Sounds and tones Phát âm

The trick: Vietnamese uses the Latin letters you know, plus a few hats and hooks. Each written piece is one syllable: Việt Nam, cà phê. And every syllable has a tone, the shape your voice makes. Change the tone, and you change the word.

Six tones, six words

ngang
no mark

ma
ghost
level, in the middle of your voice

huyền
falling mark `



mà
but
starts low and falls gently, relaxed

sắc
rising mark ´



má
cheek (mum in the South)
rises high, like a surprised what?

hỏi
hook on top



mả
grave, tomb
dips low, then comes back up a little

ngã
wave ~



mã
horse (in old words); also code
rises with a catch in the middle

nặng
dot below



mạ
rice seedling
short and low, cut off sharply

Two marks on one letter: the hat or hook belongs to the letter: â, ê, ô, ơ, ư, ă. The tone mark goes on top of it or under it: ấ, ầ, ẩ, ẫ, ậ. You need both to read the word: mặt is face, mắt is eye.

Letters to learn

Consonants	Sounds like	Example
đ	d in day	**đi** go
d, gi	z in zoo (y in yes in the South)	**da / gì** skin / what
r	z in zoo (an r in the South)	**rất** very
x, s	both s in see (s is nearer sh in the South)	**xe / sáu** vehicle / six
ch, tr	ch in church, no puff of air (tr is heavier in the South)	**chó / trà** dog / tea
nh	ny in canyon	**nhà** house
ng, ngh	ng in singer, even at the start; ngh before i, e, ê	**ngủ / nghe** sleep / listen
ph	f in fun	**phở** noodle soup
th	t with a puff of air, never th in think	**thích** like
t	t with no puff, like t in stop	**tôi** I, me
kh	a rasp, like ch in Scottish loch	**không** no, not
c, k, q	k with no puff; k before i, e, ê, y; qu is kw	**cá / kem / quà** fish / ice cream / gift
g, gh	a soft g; gh before i, e, ê	**gà / ghế** chicken / chair

Vowels	Sounds like	Example
ă	short a, like u in cut	**ăn** eat
â	short uh	**cần** need
ơ	long uh, like fur with no r	**mơ** dream
ư	oo with your lips spread, as if smiling	**thư** letter
ê	ay in say, with no y at the end	**đêm** night
e	e in bed, mouth wide open	**em** younger sibling
ô	o in go, with no w at the end	**cô** aunt; Miss
o	aw in law	**có** have

North and South: this sheet follows Hanoi. In the South, hỏi and ngã sound the same, d, gi and r start with a y sound, and some words change: bắp for corn, ba and má for dad and mum. Both are right, and you'll hear both in shows.

How words work Ngữ pháp

No verb endings: time words do the work

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

đã ăn	đang ăn	sẽ ăn	chưa ăn
ate, have eaten	am eating, right now	will eat	haven't eaten yet

Ăn cơm chưa? Have you eaten yet? It's a friendly hello as much as a question. Answer Rồi, I have, or Chưa, not yet. A time word works too: Hôm qua tôi ăn phở, yesterday I ate phở.

No plurals

One word for one and many: sách is a book or books. A number says how many: hai người bạn, two friends. các means all the: các bạn, you all, friends. những means some: những ngày mưa, rainy days.

Counting words: before a noun, put a small word for its kind. **con** for animals: một con mèo, a cat. **cái** for most things: hai cái bàn, two tables. **quyển** for books: ba quyển sách, three books *(South: cuốn)*.

Word order like English

Tôi	uống	cà phê	mỗi sáng
I	drink	coffee	every morning

Describing words go after: nhà đẹp, a beautiful house. So do my and this: nhà tôi, my house; nhà này, this house; nhà đẹp này, this beautiful house.

Who you are decides the word for I and you

Word	It means	Use it for
anh	older brother	a man a little older than you; a husband or boyfriend
chị	older sister	a woman a little older than you
em	younger sibling	anyone younger than you; a wife or girlfriend
cô	aunt	a woman your parents' age; a female teacher; Miss
chú	uncle	a man a bit younger than your parents
ông	grandfather	an old man; Mr, sir
bà	grandmother	an old woman; Mrs, madam
bạn	friend	a friend or anyone your age; you in ads and books

One word, both ways: an older brother calls his sister em and calls himself anh: Anh đi nhé, I'm off. She calls him anh and herself em. With strangers or at work, **tôi** is the neutral I.

The first 230 words Những từ đầu tiên

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *Pink italics* say how a word is used, or how the South says it.

Greetings and survival

Xin chào
hello *(with anyone)*

Chào anh / Chào chị
hello *(to a man / woman a bit older)*

Bạn có khỏe không?
how are you? *(are you well?)*

Tôi khỏe
I'm fine

Rất vui được gặp bạn
nice to meet you

Cảm ơn
thank you *(also written cám ơn)*

Cảm ơn nhiều
thanks a lot

Không có gì
you're welcome *(it means it's nothing)*

Xin lỗi
sorry; excuse me

Không
no, not

Không sao
it's OK, no problem

Làm ơn
please *(asking a favour)*

Mời
please, go ahead *(inviting: Mời anh ăn)*

Tạm biệt
goodbye

Hẹn gặp lại
see you again

Tôi không hiểu
I don't understand

Tôi không biết
I don't know

Chúc ngon miệng
enjoy your meal

Question words

gì / cái gì
what

ai
who

ở đâu
where

đi đâu
where to *(Anh đi đâu?)*

khi nào / bao giờ
when

tại sao
why *(casual: sao)*

thế nào
how, what like *(South: sao, ra sao)*

bao nhiêu
how much, how many

mấy
how many *(small numbers: Mấy giờ? What time?)*

nào
which *(cái nào, which one)*

có ... không?
yes or no question: Có đẹp không? Is it nice?

Me and you

tôi
I, me *(neutral, always safe)*

mình
I, me *(with friends)*; also we

chúng tôi
we *(you not included)*

chúng ta
we *(you included)*

các bạn
you all

anh ấy
he *(a man)*

cô ấy
she *(a young woman)*

họ
they

này / đó
this / that *(after the word: cái này)*

ở đây / ở đó
here / there

Little words

và
and

nhưng
but

hay / hoặc
or *(hay in questions)*

có
have; there is; also yes

là
is, am, are *(with nouns: Tôi là Lan)*

ở
at, in; also live, stay

của
of *(nhà của tôi, my house)*

cũng
also, too

rất
very *(before the word: rất ngon)*

lắm
very *(after the word: ngon lắm)*

một chút
a little

chỉ
only

nữa
more, again *(ăn nữa, eat more)*

với
with

cho
for; also give

vì
because

nếu
if

tôi is the safe I: it works with anyone, but it's a bit distant. With family and friends, people call themselves anh, chị or em instead, as on page 2. Shows do it all the time.

People, time, numbers Người và thời gian

Family

bố / ba
dad *(bố in the North, ba in the South)*

mẹ / má
mum *(má in the South)*

bố mẹ
parents

anh trai
older brother

chị gái
older sister

em trai / em gái
younger brother / younger sister

con
child, son or daughter

ông bà
grandparents

chồng
husband

vợ
wife

gia đình
family

anh chị em
brothers and sisters

cháu
grandchild; niece or nephew

People

người
person, people

đàn ông
man

phụ nữ
woman

con trai / con gái
boy, son / girl, daughter

bạn bè
friends

bạn trai / bạn gái
boyfriend / girlfriend

người yêu
sweetheart *(it means person you love)*

hàng xóm
neighbour

thầy giáo / cô giáo
teacher *(a man / a woman)*

học sinh
pupil

sinh viên
university student

bác sĩ
doctor

người Việt
a Vietnamese person *(Việt Nam, Vietnam)*

When

hôm nay
today

ngày mai
tomorrow

hôm qua
yesterday

bây giờ
now

lát nữa
later, in a bit *(South: chút nữa)*

buổi sáng
morning

buổi trưa
midday

buổi chiều
afternoon

buổi tối
evening

ban đêm
at night

ngày
day

mỗi ngày
every day

tuần
week

tháng
month

giờ
hour, o'clock *(Mấy giờ rồi? What time is it?)*

phút
minute

Days of the week

thứ Hai
Monday *(it means the second day)*

thứ Ba
Tuesday

thứ Tư
Wednesday *(tư, not bốn)*

thứ Năm
Thursday

thứ Sáu
Friday

thứ Bảy
Saturday

Chủ nhật
Sunday *(it means the Lord's day)*

Numbers

một
1

hai
2

ba
3

bốn
4

năm
5; also year

sáu
6

bảy
7

tám
8

chín
9

mười
10

mười một
11

mười lăm
15 *(năm turns into lăm)*

hai mươi
20 *(mười turns into mươi)*

hai mươi mốt
21 *(một turns into mốt)*

một trăm
100

một nghìn
1,000 *(South: một ngàn)*

một triệu
1,000,000

Days are numbers: thứ Hai, Monday, is the second day, and so on up to thứ Bảy, Saturday. Only Sunday has a name: Chủ nhật.

Numbers are Lego: mười is 10, so mười ba is 13. Put the number first for tens: ba mươi, 30; ba mươi lăm, 35. After a number, no plural: hai quyển sách, two books.

Food, places, verbs Ăn uống và nơi chốn

Food and drink

nước
water; also country

trà
tea *(trà đá, iced tea)*

cà phê
coffee *(cà phê sữa đá, iced milk coffee)*

sữa
milk

cơm
cooked rice; a meal

phở
noodle soup *(phở bò, beef; phở gà, chicken)*

bún
rice vermicelli *(bún chả, a Hanoi favourite)*

bánh mì
bread; the famous baguette sandwich

thịt
meat

gà
chicken

bò
beef; also cow

cá
fish

rau
vegetables, greens

trứng
egg

ngô / bắp
corn *(ngô in the North, bắp in the South)*

nước mắm
fish sauce

ngon
tasty, delicious

cay
spicy, hot

bữa sáng / trưa / tối
breakfast / lunch / dinner

Tôi đói
I'm hungry

Tính tiền!
the bill, please! *(Em ơi, tính tiền!)*

Places

nhà
house, home

ở nhà
at home

trường
school

nhà hàng
restaurant

quán
small café, food stall *(quán cà phê)*

bệnh viện
hospital

nhà vệ sinh
toilet *(WC works too)*

chợ
market

sân bay
airport

thành phố
city

đường
street, road; also sugar

biển
sea, beach

Things

điện thoại
phone

sách
book

tiền
money

chìa khóa
key

xe máy
motorbike

áo
shirt, top *(áo dài, the long dress)*

Verbs

ăn
eat

uống
drink

đi
go

đến
come, arrive *(South: tới)*

về
go home, go back

ngủ
sleep

xem
watch *(South: coi)*

thấy
see

nghe
listen, hear

đọc
read

viết
write

mua
buy

chờ / đợi
wait

nói
speak, say

làm
do, make; also work

học
study, learn

biết
know

muốn
want

thích
like

yêu
love

có thể
can

Describing words

to / nhỏ
big / small *(lớn is big too)*

nóng / lạnh
hot / cold

mới / cũ
new / old *(things)*

già / trẻ
old / young *(people)*

tốt / xấu
good / bad *(xấu is also ugly)*

nhanh / chậm
fast / slow

dễ / khó
easy / hard

rẻ / đắt
cheap / expensive *(South: mắc)*

đẹp
beautiful, nice

mệt
tired

vui
happy, fun

buồn
sad

Verbs never change: ăn is eat, ate and will eat, for everyone: tôi ăn, họ ăn. A time word or đã, đang, sẽ says when.

Show words Từ trên phim

Reactions

Trời ơi!
oh my god! *(it means oh heaven)*

Ôi!
oh! *(Ôi trời!)*

Ơ!
eh? huh? *(a small surprise)*

Thật hả?
really? *(casual; Thật không? is plainer)*

Hả?
huh? what? *(casual)*

Được
OK, fine, can do *(Được không? Is that OK?)*

Thôi
never mind; that's enough *(Thôi đi! Stop it!)*

Đi!
go! come on! *(Đi thôi! Let's go!)*

Chết rồi!
oh no! *(it means dead already)*

Hay quá!
great! how cool!

Tội nghiệp
poor thing

Kệ
whatever, let it be *(a bit cold)*

Cẩn thận!
careful!

Cứu với!
help!

Three ways to say yes

Ừ
yeah *(to friends and anyone younger)*

Vâng
yes *(polite, in the North)*

Dạ
yes *(polite, to anyone older; everywhere, most of all in the South)*

Little words at the end

... à
surprise or checking: Anh về rồi à? You're back already?

... nhé
makes it friendly: Mai gặp nhé! See you tomorrow, OK? *(South: nha)*

... nhỉ
asks you to agree: Đẹp nhỉ? Lovely, isn't it? *(South: ha)*

... mà
insists: Em nói rồi mà! I told you!

... đi
go on: Ăn đi! Go on, eat!

... ơi
calls someone: Mẹ ơi! Mum! Em ơi! *(to a waiter)*

The big scenes

Anh yêu em
I love you *(he says it, if he's older)*

Em yêu anh
I love you *(she says it back)*

Anh nhớ em
I miss you

Đừng đi!
don't go!

Im đi!
shut up! *(rude)*

Ừ, Vâng, Dạ: all three mean yes. Ừ is for friends and anyone younger. Vâng is polite. Dạ is the softest, for parents, teachers and anyone older. Saying Ừ to your boss sounds rude, so when in doubt, say Dạ.

Swear words are strong: Vietnamese has very harsh swear words, often about someone's family. You'll hear them in fights on screen: recognise them, but don't say them. Trời ơi! and Chết rồi! are the mild ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice Luyện tập

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

Questions: put không at the end: Bạn có khỏe không? Are you well? Ask chưa for not yet: Ăn chưa? Eaten yet?

Saying no: không goes before verbs and describing words: Tôi không biết, I don't know. Before a noun, say không phải: Đây không phải là cà phê, this isn't coffee.

Read these sentences

1. Xin chào, tôi tên là Lan.
   Hello, my name is Lan.

2. Bạn tên là gì?
   What's your name?

3. Nhà vệ sinh ở đâu?
   Where is the toilet?

4. Cái này bao nhiêu tiền?
   How much is this?

5. Cho tôi một ly cà phê sữa đá.
   An iced milk coffee for me, please.

6. Tôi rất thích phở.
   I really like phở.

7. Hôm nay trời nóng quá.
   It's so hot today.

8. Ngày mai tôi sẽ đi biển với bạn.
   Tomorrow I'll go to the beach with a friend.

9. Tôi ăn rồi, cảm ơn.
   I've already eaten, thanks.

10. Chúng ta đi thôi!
    Let's go!

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