How Haitian Creole sounds Kreyòl ayisyen

1 · read it out loud

The spelling: this sheet uses the official spelling of Haitian Creole, where a word is written the way it sounds.

The trick: one letter, or letter group, is one sound, and every letter is said. The alphabet: a an b ch d e è en f g h i j k l m n ng o ò on ou oun p r s t ui v w y z

Letters	Sounds like	Example
a, i	a in father, i in ski	**papa / diri** dad / rice
e	a closed e, like ay in say, but short	**manje / bebe** eat / baby
è	an open e, e in bed	**frè / tèt** brother / head
o	a closed o, like o in go, but short	**dlo / gwo** water / big
ò	an open o, o in for	**pòt / lekòl** door / school
ou	oo in food	**bouch / nou** mouth / we
an, en, on	said through the nose, with no n at the end	**manman / pen / bon** mum / bread / good
oun	ou through the nose, with a light n	**moun** person, people
ch	sh in shop	**chat / cheve** cat / hair
j	s in pleasure	**jou / je** day / eye
g	always hard, g in go, even before e	**gade / gen** look / have
r	soft and light, never rolled; before o and ou it turns into w	**rad / wouj** clothes / red
ui	wee, said quickly	**uit** eight
w, y	w in wet, y in yes	**wi / pye** yes / foot
s, z	s is always s in sun, z is always z in zoo	**sèl / zanmi** salt / friend
b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, t, v	much as in English	**liv / dife** book / fire

e · è o · ò

two e's and two o's

e and **o** are closed, **è** and **ò** are open

dlo water · **pòt** door

an · en · on · oun

through the nose

but before a vowel, the n is said:

fenèt window, said fe-nèt

No silent letters: every letter is said, even at the end: liv, book, ends in a v; fèt, party, ends in a t. And èn is è followed by an n you can hear: jèn, young; semèn, week.

Stress: light and even, a little on the last syllable: man-JE, eat; le-KÒL, school; ma-CHIN, car.

How words work liv yo

No gender: no masculine or feminine, and li is he, she and it. Most Haitian Creole words come from French, but the grammar is its own, and Haiti also uses French as an official language.

Words in colour

noun
a thing, a person or a place
chen dog · **kay** house

describing word
most come after the noun
gwo big · **bon** good

verb
the same for everyone, every time
manje eat · **pale** speak

other
little words and phrases
ak and · **kounye a** now

A, the, and more than one

yon liv a book: yon, before	liv **la** the book: la after a consonant	peyi **a** the country: a after a vowel	chen **an** the dog: an after a nasal vowel	machin **nan** the car: nan after m or n	liv **yo** the books: yo, more than one

The goes after the noun, and it changes with the last sound: la after a consonant (liv la, chat la, rad la), a after a vowel (peyi a), an after a nasal vowel (chen an), nan after an m or n you can hear (machin nan). For more than one, it's yo: liv yo, the books.

My, your, his

chen **mwen** my dog	kay **ou** your house	manman **li** his or her mum	lekòl **nou** our school; also your, all of you	zanmi **yo** their friend; also the friends

After the noun too: the same words as I, you, he: chen mwen, my dog. So zanmi yo is their friend or the friends; the sentence makes it clear.

Who and when: manje, to eat

	short	is eating
mwen I	**m**	**m** ap manje
ou you	**w**	**w** ap manje
li he, she, it	**l**	**l** ap manje
nou we	**n**	**n** ap manje
nou you, all	**n**	**n** ap manje
yo they	**y**	**y** ap manje

manje eat, ate: no marker	**ap** manje eating now; also going to eat	**te** manje ate, had eaten	**t ap** manje was eating	**pral** manje going to eat	**pa** manje not eating, didn't eat

The verb never changes: little words in front say when: ap now, te past, t ap was doing, pral going to. M ap manje, I'm eating. **Saying no:** pa before the verb: M pa konnen, I don't know. **Questions:** put Èske in front, or just let your voice rise: Èske ou pale kreyòl? Ou pale kreyòl? Do you speak Creole?

The first 256 words Mwen, ou, li

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

Me and you

mwen / m
I, me; also my, after the noun *(liv mwen, my book)*

ou / w
you, one person; also your

li / l
he, she, it: there is no gender

nou / n
we; also you, more than one

yo / y
they; also their

sa a
this, that, after the noun *(chat sa a, this cat)*

yon
a, one, before the noun *(yon liv, a book)*

Question words

kisa
what

kiyès
who

ki kote
where

kijan
how

konbyen
how many, how much

poukisa
why

kilè
when

Little words

ak
and, with

oswa
or

tou
also, too

isit
here

nan
in, at

apre
after, then

ankò
again

dousman / vit
slowly / quickly

se
is, it's, before a noun *(Se yon chat, it's a cat)*

pa
not, before the verb

Family

manman
mother, mum

papa
father, dad

pitit
child, son or daughter *(pitit mwen, my child)*

pitit gason / pitit fi
son / daughter

frè / sè
brother / sister

granmanman / granpapa
grandmother / grandfather

mari
husband

madanm
wife; also Mrs, madam

fanmi
family

fanm / gason
woman / man, boy

People

moun
person, people

timoun
child, children, any child

zanmi
friend

pwofesè
teacher

elèv
pupil, student

vwazen
neighbour

tifi / tigason
girl / boy

bebe
baby

Short and long: mwen, ou, li, nou and yo have short forms, m, w, l, n and y, used all the time in speech: M bouke, I'm tired. Pitit is your own child, at any age; timoun is any child, or children.

Time and things Kounye a, demen

When

kounye a
now

jodi a
today

demen
tomorrow

yè
yesterday

jou
day

maten
morning

apremidi
afternoon

aswè
evening

lannwit
night

semèn
week

mwa
month

ane
year

The body

kò
body

tèt
head

je
eye, eyes

zòrèy
ear

nen
nose

bouch
mouth

dan
tooth

cheve
hair

men
hand *(men also means but)*

pye
foot

kè
heart

Things

lajan
money

rad
clothes

pòt
door

fenèt
window

chèz
chair

kabann
bed

tab
table

liv
book

telefòn
phone

machin
car

soulye
shoe, shoes

Weather and nature

solèy
sun

lalin
moon

lapli
rain

van
wind

lanmè
sea

rivyè
river

mòn
mountain, hill

pyebwa
tree

flè
flower

wòch
stone, rock

difé
fire

tè
earth, ground, land

Animals

chen
dog

chat
cat

poul
hen, chicken

kochon
pig

bèf
cow

kabrit
goat

cheval
horse

zwazo
bird

pwason
fish

papiyon
butterfly

krapo
toad, frog

Numbers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
en	de	twa	kat	senk	sis	sèt	uit	nèf	dis

11	12	20	30	50	100
onz	douz	ven	trant	senkant	san

Counting: one is en when you count, but yon before a noun: yon chat, a cat or one cat; then de chat, twa chat. The noun never changes.

Now and today: kounye a, now, and jodi a, today, are written in two parts but said as one word.

Food, places, verbs Manje, lakay, fè

Food and drink

manje
food; also eat

dlo
water

diri
rice

pwa
beans

diri ak pwa
rice and beans

vyann
meat

pen
bread

lèt
milk

sèl
salt

sik
sugar

ze
egg

bannann
plantain

mango
mango

kafe
coffee

griyo
fried pork, a favourite dish

Places

kay
house

lakay
home, at home *(lakay mwen, my home)*

lavil
town, city

lari
street

wout
road, way

lekòl
school

boutik
shop

jaden
garden; also a farm plot

peyi
country

Ayiti
Haiti

kreyòl
Creole, the language

Verbs

bwè
drink

dòmi
sleep

ale
go *(often just al)*

vini
come *(often just vin)*

wè
see

tande
hear, listen

gade
look, watch

pale
speak, talk

konnen
know

konprann
understand

aprann
learn

fè
do, make

travay
work; also a job

achte / vann
buy / sell

bay
give

renmen
love, like

vle
want

bezwen
need

kapab
can, be able

gen
have; also there is

chante
sing

danse
dance

jwe
play

ede
help

tann
wait

chita
sit down

kouri
run

mache
walk; also market

louvri / fèmen
open / close

rele
call; also shout *(M rele Lina, my name is Lina)*

Describing words

gwo / piti
big / small *(piti is ti before a noun)*

bon / move
good / bad

bèl
beautiful

nouvo
new

vye / jèn
old / young

cho / frèt
hot / cold

dous
sweet

bouke
tired *(M bouke, I'm tired)*

lwen / pre
far / near

anpil / kèk
a lot, many / a few, some

long / kout
long / short

pwòp / sal
clean / dirty

wouj / jòn
red / yellow

nwa / blan
black / white

ble / vèt
blue / green

kontan
happy, glad

grangou
hungry *(M grangou, I'm hungry)*

malad
ill, poorly

Verbs never change: manje is eat for everyone: m manje, ou manje, yo manje. Little words in front of it say when (page 2), and some verbs have a short form: ale, al; vini, vin.

Describing words go after the noun: yon kay wouj, a red house. A few short ones go before: gwo, ti, bèl, bon, vye: yon gwo chen, a big dog; yon ti kay, a little house.

Phrases and show words Sak pase?

Hello and goodbye

Bonjou
hello, good morning *(see below)*

Bonswa
hello, good afternoon, good evening

Sak pase?
hi, what's up? *(friendly)*

N ap boule
doing fine, the answer to Sak pase?

Kijan ou ye?
how are you?

Mwen byen
I'm well

Kijan ou rele?
what's your name?

M rele ...
my name is ...

Byenveni
welcome

Orevwa
goodbye

N a wè
see you *(it means we'll see)*

A demen
see you tomorrow *(it means until tomorrow)*

Bòn nwit
good night

Please, thanks and help

Wi / Non
yes / no

Mèsi / Mèsi anpil
thank you / thank you very much

Souple
please

Padon
sorry

Eskize m
excuse me

Pa dekwa
you're welcome

Pa gen pwoblèm
no problem

M pa konnen
I don't know

M pa konprann
I don't understand

Èske ou pale angle?
do you speak English?

Reactions

Bravo!
well done!

Se vre?
really? *(it asks is it true?)*

Mwen tou
me too

Ou menm tou
you too, same to you

Se sa!
that's it! exactly!

Kenbe la!
hang in there!

The big scenes

Anmwe!
help! *(see below)*

Mwen renmen ou
I love you

Ann ale!
let's go!

Vin isit!
come here!

Tann mwen!
wait for me!

Pa kriye
don't cry

M la
I'm here

Ede m!
help me!

Fè atansyon!
be careful!

What to call people

mesye
sir, Mr; also gentlemen

cheri
darling, dear

zanmi mwen
my friend

Bonjou and Bonswa: Bonjou until around midday, Bonswa from then on, through the afternoon and evening. Sak pase? is the friendly hi, and the answer is N ap boule.

Short forms: m, n and the rest stand for mwen, nou and the others: Eskize m, excuse me. N a wè, see you, uses a, another little word for will.

Anmwe! is a real cry for help: you'll hear it in films and series when something goes wrong.

Practice Ann ale!

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

No am, no is: Mwen bouke, I'm tired, is word for word I tired. Before a noun you use se: Mwen se pwofesè, I'm a teacher.

Read every letter: nothing is silent, so say the t of fèt and the v of liv.

Read these sentences

1. Bonjou! M rele Lina.
   Hello! My name is Lina.

2. Kijan ou ye? Mwen byen, mèsi.
   How are you? I'm well, thank you.

3. Mwen se pwofesè.
   I'm a teacher.

4. M ap manje diri ak pwa.
   I'm eating rice and beans.

5. Li bwè dlo.
   She drinks water. (Or he: li is both.)

6. Chat la pa la.
   The cat isn't here.

7. Timoun yo ale lekòl.
   The children go to school.

8. Nou te manje lakay.
   We ate at home.

9. Demen m pral travay.
   Tomorrow I'm going to work.

10. Èske ou pale kreyòl?
    Do you speak Creole?

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