How Maltese sounds L-alfabett

The trick: Maltese is written the way it sounds, once you know a handful of letters. ċ, ġ, ħ and ż wear a dot or a bar, x is sh, q is a catch in the throat, and għ is one letter that is mostly silent.

Letters	Sounds like	Example
Ċ ċ	ch in chips	**ċavetta / ċkejken** key / tiny
Ġ ġ	j in jam	**ġobon / ġurnata** cheese / day
g	g in go	**grazzi / gżira** thank you / island
Ħ ħ	a strong h, breathed from the throat	**ħobż / ħalib** bread / milk
h	silent	**hawn / hu** here / he
Għ għ	one letter, mostly silent: it makes the vowel long	**għada / għalliem** tomorrow / teacher
ie	a long ee, like the ea in near	**bieb / tieqa** door / window
j	y in yes	**jien / jekk** I / if
q	a catch in the throat, like the break in uh-oh	**qattus / qalb** cat / heart
x	sh in shop	**xemx / xita** sun / rain
z	ts in cats	**zokkor / zija** sugar / aunt
Ż ż	z in zoo	**żiemel / żgħir** horse / small
aj, aw, ej	eye, cow, day	**ajma / lejl** ouch / night

għ

mostly silent: the vowel goes long

għada AA-da, tomorrow

għalliem aal-LEEM, teacher

à è ì ò ù

an accent on the last vowel takes the stress

kafè ka-FE, coffee

diġà di-JA, already

Stress: most words stress the last but one syllable: SKO-la, ka-ROZ-za, GRAZ-zi. A final accent marks the ones that don't: kafè, diġà.

Double letters: a double letter is held a moment longer, like the join in hot tea: tazza, karozza, qattus.

Dots and bars stay: Ċ, Ġ, Ħ and Ż keep their marks as capitals too: Ċaw, il-Ħadd. Without them it's a different letter, so write them every time.

The rest: b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v and w sound much as in English, and r is a light roll of the tongue. Every vowel is said, even at the end: sena, SE-na, year.

How words work Il-grammatika

Every noun is masculine or feminine

rağel · ktieb
masculine: often ends in a consonant
ir-rağel, the man · il-ktieb, the book

mara · karozza
feminine: often ends in -a
il-mara, the woman · il-karozza, the car

not always
learn the gender with the word
id-dar (f), the house · l-ilma (m)

The: il-, and the sun letters

One word for the: il- before most consonants, il-ktieb, and l- before a vowel, l-omm. Before the nine sun letters ċ d n r s t x z ż, the l turns into that letter and it's said twice:

iċ-ċavetta the key	id-dar the house	in-nanna the gran	ir-rağel the man	is-sena the year
it-tifel the boy	ix-xemx the sun	iz-zokkor the sugar	iż-żiemel the horse	il-ktieb the book: l stays

No word for a: ktieb is a book, il-ktieb the book. After a word that ends in a vowel, il- drops its i: fejn hi l-kamra? where is the room?

More than one: add an ending, or change the inside (a broken plural, like man, men)

karozza → karozzi car: -a becomes -i	omm → ommijiet mother: add -ijiet	rağel → irġiel man: broken
tifel → tfal boy: tfal, children	kelb → klieb dog: broken	ktieb → kotba book: broken

Have and a regular verb: għandi and kiteb

	I have, you have	kiteb, to write
jien	għandi	nikteb
int	għandek	tikteb
hu	għandu	jikteb
hi	għandha	tikteb
aħna	għandna	niktbu
intom	għandkom	tiktbu
huma	għandhom	jiktbu

No verb for be: in the present, the pronoun does the job: Jien Malti, I'm Maltese. Hija tabiba, she's a doctor. Id-dar kbira, the house is big.

Saying no: put ma before the verb and -x on the end: naf, I know; ma nafx, I don't know. Before a vowel or għ, ma becomes m': m'għandix, I haven't got.

Words from everywhere: the grammar is Semitic, and many everyday words come from Italian and English: grazzi, skola, mowbajl.

The first 257 words L-ewwel kliem

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

Greetings and survival

Bonġu
good morning; hello in the daytime

Bonswa
good evening

Il-lejl it-tajjeb
good night

Ċaw
bye; also hi, among friends

Saħħa
bye; also cheers! *(it means health)*

Narak għada
see you tomorrow

Grazzi
thank you

Grazzi ħafna
thank you very much

Ta' xejn
you're welcome *(it means of nothing)*

Jekk jogħġbok
please *(to one person)*

Skużani
excuse me, sorry

Jiddispjaċini
I'm sorry

Iva / Le
yes / no

Kif inti?
how are you?

Tajjeb, u int?
fine, and you?

X'jismek?
what's your name?

Jisimni ...
my name is ...

Pjaċir
nice to meet you *(it means pleasure)*

Merħba
welcome

Titkellem bl-Ingliż?
do you speak English?

Ma nifhimx
I don't understand

Ma nafx
I don't know

Question words

xiex / x'
what *(x' joins the next word: X'jismek?)*

min
who

fejn
where

minn fejn
where from

meta
when

għaliex
why

kif
how

kemm
how much, how many

liema
which

Kemm jiswa?
how much is it?

Me and you

jien
I *(also jiena)*

int
you, to one person *(also inti)*

hu / hi
he / she *(also huwa, hija)*

aħna
we

intom
you, to more than one

huma
they

tiegħi
my, mine *(il-ktieb tiegħi, my book)*

tiegħek
your, yours

dan / din
this *(m / f)*

dak / dik
that *(m / f)*

dawn
these

Little words

u
and

imma
but

jew
or

ħafna
a lot, many; very *(sabiħ ħafna, very nice)*

ftit
a little, a few

biss
only, just

diġà
already

hawn
here

hemm
there

ma'
with

mingħajr
without

għax
because

ukoll
also, too

forsi
maybe

dejjem
always

qatt
never

kollox
everything

xejn
nothing

Through the day: Bonġu in the morning and early afternoon, Bonswa later on, Il-lejl it-tajjeb at bedtime. Ċaw and Saħħa work at any time.

Iva and le: iva is yes and le is no. To say not, Maltese wraps the verb: ma nafx, I don't know (page 2).

People and time Nies u żmien

Family

l-omm
mother, mum

il-missier
father, dad

il-ħu
brother *(ħija, my brother)*

l-oħt
sister *(oħti, my sister)*

l-iben
son *(ibni, my son)*

il-bint
daughter

in-nannu
grandfather, grandad

in-nanna
grandmother, gran

iz-ziju
uncle

iz-zija
aunt

il-familja
family

People

ir-raġel
man; also husband

il-mara
woman; also wife

it-tifel
boy, child *(it-tfal, children)*

it-tifla
girl

il-ħabib
friend *(f: il-ħabiba)*

it-tabib
doctor *(f: it-tabiba)*

il-ġar
neighbour *(f: il-ġara)*

When

illum
today

għada
tomorrow

ilbieraħ
yesterday

issa
now

aktar tard
later

filgħodu
in the morning

waranofsinhar
in the afternoon

filgħaxija
in the evening

billejl
at night

il-ġurnata
day

il-lejl
night

il-ġimgħa
week *(with a capital, il-Ġimgħa is Friday)*

ix-xahar
month

is-sena
year

il-ħin
time

is-siegħa
hour

Days of the week

it-Tnejn
Monday

it-Tlieta
Tuesday

l-Erbgħa
Wednesday

il-Ħamis
Thursday

il-Ġimgħa
Friday

is-Sibt
Saturday

il-Ħadd
Sunday

Things

il-flus
money *(always plural)*

il-mowbajl
mobile phone

iċ-ċavetta
key

il-ktieb
book

il-mejda
table

is-sodda
bed

il-bieb
door

it-tieqa
window

il-biljett
ticket

il-borża
bag

is-siġġu
chair

Getting around

il-karozza
car

il-karozza tal-linja
bus *(it means line car)*

il-vapur
ship, ferry

l-ajruplan
plane

l-ajruport
airport

lemin / xellug
right / left

dritt
straight on

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
żero	wieħed / waħda	tnejn	tlieta	erbgħa	ħamsa	sitta	sebgħa	tmienja	disgħa	għaxra	ħdax

12	20	21	30	100	1,000
tnax	għoxrin	wieħed u għoxrin	tletin	mija	elf

Numbers: 1 has a feminine form: wieħed, waħda. 2 is tnejn when you count, but żewġ before a word: żewġ kotba, two books. 21 is said one and twenty: wieħed u għoxrin.

Capital days: days and months take a capital letter, while the article stays small: it-Tnejn, Monday; Jannar, January.

Food, places, verbs Ikel, postijiet, verbi

Food and drink

l-ilma
water *(masculine, though it ends in -a)*

il-kafè
coffee

it-te
tea

il-ħalib
milk

il-birra
beer

l-inbid
wine *(inbid aħmar, red wine)*

il-ħobż
bread *(ħobż biż-żejt, bread with oil and tomato)*

il-ġobon
cheese

il-laħam
meat

il-ħut
fish

il-bajda
egg

il-frott
fruit

it-tuffieħa
apple

ir-ross
rice

is-soppa
soup

il-ġelat
ice cream

iz-zokkor
sugar

il-pastizz
a flaky pastry filled with ricotta or peas

il-fenek
rabbit *(stuffat tal-fenek, rabbit stew)*

l-ikel
food

Għandi l-ġuħ
I'm hungry *(it means I have the hunger)*

Il-kont, jekk jogħġbok
the bill, please

Places

id-dar
house, home

l-iskola
school

ix-xogħol
work, job

ir-restorant
restaurant

il-kamra
room

il-kamra tal-banju
bathroom, toilet

il-ħanut
shop

il-belt
city, town *(il-Belt is Valletta)*

ir-raħal
village

it-triq
street, road

il-pjazza
square

il-lukanda
hotel

l-isptar
hospital

il-bajja
bay, beach

il-baħar
sea

il-ġżira
island

il-Malti
Maltese, the language

Verbs: dictionary / I do it

kiel / niekol
eat

xorob / nixrob
drink

mar / immur
go

ġie / niġi
come

ra / nara
see

għamel / nagħmel
do, make

raqad / norqod
sleep

tkellem / nitkellem
speak

fehem / nifhem
understand

ried / irrid
want

seta' / nista'
can

tgħallem / nitgħallem
learn

ħadem / naħdem
work

għex / ngħix
live

xtara / nixtri
buy

ħallas / nħallas
pay

kiteb / nikteb
write

qara / naqra
read

sema' / nisma'
hear, listen

ħabb / inħobb
love; also like a lot

qal / ngħid
say

ħareġ / noħroġ
go out

Describing words

tajjeb / ħażin
good / bad *(f: tajba, ħażina)*

kbir / żgħir
big / small *(f: kbira, żgħira)*

sħun / kiesaħ
hot / cold *(f: sħuna, kiesħa)*

ġdid / qadim
new / old *(f: ġdida, qadima)*

għali / irħis
expensive / cheap

faċli / diffiċli
easy / hard

ferħan / imdejjaq
happy / sad, fed up

sabiħ / ikrah
beautiful, lovely / ugly

għoli / baxx
tall, high / short, low

għajjien
tired

abjad / iswed
white / black

aħmar / blu / aħdar
red / blue / green

isfar
yellow

Two forms: the dictionary form is the he did it form: kiteb, he wrote. The I form usually starts with n: nikteb, I write. Learn both forms together.

Describing words agree: they come after the noun, and most add -a for a feminine one: tifel kbir, a big boy; tifla kbira, a big girl.

Show words Kliem ieħor

Reactions

Ajma!
ouch! oh no! *(see below)*

Mela!
of course! sure! *(see below)*

Veru?
really?

Kemm hu sabiħ!
how lovely!

Prosit!
well done!

Awguri!
congratulations! best wishes!

Ejja!
come on! come here!

Ejja nimxu!
let's go!

Oqgħod attent!
be careful! *(to a woman: attenta)*

Ma jimpurtax
never mind, it doesn't matter

Ħasra!
what a shame!

Kollox sew?
everything OK? all good?

Mhux hekk?
isn't it? right?

Eżatt!
exactly!

Mhux possibbli!
no way! *(it means not possible)*

The big scenes

Inħobbok
I love you

Għajnuna!
help!

Stenna!
wait!

Tmurx!
don't go!

X'ġara?
what happened?

X'qed jiġri?
what's going on?

Ħallini waħdi
leave me alone

Iskot!
be quiet! shut up! *(rude)*

Isma'!
listen!

Tibżax!
don't be scared!

Xorti tajba!
good luck!

What to call people

qalbi
my love, darling *(it means my heart)*

ħanini
sweetheart, dear

sinjur / sinjura
sir / madam

is-Sur / is-Sinjura
Mr / Mrs, before a name: is-Sur Borg

Mela: a little word you'll hear everywhere. It opens a sentence, like so or well: Mela, x'nagħmlu? So, what shall we do? On its own, Mela! means of course!

Ajma!: what you say when you stub your toe, or when something goes wrong: Ajma, insejt iċ-ċavetta! Oh no, I forgot the key!

Saħħa!: it means health. Say it to say bye, and say it again when you lift a glass: it's cheers too.

Practice Prattika

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

Questions: keep the same word order and let your voice go up at the end: Int Malti? Are you Maltese?

Like: Jogħġobni l-kafè. I like coffee, word for word the coffee pleases me. Ma jogħġobnix il-kafè. I don't like coffee. Jekk jogħġbok, please, is the same word: if it pleases you.

Read these sentences

1. Bonġu, jisimni Anna.
   Hi, my name is Anna.

2. Minn fejn int?
   Where are you from?

3. Skużani, fejn hi l-kamra tal-banju?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Kemm jiswa dan?
   How much is this?

5. Kafè bil-ħalib, jekk jogħġbok.
   A white coffee, please.

6. Nitkellem ftit Malti.
   I speak a little Maltese.

7. Illum il-baħar sabiħ ħafna.
   The sea is lovely today.

8. Immorru l-baħar għada?
   Shall we go to the sea tomorrow?

9. Ilbieraħ kilt żewġ pastizzi.
   Yesterday I ate two pastizzi.

10. M'għandix flus.
    I haven't got any money.

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