How Malay sounds Sebutan

The trick: Malay 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
sy	sh in shoe	**syukur** thankful, thank goodness
kh	a rasp, like ch in Scottish loch; many people just say k	**khabar** news (Apa khabar?)
gh	a soft g from the throat, like a French r; many just say g	**loghat** accent, dialect
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)
r	tapped; at the end of a word often soft, almost gone	**besar** big
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 / budak** no, not / kid (ti-da', bu-da')
a, i, o, u	short and clean, as in Spanish or Italian	**satu** one
au, ai	ow in cow, and y in my	**pulau / pantai** island / beach

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
meja (table), merah (red), elok (fine, nice)

One letter, two e's: the spelling doesn't show which one it is. The quick uh is much more common, so guess that first, then copy what you hear.

A soft end: in everyday Malaysian speech, a final -a often sounds like a soft uh: saya, apa, mana. Both are fine, and you'll hear both.

Where the stress goes: nowhere strong. Malay 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 Tatabahasa

No gender, no the: Malay 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
have eaten, already

sedang makan
am eating, right now

akan makan
will eat

belum makan
haven't eaten yet

In speech, sudah becomes dah: Saya dah makan, I've eaten. A time word works too: Semalam saya makan nasi, yesterday I ate rice.

More than one

Say it twice: budak, a kid; budak-budak, kids; buku-buku, books. Often you don't need to: dua budak, two kids; banyak buku, many books. 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 doing: jalan, berjalan, to walk. di- means it's done to it: dimakan, is eaten. In a dictionary, look up the root: membaca is under baca.

Describing words go after

rumah besar
a big house

rumah saya
my house

rumah ini
this house

kopi panas
hot coffee

Saying you, politely

awak
everyday you, to people your age

anda
polite you, mostly written: ads, signs, forms

kamu
to kids or close friends; can sound bossy to adults

Even better, use a title: encik (Mr, sir) and puan (Mrs, madam) for strangers; abang and kakak, big brother and big sister, for anyone a bit older. Malaysians often skip you and use the title or the name: Kakak nak apa? What would you like?

The first 229 words Perkataan 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

Hai
hi, hello

Selamat pagi
good morning

Selamat petang
good afternoon *(after lunch until dark)*

Selamat malam
good evening, good night

Apa khabar?
how are you? *(it means what news?)*

Khabar baik
I'm fine *(it means good news)*

Terima kasih
thank you

Sama-sama
you're welcome

Maaf
sorry; excuse me

Tumpang lalu
excuse me, can I get past?

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

Sila
please, go ahead *(on signs: sila masuk, please come in)*

Ya
yes

Tidak
no, not *(in speech: tak)*

Selamat datang
welcome

Selamat tinggal
goodbye *(said by the one leaving: stay well)*

Selamat jalan
goodbye *(said to the one leaving: go well)*

Jumpa lagi
see you again

Saya tak faham
I don't understand

Saya tak tahu
I don't know

Jemput makan
please eat, help yourself

Jaga diri
take care

Question words

apa
what

siapa
who

di mana
where

ke mana
where to

dari mana
where from

bila
when

kenapa
why

macam mana
how *(formal: bagaimana)*

berapa
how many, how much

Berapa harga?
how much is it?

Me and you

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

aku
I, me *(casual, close friends)*

awak
you *(everyday, to people your age)*

anda
you *(polite: ads, signs, forms)*

kamu
you *(to kids, or very close friends)*

dia
he, she

kita
we *(you included)*

kami
we *(you not included)*

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 *(sangat sedap; in speech also sedap sangat)*

sikit
a little *(formal: sedikit)*

banyak
a lot, many

saja
only, just *(in speech: je)*

lagi
again, more

sini
here *(di sini)*

sana
there *(di sana)*

dengan
with

untuk
for

sebab
because *(formal: kerana)*

kalau
if

yang
who, which, the one that

Two goodbyes: the one who leaves says Selamat tinggal, stay well. The one who stays says Selamat jalan, go well. Among friends, Jumpa lagi or just Bye does the job.

People and time Orang dan masa

Family

ayah
dad, father *(formal: bapa)*

mak
mum *(formal: emak, ibu)*

ibu bapa
parents *(it means mother father)*

abang
older brother

kakak
older sister

adik
younger brother or sister

anak
child, son, daughter

atuk
grandpa *(formal: datuk)*

nenek
grandma

pak cik
uncle; also any older man

mak cik
aunt; also any older woman

suami
husband

isteri
wife

keluarga
family

sepupu
cousin

People

orang
person, people

lelaki
man, male

perempuan
woman, female

budak
kid, child

kawan
friend

jiran
neighbour

cikgu
teacher

pelajar
student

doktor
doctor

When

hari ini
today

esok
tomorrow

semalam
yesterday; also last night

sekarang
now

nanti
later

pagi
morning

tengah hari
midday

petang
afternoon, early evening

malam
evening, night

hari
day

minggu
week

bulan
month; also moon

tahun
year

jam
hour; also clock, watch

masa
time

pukul
o'clock *(Pukul berapa? What time is it?)*

Days of the week

Isnin
Monday

Selasa
Tuesday

Rabu
Wednesday

Khamis
Thursday

Jumaat
Friday

Sabtu
Saturday

Ahad
Sunday

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
kosong	satu	dua	tiga	empat	lima	enam	tujuh	lapan

9	10	11	12	20	21	100	1,000
sembilan	sepuluh	sebelas	dua belas	dua puluh	dua puluh satu	seratus	seribu

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. After a number, no plural: dua buku, two books.

Malaysia and Indonesia: Malay and Indonesian are close, and speakers understand each other. A few everyday words differ, and neither one is wrong. This sheet uses the Malaysian ones.

Malaysia	**kereta**	**percuma**	**polis**	**boleh**	**esok**	**bila**
Indonesia	mobil	gratis	polisi	bisa	besok	kapan
	car	free (of charge)	police	can	tomorrow	when

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 *(plain water: air kosong)*

teh
tea

kopi
coffee

ais
ice *(iced tea: teh ais)*

teh tarik
pulled tea, poured from high until it foams

nasi
cooked rice

nasi lemak
rice cooked in coconut milk, with sambal, the national favourite

roti canai
flaky flatbread, dipped in curry

mi
noodles *(often spelled mee)*

ayam
chicken

ikan
fish

daging
meat; often beef

sayur
vegetables

pedas
spicy, hot

sedap
tasty, delicious

sarapan
breakfast

makan tengah hari
lunch

makan malam
dinner

Saya lapar
I'm hungry

Boleh kira?
the bill, please *(it means can you count?)*

Places

rumah
house, home

sekolah
school

pejabat
office

kedai
shop

kedai makan
small restaurant *(it means eating shop)*

mamak
Indian Muslim eatery, open late; where friends meet

tandas
toilet

stesen
station

pasar malam
night market

bandar
town, city

jalan
street, road

pantai
beach

Things

telefon
phone *(in speech also fon)*

buku
book

duit
money *(formal: wang)*

kunci
key

kereta
car

beg
bag

baju
shirt, top; also clothes

Verbs: short / full form

makan
eat

minum
drink

pergi
go

datang
come

balik
go back, go home

tidur
sleep

duduk
sit; also live somewhere

tengok
look, watch *(formal: lihat)*

baca / membaca
read

tulis / menulis
write *(the t drops)*

beli / membeli
buy

tunggu / menunggu
wait *(the t drops)*

cakap / bercakap
speak, talk

kerja / bekerja
work

belajar
study, learn

tahu
know

faham
understand

nak
want *(formal: mahu, hendak)*

suka
like

Describing words

besar / kecil
big / small

panas / sejuk
hot / cold

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

cepat / lambat
fast / slow

senang / susah
easy / hard *(senang is also happy)*

murah / mahal
cheap / expensive

cantik
beautiful, pretty

penat
tired

gembira
happy, glad

Makan is a favourite topic: food comes up all day. Dah makan? Have you eaten? is a friendly hello, and Jom makan! Let's eat! ends many a talk. Answer Dah, I have, or Belum, not yet, and expect to be fed.

Show words Kata-kata drama

6 · heard on screen

Reactions

Wah!
wow!

Alamak!
oh no! oops!

Aiyo!
oh dear! *(from Chinese Malaysian speech, said by everyone)*

Betul ke?
really? is it true?

Biar betul!
no way! seriously?

Jom!
let's go! come on!

Boleh!
sure! can do! *(boleh means can)*

Tak apa
never mind, it's OK

Best!
great! fun! *(said the English way)*

Mana ada!
no way, not true! *(it means where is there?)*

Padan muka!
serves you right!

Kesian
poor thing

Sabar
be patient, hang in there

Dah
done, already *(short for sudah)*

Little words at the end

lah
softens or pushes, see below: OK lah, Jom lah

kan
asks for a nod: Sedap, kan? Tasty, right?

ke
makes a yes or no question: Awak lapar ke? Are you hungry?

je
only, just: Sikit je. Just a little.

The big scenes

Saya cinta awak
I love you

Saya sayang awak
I love you, I care about you

Saya rindu awak
I miss you

Awas!
watch out!

Jangan pergi!
don't go!

Cukup!
enough!

Diam!
be quiet! shut up!

What to call people

sayang
darling, love

bro
bro, mate: any guy your age

abang / bang
big brother; any man a bit older, or a husband

adik / dik
little one; anyone younger

kak
big sister; any woman a bit older

bos
what you call the man at the stall: Bos, kira!

uncle / auntie
any older man or woman, said in English

Lah is famous: it goes at the end and adds a tone, not a meaning. It can soften, OK lah, all right then; push, Jom lah, come on, let's go; or shrug, Tak apa lah, never mind. Say it lightly and you'll sound local.

Manglish: Malaysian English mixes in Malay, Chinese and Tamil words, and lah too: Can or not? Can lah! People switch between it and Malay in the middle of a sentence.

Swear words are strong: Malay has strong swear words, and you'll hear them in fights on screen. Recognise them, but don't say them. Alamak! and Aiyo! 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 Malay 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 add ke: Awak dah makan ke? Have you eaten? Writing often starts with adakah: Adakah awak sudah makan?

Saying no: tidak, or tak in speech, goes before verbs and describing words: Saya tak tahu, I don't know. bukan goes before nouns: Ini bukan kopi, this isn't coffee.

Read these sentences

1. Hai, nama saya Aisyah.
   Hi, my name is Aisyah.

2. Siapa nama awak?
   What's your name?

3. Tandas di mana?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Berapa harga ini?
   How much is this?

5. Teh tarik satu, ya.
   One teh tarik, please.

6. Nasi lemak ini sedap sangat!
   This nasi lemak is really tasty!

7. Saya boleh cakap sikit bahasa Melayu.
   I can speak a little Malay.

8. Esok saya nak pergi ke pantai dengan kawan.
   Tomorrow I want to go to the beach with a friend.

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

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

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