How Finnish sounds Ääntäminen

The trick: Finnish is read exactly as it's written. One letter, one sound, and every letter is said, the end of the word too. Learn the rows below, and you can read any word aloud.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
ä	a in cat	**äiti / tämä** mother / this
ö	like ur in British fur, lips rounded	**yö / pöytä** night / table
y	like German ü: say ee, then round your lips	**yksi / hyvä** one / good
a	a in father, but short	**talo / kala** house / fish
e, i	e in bed; i like ee in see, but short	**kello / kiitos** clock / thanks
o, u	o in hot, lips round; u like oo in food	**koti / kuka** home / who
aa, ii, uu	a double vowel is the same sound, held longer	**kaali / uusi** cabbage / new
kk, ll, tt	a double consonant is held a moment, with a tiny pause	**kukka / kello** flower / clock
ie, uo, yö	two vowels glide together in one beat	**tie / ruoka** road / food
r	rolled with the tip of the tongue, as in Spanish or Italian	**rakas / ruis** dear / rye
j	y in yes	**joo / jäätelö** yeah / ice cream
h	always said, even before another consonant	**hei / tähti** hi / star
ng, nk	ng as in singer, said long; nk as in think	**kenkä / Helsingissä** shoe / in Helsinki
b, g, f	only in borrowed words	**bussi / grilli** bus / grill
stress	always on the first syllable, every word	**kiitos / Helsinki** KII-tos / HEL-sin-ki

Long vowels

written double: hold the sound

tuli fire · **tuuli** wind · **sika** pig · **siika** whitefish

Long consonants

written double: hold it, with a tiny pause

kuka who · **kukka** flower · **mato** worm · **matto** rug

Length changes the word: tuli is fire, tuuli is wind, and tulli is customs. Say them slowly: the length is the whole difference. Short or long, the sound itself stays the same.

Stress is easy: always on the first syllable, even in long words: HEL-sin-ki, MAA-nan-tai, RA-vin-to-la. Keep the rest of the word light and even.

How words work Kielioppi

No gender, no the: Finnish has no masculine or feminine and no word for a or the. talo is a house or the house. And hän is he and she, one word for both.

Endings do the work of little words

Where English puts in, from or into before the word, Finnish adds an ending to it.

talo a house, the house	talot houses	talossa in the house
talosta from the house, out of it	taloon into the house	talolla at the house, on it

Try it: koulu, a school: koulussa, at school; koulusta, from school; kouluun, to school. Into repeats the last vowel and adds n. A few words change a little inside: kauppa, a shop, but kaupassa, in the shop.

Vowel harmony

Endings come in two versions, with a or with ä. The word chooses: if it has a, o or u, use a. If not, use ä.

Vowels in the word	Endings	Example
a, o, u	-ssa, -sta, -lla	**talossa, talosta** in the house, from the house
ä, ö, y	-ssä, -stä, -llä	**kylässä, kylästä** in the village, from the village
only e, i	-ssä, -stä, -llä	**tiellä** on the road

Verbs change for each person

minä olen I am	sinä olet you are	hän on he, she is
me olemme we are	te olette you all are	he ovat they are

The ending says who: -n is I and -t is you, so minä is often left out: Olen kotona. I'm at home.

en, et, ei

not is a little verb of its own

en tiedä I don't know · **et tiedä** you don't know · **ei tiedä** he, she doesn't know

The not-word takes the person ending, so the main verb drops its own: tiedän, I know, becomes en tiedä. For we, you all and they: emme, ette, eivät. No need to learn it all yet: spot en or ei, and you know it's a no.

Spoken Finnish is shorter: minä becomes mä, sinä becomes sä, olen becomes oon: Mä oon kotona. Subtitles often write the full form, so you see minä while you hear mä.

The first 220 words Ensimmäiset sanat

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

Greetings and survival

Moi
hi; also bye *(casual)*

Hei
hi, hello *(with anyone)*

Moikka
bye; also hi *(cheerful)*

Hyvää huomenta
good morning

Hyvää iltaa
good evening

Hyvää yötä
good night

Näkemiin
goodbye *(polite)*

Nähdään
see you

Kiitos
thanks; also please *(Kahvi, kiitos)*

Kiitos paljon
thanks a lot

Ole hyvä
here you are; you're welcome

Anteeksi
sorry; excuse me

Kyllä
yes

Ei
no

Mitä kuuluu?
how are you? *(what's new)*

Hyvää, kiitos
fine, thanks

Minun nimeni on ...
my name is ...

Hauska tutustua
nice to meet you

En ymmärrä
I don't understand

En tiedä
I don't know

Puhutko englantia?
do you speak English?

Question words

mikä
what *(Mikä tämä on? What is this?)*

mitä
what *(Mitä teet? What are you doing?)*

kuka
who

missä
where

mihin
where to

mistä
where from

milloin
when

miksi
why

miten
how

paljonko
how much, how many

Me and you

minä
I *(said mä)*

sinä
you *(to anyone: the normal you; said sä)*

hän
he and she: one word

se
it *(in speech, he or she too)*

me
we

te
you all; also very polite you

he
they

minun / sinun
my / your

tämä / tuo
this / that

Little words

ja
and

mutta
but

tai
or

myös
also, too

vähän
a little

paljon
a lot, much

vain
only, just

jo
already

vielä
still; yet

täällä
here

siellä
there

kanssa
with *(after the word: äidin kanssa)*

koska
because

ehkä
maybe

Kiitos does two jobs: it's thank you, and it's please when you ask: Kahvi, kiitos. A coffee, please. Ole hyvä is what you say as you hand something over.

Sinä is for everyone: Finns say sinä to almost anyone, a boss or a doctor too. Te is for more than one person, and now and then for being very polite.

People and time Ihmiset ja aika

Family

äiti
mother, mum

isä
father, dad

veli
brother

sisko
sister

poika
son; boy

tytär
daughter

vanhemmat
parents

isoäiti
grandmother *(mummo, grandma)*

isoisä
grandfather *(ukki or vaari, grandpa)*

täti
aunt

setä
uncle *(dad's brother)*

eno
uncle *(mum's brother)*

perhe
family

mies
man; husband

vaimo
wife

lapsi
child *(lapset, children)*

People

ihminen
person, human

nainen
woman

tyttö
girl

ystävä
friend

poikaystävä
boyfriend

tyttöystävä
girlfriend

opettaja
teacher

When

tänään
today

huomenna
tomorrow

eilen
yesterday

nyt
now

myöhemmin
later

aamu
morning

ilta
evening

yö
night

päivä
day

viikko
week

viikonloppu
weekend

kuukausi
month

vuosi
year

kello
clock; o'clock *(kello kolme, three o'clock)*

Days of the week

maanantai
Monday

tiistai
Tuesday

keskiviikko
Wednesday *(it means midweek)*

torstai
Thursday

perjantai
Friday

lauantai
Saturday

sunnuntai
Sunday

Numbers

nolla
0

yksi
1

kaksi
2

kolme
3

neljä
4

viisi
5

kuusi
6; also spruce

seitsemän
7

kahdeksan
8

yhdeksän
9

kymmenen
10

yksitoista
11 *(one of the second ten)*

kaksikymmentä
20 *(two tens)*

kaksikymmentäyksi
21

kolmekymmentä
30

sata
100

tuhat
1,000

Numbers build up: 20 is kaksikymmentä, two tens. Put the units straight on: kaksikymmentäyksi is 21. From 11 to 19 add -toista: kolmetoista is 13. Long, but regular.

Days are small: days and months take no capital letter: maanantai, tammikuu. On Monday is maanantaina.

Food, places, verbs Ruoka ja paikat

Food and drink

vesi
water

kahvi
coffee *(Finns drink a lot of it)*

tee
tea

maito
milk

olut
beer

ruoka
food

leipä
bread

ruisleipä
dark rye bread

voi
butter

juusto
cheese

kana
chicken

kala
fish

kananmuna
egg *(muna for short)*

makkara
sausage *(grilled after the sauna)*

pulla
sweet cardamom bun

korvapuusti
cinnamon bun *(it means a slapped ear)*

aamiainen
breakfast

lounas
lunch

päivällinen
dinner, the early evening meal

Minulla on nälkä
I'm hungry *(it means I have hunger)*

Places

talo
house

koti
home

kauppa
shop

koulu
school

ravintola
restaurant

kahvila
café

vessa
toilet

kaupunki
town, city

sauna
sauna: a Finnish word

järvi
lake

mökki
summer cottage, often by a lake

Suomi
Finland; also Finnish, the language

Things

puhelin
phone

raha
money

avain
key

auto
car

lippu
ticket; also flag

Verbs: dictionary / I do it

olla / olen
be

tulla / tulen
come

mennä / menen
go

syödä / syön
eat

juoda / juon
drink

nähdä / näen
see

tehdä / teen
do, make

nukkua / nukun
sleep

puhua / puhun
speak, talk

ymmärtää / ymmärrän
understand

tietää / tiedän
know *(a fact)*

haluta / haluan
want

voida / voin
can, be able to

tykätä / tykkään
like *(tykkään kahvista)*

rakastaa / rakastan
love

asua / asun
live *(somewhere)*

ostaa / ostan
buy

oppia / opin
learn

lukea / luen
read

Describing words

hyvä / huono
good / bad

iso / pieni
big / small

kuuma / kylmä
hot / cold

uusi / vanha
new / old

kallis / halpa
expensive / cheap

helppo / vaikea
easy / hard

iloinen / surullinen
happy / sad

väsynyt
tired

kaunis
beautiful

kiva
nice *(casual)*

hauska
fun, funny

Two forms: the dictionary form usually ends in -a or -ä, sometimes -da or -dä. The minä form, I do it, ends in **-n**: puhun, I speak; syön, I eat. Some change a little inside, like ymmärtää, ymmärrän: learn both forms together.

Describing words take endings too: they match the noun: iso talo, a big house; isossa talossa, in a big house.

Show words Sarjojen sanoja

Reactions

Joo
yeah, yes *(everyday)*

No niin
well then; right; there we go *(see below)*

Siistiä!
cool! *(siisti also means tidy)*

Ihan sama
whatever, I don't mind

Oikeesti?
really? seriously? *(spoken oikeasti)*

Hyvä!
good! well done!

Voi ei!
oh no!

Voi vitsi!
oh shoot! *(mild: vitsi means joke)*

Kippis!
cheers!

Aivan
exactly, right

Ai jaa
oh, I see

Älä viitsi!
oh come on! don't!

Hups!
oops!

Ihanaa!
lovely! wonderful!

Okei
OK

The big scenes

Rakastan sinua
I love you *(strong: Finns say it rarely and mean it)*

Ikävä sinua
miss you *(ikävä is longing)*

Jätä minut rauhaan
leave me alone

Apua!
help!

Varo!
watch out!

Lopeta!
stop it!

Älä mene!
don't go!

Mitä tapahtui?
what happened?

Mitä nyt?
what now? what's wrong?

What to call people

kulta
darling, honey *(it means gold)*

rakas
dear, my love

kaveri
mate, buddy, friend

muru
sweetie *(it means crumb)*

jätkä
guy, lad *(casual)*

No niin: the Finnish all-purpose phrase. Said as you stand up, it's right, let's go. After a long wait, finally. When something breaks, oh dear. To calm someone down, there, there. The tone tells you which one.

Sisu: the Finnish idea of quiet grit: keeping going when it's hard, without fuss or complaint. You'll hear it in sport, in war films and about long winters. Finns are a little proud of it.

Swear words are strong: Finnish has some strong swear words, and you'll hear them a lot in crime series and films. Recognise them, but don't say them. Voi ei, voi vitsi and hups are the mild ones, fine in front of anyone.

Practice Harjoitus

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

Questions: add -ko or -kö to the verb and put it first: puhut, you speak; Puhutko englantia? Do you speak English?

Saying no: put en, et or ei before the verb: En juo kahvia. I don't drink coffee.

Read these sentences

1. Hei, minun nimeni on Aino.
   Hi, my name is Aino.

2. Mikä sinun nimesi on?
   What's your name?

3. Missä vessa on?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Paljonko tämä maksaa?
   How much does this cost?

5. Yksi kahvi, kiitos.
   One coffee, please.

6. Puhun vähän suomea.
   I speak a little Finnish.

7. Tänään on tosi kylmä.
   It's really cold today.

8. Huomenna menen saunaan.
   Tomorrow I'm going to the sauna.

9. Tämä ruisleipä on todella hyvää!
   This rye bread is really good!

10. No niin, mennään!
    Right then, let's go!

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