How Indonesian sounds Pelafalan

The trick: Indonesian is read the way it's written, in the Latin letters you already know. Learn the few below, and you can read any word aloud.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
c	ch in church, never k or s	**cinta** love
j	j in jam	**jalan** street, road
ng	ng in singer, with no hard g after it; it can start a word	**bunga** flower (bu-nga)
ngg	ng plus a hard g, like ng in finger	**tinggal** live, stay (ting-gal)
ny	ny in canyon, like Spanish ñ	**banyak** many, a lot (ba-nyak)
kh	a rasp, like ch in Scottish loch; many people just say k or h	**akhir** end
sy	sh in shoe	**syukurlah** thank goodness
r	rolled or tapped, as in Spanish or Italian	**rumah** house
g	always hard, as in go	**gula** sugar
h	said lightly, even between vowels and at the end	**lihat** see (li-hat)
k at the end	a light catch in the throat, not a full k	**tidak / bapak** no, not / father (ti-da', ba-pa')
a, i, o, u	short and clean, as in Spanish or Italian	**satu** one
au	ow in cow; in casual speech often o	**pulau** island (pu-lau)
ai	y in my; in casual speech often e	**pantai** beach (pan-tai)
two vowels	each one said: two beats	**maaf** sorry (ma-af)
y, w	y in yes and w in water	**saya** I, me

e

most of the time: a quick uh, like the a in about

besar (big), empat (four), sekolah (school)

e = é

sometimes: e in bed

enak (tasty), meja (table), sore (afternoon)

One letter, two e's: normal spelling doesn't show which one it is. Some dictionaries write é for the bed sound. The quick uh is much more common, so guess that first, then copy what you hear in shows.

Where the stress goes: nowhere strong. Indonesian sounds light and even. Many people lean a little on the next-to-last syllable, se-LA-mat, MA-kan, but don't hit any syllable hard and you'll sound right.

How words work Tata bahasa

No gender, no the: Indonesian has no masculine or feminine and no word for a or the. rumah is a house or the house. dia is he and she. When you need one, say satu, or sebuah for things and seorang for people.

No tenses: time words do the work

A verb never changes. Saya makan is I eat, I ate or I'll eat. Add a little word before the verb when the time matters.

sudah makan	**sedang** makan	**akan** makan	**belum** makan
have eaten, already	am eating, right now	will eat	haven't eaten yet

Sudah makan? Have you eaten? It's a friendly hello as much as a question. Answer Sudah, I have, or Belum, not yet. A time word works too: Kemarin saya makan nasi, yesterday I ate rice.

More than one

Say it twice: anak, a child; anak-anak, children; buku-buku, books. Often you don't need to: dua anak, two children; banyak anak, many children. A number or banyak already says more than one.

Prefixes

Three to know: me- makes a doing word: baca, membaca, to read; tulis, menulis, to write. ber- means having or being: jalan, berjalan, to walk. di- means it's done to it: dimakan, is eaten. The prefix can change the first letter of the word, so in a dictionary look up the root: membaca is under baca.

Word order like English

Saya	minum	kopi	sekarang
I	drink	coffee	now

Describing words go after: rumah besar, a big house. So do my and this: rumah saya, my house; rumah ini, this house; rumah besar saya, my big house.

The first 228 words Kata-kata pertama

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 a prefix added to the word.

Greetings and survival

Halo
hello

Selamat pagi
good morning *(until about 11)*

Selamat siang
good day *(about 11 to 3)*

Selamat sore
good afternoon *(about 3 until dark)*

Selamat malam
good evening, good night

Apa kabar?
how are you?

Baik
fine, good

Salam kenal
nice to meet you

Terima kasih
thank you

Makasih
thanks *(casual)*

Sama-sama
you're welcome

Tolong
please *(asking for help)*; also help!

Silakan
please, go ahead *(offering)*

Ya
yes

Tidak
no, not

Maaf
sorry

Permisi
excuse me *(to pass, or to get attention)*

Sampai jumpa
see you

Saya tidak mengerti
I don't understand

Saya tidak tahu
I don't know

Selamat makan
enjoy your meal

Hati-hati
take care, be careful

Question words

apa
what

siapa
who

di mana
where

ke mana
where to

kapan
when

kenapa
why

bagaimana
how

berapa
how many, how much

yang mana
which one

Me and you

saya
I, me *(polite, always safe)*

aku
I, me *(casual)*

kamu
you *(casual)*

Anda
you *(polite, written with a capital A)*

dia
he, she

kita
we *(you included)*

kami
we *(you not included)*

kalian
you all

mereka
they

ini / itu
this / that

Little words

dan
and

tapi
but

atau
or

ada
there is; also to have

juga
also, too

sangat
very *(before the word)*

sekali
very *(after the word: enak sekali)*

sedikit
a little

hanya
only

lagi
again, more

di sini
here

di sana
there

dengan
with

untuk
for

karena
because

kalau
if; when

yang
who, which, the one that

saya or aku, Anda or kamu: saya and Anda are polite: use them with strangers, older people and at work. aku and kamu are for friends, family and people your age. Shows use aku and kamu all the time.

People, time, numbers Orang dan waktu

Family

ayah
father

ibu
mother; also Mrs

orang tua
parents *(it means old people)*

kakak
older brother or sister

adik
younger brother or sister

anak
child, son, daughter

kakek
grandpa

nenek
grandma

paman
uncle *(om in cities)*

bibi
aunt *(tante in cities)*

suami
husband

istri
wife

keluarga
family

saudara
brother or sister; also a relative

People

orang
person, people

laki-laki
man, boy, male

perempuan
woman, girl, female

teman
friend

pacar
boyfriend, girlfriend

tetangga
neighbour

guru
teacher

murid
pupil, student

dokter
doctor

When

hari ini
today

besok
tomorrow

kemarin
yesterday

sekarang
now

nanti
later

pagi
morning

siang
midday

sore
late afternoon

malam
evening, night

hari
day

bulan
month; also moon

tahun
year

jam
hour, clock *(Jam berapa? What time is it?)*

waktu
time

Days of the week

Senin
Monday

Selasa
Tuesday

Rabu
Wednesday

Kamis
Thursday

Jumat
Friday

Sabtu
Saturday

Minggu
Sunday; minggu is also a week

Numbers

nol
0

satu
1

dua
2

tiga
3

empat
4

lima
5

enam
6

tujuh
7

delapan
8

sembilan
9

sepuluh
10

sebelas
11

dua belas
12

dua puluh
20

dua puluh satu
21

seratus
100

seribu
1,000

Older or younger, not he or she: kakak is an older brother or sister, adik a younger one. Add laki-laki or perempuan only when it matters: kakak perempuan, older sister.

Numbers are Lego: se- means one: sepuluh 10, seratus 100, seribu 1,000. belas makes the teens: tiga belas 13. puluh makes the tens: tiga puluh 30, tiga puluh lima 35. After a number, no plural: dua buku, two books.

Food, places, verbs Makanan dan tempat

Two forms: many verbs have a short root and a full form with a prefix: baca, membaca. Talk and shows mostly use the short one, books and the news the full one. Both mean the same.

Food and drink

air
water *(to drink: air putih)*

teh
tea

kopi
coffee

es
ice; also an iced drink: es teh

nasi
cooked rice

nasi goreng
fried rice

mi
noodles *(often spelled mie)*

roti
bread

ayam
chicken

ikan
fish

daging
meat

sayur
vegetables

pedas
spicy, hot

enak
tasty, nice

sarapan
breakfast

makan siang
lunch

makan malam
dinner

Saya lapar
I'm hungry

Minta bonnya
the bill, please

Places

rumah
house, home

di rumah
at home *(di, at, in)*

sekolah
school

rumah makan
restaurant *(it means eating house)*

rumah sakit
hospital *(it means sick house)*

toilet
toilet *(also WC, said we-se)*

stasiun
train station

pasar
market

warung
small shop or food stall

kota
city, town

jalan
street, road

pantai
beach

Things

HP
mobile phone *(said ha-pe)*

buku
book

uang
money

kunci
key

mobil
car

tas
bag

Verbs: short / full form

makan
eat

minum
drink

pergi
go

datang
come

pulang
go home

tidur
sleep

lihat / melihat
see

nonton / menonton
watch *(a show, a film)*

baca / membaca
read

tulis / menulis
write *(the t drops)*

beli / membeli
buy

tunggu / menunggu
wait *(the t drops)*

bicara / berbicara
speak, talk

kerja / bekerja
work

belajar
study, learn

tahu
know

mau
want; also will

suka
like

bisa
can

punya
have, own

Describing words

besar / kecil
big / small

panas / dingin
hot / cold

baru / lama
new / old *(lama is also a long time)*

bagus / jelek
good, nice / bad, ugly

cepat / lambat
fast / slow

mudah / sulit
easy / hard

murah / mahal
cheap / expensive

cantik
beautiful

capek
tired *(casual)*

senang
happy, glad

Describing words come after: rumah besar, a big house; nasi goreng, fried rice. They never change: rumah-rumah besar, big houses.

Show words Kata-kata sinetron

6 · heard on screen

Reactions

Wah!
wow!

Aduh!
ouch! oh no! *(pain or trouble)*

Masa?
really? no way! *(often Masa sih?)*

Beneran?
for real? *(casual)*

Ayo!
come on! let's go!

Nggak / gak
no, not *(casual for tidak)*

Udah
already, done; that's enough *(casual for sudah)*

Gimana?
how? so what now? *(casual for bagaimana)*

Ya ampun!
oh my goodness!

Astaga!
good grief!

Nggak apa-apa
it's OK, no problem

Asyik!
yay! cool!

Kasihan
poor thing

Sabar
be patient, hang in there

Mau ke mana?
where are you off to? *(a friendly hello)*

Little sounds at the end

sih
softens a question or adds a shrug: Kenapa sih? Why, though?

dong
pushes a request, or says obviously: Ayo dong! Come on!

kok
surprise, how come: Kok mahal? How come it's so pricey?

deh
settles it: Ya udah deh. Fine, then.

The big scenes

Aku cinta kamu
I love you

Aku sayang kamu
I love you, I care about you

Aku kangen kamu
I miss you

Awas!
watch out!

Jangan pergi!
don't go!

Cukup!
enough!

Diam!
be quiet! shut up!

What to call people

Mas
big brother; any young man, friendly

Mbak
big sister; any young woman, friendly

Kak
big brother or sister; anyone a bit older

Bang
big brother; drivers, sellers, any man

Dek
little one; anyone younger

Pak
sir, Mr *(short for Bapak)*

Bu
ma'am, Mrs *(short for Ibu)*

sayang
darling, love

gue / lo
I / you: Jakarta slang, casual only

gue and lo: Jakarta slang, all over shows and social media. Use them only with close friends. Everywhere else, aku and kamu or saya and Anda do the job.

Mas, Mbak, Kak: people call a waiter, a driver or a shop assistant Mas or Mbak, words from Javanese. It's warm and normal, not odd. Kak works anywhere, and Pak and Bu are for anyone older.

Swear words are strong: Indonesian has harsh swear words, and some are animal names. You'll hear them in fights on screen: recognise them, but don't say them. Aduh! and Ya ampun! are the mild ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice Latihan

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

Questions: just raise your voice at the end: Kamu sudah makan? Have you eaten? Writing often starts with apakah: Apakah kamu sudah makan?

Saying no: tidak goes before verbs and describing words: Saya tidak tahu, I don't know. bukan goes before nouns: Ini bukan kopi, this isn't coffee. In casual talk, nggak works for both.

Read these sentences

1. Halo, nama saya Dewi.
   Hello, my name is Dewi.

2. Nama kamu siapa?
   What's your name?

3. Toiletnya di mana?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Ini berapa?
   How much is this?

5. Saya mau es teh manis.
   I'd like a sweet iced tea.

6. Saya suka sekali nasi goreng.
   I really like fried rice.

7. Hari ini panas sekali.
   It's very hot today.

8. Besok saya mau ke pantai dengan teman.
   Tomorrow I want to go to the beach with a friend.

9. Saya sudah makan, terima kasih.
   I've already eaten, thank you.

10. Ayo, kita pergi!
    Come on, let's go!

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