velká zima.
   It's very cold today.

8. Zítra jedu do Prahy.
   Tomorrow I'm going to Prague.

9. Knedlíky jsou výborné!
   The dumplings are delicious!

10. Pojď, jdeme!
    Come on, let's go!

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