Two alphabets Азбука · Abeceda

1 · 30 letters, read it out loud

The trick: Serbian keeps one simple promise: write as you speak, read as written. One letter, one sound, and nothing is silent. It has two alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin, with the same 30 letters, and each Cyrillic letter has exactly one Latin match. Three of the Latin ones are written with two letters, lj, nj and dž, but each is still one sound.

Same capitals in both · Look familiar, read differently · New shapes

	Cyrillic	Latin	Sounds like	Example, in both
1	А а	A a	a in father, short	avion авион plane
2	Б б	B b	b in book	brat брат brother
3	В в	V v	v in van	voda вода water
4	Г г	G g	g in go, always hard	grad град town, city
5	Д д	D d	d in day	dan дан day
6	Ђ ђ	Đ đ	a soft j, like the d in duty said quickly	đak ђак pupil
7	Е е	E e	e in bed	ekran екран screen
8	Ж ж	Ž ž	s in pleasure	žena жена woman, wife
9	З з	Z z	z in zoo	zima зима winter
10	И и	I i	ee in see, short	ime име name
11	Ј ј	J j	y in yes	jutro јутро morning
12	К к	K k	k in skip	kuća кућа house
13	Л л	L l	l in lamp	leto лето summer
14	Љ љ	Lj lj	lli in million: one sound, one letter	ljubav љубав love
15	М м	M m	m in mum	mleko млеко milk
16	Н н	N n	n in no	noć ноћ night
17	Њ њ	Nj nj	ny in canyon: one sound, one letter	njegov његов his
18	О о	O o	o in hot, round	oko око eye
19	П п	P p	p in spin	pas пас dog
20	Р р	R r	a quick tapped or rolled r	reka река river
21	С с	S s	s in sun	sunce сунце sun
22	Т т	T t	t in stop	torta торта cake
23	Ћ ћ	Ć ć	a soft ch, tongue flat behind the teeth	ćerka ћерка daughter
24	У у	U u	oo in food, short	ulica улица street
25	Ф ф	F f	f in fun	film филм film
26	Х х	H h	throaty, like ch in loch, but lighter	hleb хлеб bread
27	Ц ц	C c	ts in cats	cvet цвет flower
28	Ч ч	Č č	ch in church, hard: tongue pulled back	čaj чај tea
29	Џ џ	Dž dž	j in jam, hard: one letter	džep џеп pocket
30	Ш ш	Š š	sh in shoe	škola школа school

Both, every day

Signs, menus, newspapers and screens use both alphabets, often side by side. Subtitles may use either one. Hvala Хвала is the same word either way, so learn both and you can read it all.

Careful with look-alikes

P is r, C is s, H is n, B is v, X is h and У is u. So РЕСТОРАН is restoran ресторан, and СРЕЋА is sreća срећа, luck.

Hard or soft

č and dž (ч, џ) are hard: tongue back, lips a little round. ć and đ (ћ, ђ) are soft: tongue flat, lighter: čaj чај, tea; kuća кућа, house. If they sound alike to you at first, you'll still be understood, and the spelling tells you which one it is.

R can be a vowel

Between two consonants, r carries the syllable on its own: prst прст, finger; vrt врт, garden; Srbija Србија, Serbia. Say a short rolled r and add nothing: SR-bi-ja.

How words work Граматика

No a, no the: Serbian has no articles, so kuća кућа is a house or the house. Context does the work.

Every noun is masculine, feminine or neuter

taj таj
masculine: usually ends in a consonant
taj grad таj град, town
taj čaj таj чај, tea
taj hleb таj хлеб, bread

ta та
feminine: usually ends in -a
ta žena та жена, woman
ta kafa та кафа, coffee
ta ulica та улица, street

to то
neuter: ends in -o or -e
to selo то село, village
to more то море, sea
to mleko то млеко, milk

Mostly, not always: tata, dad, deda, grandpa, and komšija, neighbour, end in -a but are masculine; so is auto, car, with its -o. Noć, night, and ljubav, love, are feminine with no -a. On the next pages the noun itself wears its gender colour, so you don't have to guess.

Endings change with the job in the sentence

kafa кафа
coffee: the dictionary form

Pijem kafu. Пијем кафу.
I drink coffee.

bez kafe без кафе
without coffee

s kafom с кафом
with coffee

That's the case system: the start of the word stays, and only the end changes. Learn the dictionary form first; listening brings the rest.

Ti or Vi

Kako si? Како си?
ti: friends, family, kids, anyone your age

Kako ste? Како сте?
Vi: strangers, older people, at work; vi is also more than one person

Verbs change with the person: biti, to be, and govoriti, to speak

ja sam ја сам I am	ti si ти си you are (casual)	on, ona je он, она је he, she is	mi smo ми смо we are	vi ste ви сте you all are; polite you	oni su они су they are
govorim говорим I speak	govoriš говориш you speak (casual)	govori говори he, she speaks	govorimo говоримо we speak	govorite говорите you all speak; polite you	govore говоре they speak

No need for ja: the ending already says who. Kod kuće sam is I'm at home. The short sam, si, je never come first, so it's Umoran sam, or Ja sam umoran.

Saying no: put ne before the verb: ne govorim, I don't speak. For biti it joins up: nisam, nisi, nije.

Have and have not: imam is I have, nemam is I don't have. Nema on its own means there isn't, and you'll hear it all day: Nema problema. No problem.

The first 256 words Прве речи

How: learn five a day, then listen for them in Serbian films and series. Each word comes in Latin, then in Cyrillic. *Pink italics* say how a word is used.

Greetings and survival

Zdravo Здраво
hi, hello; also bye

Ćao Ћао
hi; bye *(casual, very common)*

Dobar dan Добар дан
hello *(polite, all day)*

Dobro jutro Добро јутро
good morning

Dobro veče Добро вече
good evening

Laku noć Лаку ноћ
good night

Doviđenja Довиђења
goodbye *(polite)*

Vidimo se Видимо се
see you

Hvala Хвала
thank you

Hvala lepo Хвала лепо
thanks a lot *(it means thank you nicely)*

Molim Молим
please; you're welcome; pardon?

Izvolite Изволите
here you are; can I help you? *(polite)*

Izvinite Извините
excuse me, sorry *(polite)*

Izvini Извини
sorry *(casual)*

Da Да
yes

Ne Не
no; not

Dobro Добро
OK, fine, good

Kako si? Како си?
how are you? *(casual)*

Kako ste? Како сте?
how are you? *(polite)*

Dobro sam Добро сам
I'm fine

Drago mi je Драго ми је
nice to meet you *(it means it's dear to me)*

Ne razumem Не разумем
I don't understand

Ne znam Не знам
I don't know

Živeli! Живели!
cheers! *(it means may you live)*

Prijatno! Пријатно!
enjoy your meal! *(also a polite bye)*

Question words

šta шта
what

ko ко
who

gde где
where

odakle одакле
where from

kada када
when *(also kad)*

zašto зашто
why

kako како
how

koliko колико
how much, how many

koji који
which

Koliko košta? Колико кошта?
how much is it?

Me and you

ja ја
I

ti ти
you *(casual)*

on / ona / ono он / она / оно
he / she / it

mi ми
we

vi ви
you all; Vi is the polite you

oni они
they

moj / moja мој / моја
my *(m word / f word)*

tvoj / tvoja твој / твоја
your *(casual)*

taj / ta / to тај / та / то
this, that *(m / f / n)*

Little words

i и
and

ali али
but

ili или
or

takođe такође
also, too

veoma веома
very *(also jako)*

mnogo много
a lot, many *(also puno)*

malo мало
a little

samo само
only, just

već већ
already

još још
still, yet, more

ovde овде
here

tamo тамо
there

sa / s са / с
with

bez без
without

jer јер
because

možda можда
maybe

Molim does a lot: it means please, and also you're welcome, and pardon? when you didn't catch something. Hvala. Molim. Thank you. You're welcome.

People and time Људи и време

Family

majka мајка
mother

otac отац
father

mama мама
mum

tata тата
dad *(masculine, despite the -a)*

brat брат
brother

sestra сестра
sister

sin син
son

ćerka ћерка
daughter

baka бака
grandma

deda деда
grandpa *(masculine too)*

ujak ујак
uncle *(your mother's brother)*

tetka тетка
aunt

roditelji родитељи
parents *(plural)*

porodica породица
family

People

čovek човек
person, man *(ljudi, people)*

muškarac мушкарац
man

žena жена
woman; wife

muž муж
husband

dete дете
child *(deca, children)*

dečko дечко
boy; boyfriend *(casual, masculine despite the -o)*

devojka девојка
girl; girlfriend

prijatelj пријатељ
friend *(a man)*

prijateljica пријатељица
friend *(a woman)*

komšija комшија
neighbour *(masculine, despite the -a)*

lekar лекар
doctor *(casual: doktor)*

Things

telefon телефон
phone *(a mobile is mobilni)*

knjiga књига
book

novac новац
money *(in speech: pare)*

ključ кључ
key

auto ауто
car *(masculine, despite the -o)*

prozor прозор
window

When

danas данас
today

sutra сутра
tomorrow

juče јуче
yesterday

sada сада
now *(in speech: sad)*

uvek увек
always

nikad никад
never

jutro јутро
morning

popodne поподне
afternoon

noć ноћ
night *(feminine, with no -a)*

dan дан
day

sat сат
hour; also clock, watch

vreme време
time; also weather

sedmica седмица
week *(also nedelja)*

mesec месец
month; also moon

godina година
year

Days of the week

ponedeljak понедељак
Monday

utorak уторак
Tuesday

sreda среда
Wednesday

četvrtak четвртак
Thursday

petak петак
Friday

subota субота
Saturday

nedelja недеља
Sunday; also week

Getting around

autobus аутобус
bus

voz воз
train

taksi такси
taxi

stanica станица
station; also a stop

aerodrom аеродром
airport

karta карта
ticket; also map

levo / desno лево / десно
left / right

pravo право
straight on

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
nula нула	jedan један	dva два	tri три	četiri четири	pet пет	šest шест	sedam седам	osam осам	devet девет

10	11	12	20	30	40	50	100	200	1,000
deset десет	jedanaest једанаест	dvanaest дванаест	dvadeset двадесет	trideset тридесет	četrdeset четрдесет	pedeset педесет	sto сто	dvesta двеста	hiljada хиљада

One and two change: they follow the gender: jedan grad, jedna kafa, jedno pivo; dva grada, but dve kafe. 21 is dvadeset jedan.

Days are small: days and months take no capital letter: ponedeljak, januar. On Monday is u ponedeljak.

Food, places, verbs Храна, места, глаголи

Food and drink

voda вода
water

kafa кафа
coffee, a reason to sit for an hour

čaj чај
tea

mleko млеко
milk

pivo пиво
beer

vino вино
wine

hleb хлеб
bread

sir сир
cheese

meso месо
meat

piletina пилетина
chicken *(the meat)*

riba риба
fish

ćevapi ћевапи
small grilled meat rolls *(plural)*, with bread and onion

pljeskavica пљескавица
a big grilled meat patty, often in bread

ajvar ајвар
roasted red pepper spread

burek бурек
flaky pie with meat or cheese, from the bakery

rakija ракија
fruit brandy *(strong: sip it slowly)*

doručak доручак
breakfast

ručak ручак
lunch, the main meal

večera вечера
dinner

Gladan sam Гладан сам
I'm hungry *(a woman says gladna sam)*

Račun, molim Рачун, молим
the bill, please

Places

kuća кућа
house

kod kuće код куће
at home

posao посао
work, job

škola школа
school

restoran ресторан
restaurant

kafić кафић
café, where the day happens

bolnica болница
hospital

prodavnica продавница
shop

pijaca пијаца
market

grad град
town, city

selo село
village

ulica улица
street

trg трг
town square

toalet тоалет
toilet *(signs say WC)*

Srbija Србија
Serbia

Beograd Београд
Belgrade

Verbs: dictionary / ja form

biti / sam бити / сам
be

imati / imam имати / имам
have

ići / idem ићи / идем
go

doći / dođem доћи / дођем
come

jesti / jedem јести / једем
eat

piti / pijem пити / пијем
drink

videti / vidim видети / видим
see

gledati / gledam гледати / гледам
watch, look

raditi / radim радити / радим
work; also do

spavati / spavam спавати / спавам
sleep

govoriti / govorim
говорити / говорим
speak

razumeti / razumem
разумети / разумем
understand

znati / znam знати / знам
know

hteti / hoću хтети / хоћу
want

moći / mogu моћи / могу
can

voleti / volim волети / волим
love; also like

učiti / učim учити / учим
learn, study

živeti / živim живети / живим
live

kupiti / kupim купити / купим
buy

čekati / čekam чекати / чекам
wait

Describing words

dobar / loš добар / лош
good / bad

veliki / mali велики / мали
big / small

topao / hladan топао / хладан
warm / cold

nov / star нов / стар
new / old

skup / jeftin скуп / јефтин
expensive / cheap

lak / težak лак / тежак
easy / hard; also light / heavy

lep леп
beautiful, nice

odličan одличан
excellent

ukusan укусан
tasty

umoran уморан
tired

Two forms: the dictionary form ends in -ti or -ći. For I, it usually ends in -m: gledam, govorim. Learn the odd ones by heart: hoću, mogu, idem.

Describing words agree: the list shows the masculine form. Feminine adds -a, neuter -o or -e: dobar dan, dobra kafa, dobro pivo.

Show words Речи из серија

Reactions

Bre! Бре!
the famous one: hey, man, come on *(see below)*

Ajde! Ајде!
come on! let's go!

Stvarno? Стварно?
really? seriously?

Super! Супер!
great!

Važi Важи
OK, deal, sure *(it means it holds)*

Nema veze Нема везе
never mind, no problem *(it means no connection)*

Bravo! Браво!
well done!

Jao! Јао!
ouch! oh no! oh dear!

Joj! Јој!
oh! *(pain, surprise or delight)*

E pa Е па
well, well then *(to start a sentence)*

Ma daj! Ма дај!
come on! no way! you're kidding!

Naravno Наравно
of course

Tačno Тачно
exactly, that's right

Polako Полако
slowly; take it easy

Svaka čast! Свака част!
respect! well done! *(it means every honour)*

Šta ima? Шта има?
what's up? *(it means what is there)*

The big scenes

Volim te Волим те
I love you

Nedostaješ mi Недостајеш ми
I miss you *(it means you are missing to me)*

Ostavi me na miru
Остави ме на миру
leave me alone *(it means leave me in peace)*

Pazi! Пази!
watch out!

Prestani! Престани!
stop it!

Pomoć! Помоћ!
help!

Šta se desilo? Шта се десило?
what happened?

Sve će biti u redu
Све ће бити у реду
everything will be all right

Ne brini Не брини
don't worry

Čekaj! Чекај!
wait!

Šta radiš? Шта радиш?
what are you doing?

What to call people

brate брате
bro *(it means brother)*

druže друже
mate, pal *(from drug, friend)*

dušo душо
darling, honey *(it means soul)*

ljubavi љубави
my love

stari стари
mate, dude *(it means old one)*

gospodine / gospođo
господине / госпођо
sir / madam; Mr / Mrs before a name

Bre, the famous one: a tiny word with no exact meaning that adds punch and warmth to anything: Ajde, bre! Come on! Šta je, bre? What's up? It can sound impatient or affectionate, and the voice tells you which. You'll hear it in almost every scene.

Calling someone changes the word: brat becomes brate, drug becomes druže, duša becomes dušo, Milan becomes Milane. It sounds warm, not formal.

Swear words are strong: Serbian has strong swear words, and you'll hear them a lot on screen, even between friends. They hit harder than the subtitles show: recognise them, but don't say them. Jao and joj are the mild ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice Вежба

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

Questions: raise your voice at the end, or start with da li: Da li imaš vremena? Do you have time?

Read every letter: nothing is silent, so say each one: Ćevapi is ĆE-va-pi, three beats.

Read these sentences

1. Zdravo, ja sam Ana.
   Здраво, ја сам Ана.
   Hi, I'm Ana.

2. Kako se zoveš?
   Како се зовеш?
   What's your name?

3. Izvinite, gde je toalet?
   Извините, где је тоалет?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Koliko košta karta?
   Колико кошта карта?
   How much is the ticket?

5. Jednu kafu, molim.
   Једну кафу, молим.
   One coffee, please.

6. Govorim malo srpski.
   Говорим мало српски.
   I speak a little Serbian.

7. Danas je lepo vreme.
   Данас је лепо време.
   The weather is nice today.

8. Sutra idemo u Beograd.
   Сутра идемо у Београд.
   Tomorrow we're going to Belgrade.

9. Ćevapi su odlični!
   Ћевапи су одлични!
   The ćevapi are excellent!

10. Ajde, bre, kasnimo!
    Ајде, бре, каснимо!
    Come on, we're late!

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