# How Yoruba sounds Èdè Yorùbá

1 · read it out loud

**The trick:** Yoruba is read as it's written, and every letter is said. The alphabet has 25 letters: a b d e ẹ f g gb h i j k l m n o ọ p r s ṣ t u w y. There's no c, q, v, x or z, and gb is one letter.

| Letters | Sounds like | Example |
|---|---|---|
| a, i, u | a in father; i as ee in see; u as oo in food | **àti / ìlú** and / town |
| e | ay in day, but pure, with no y at the end | **ilé / ewé** house / leaf |
| ẹ | e in bed | **ẹja / ẹran** fish / meat |
| o | o in go, but pure, with no w at the end | **owó / odò** money / river |
| ọ | o in hot, or aw in law | **ọmọ / ọjà** child / market |
| ṣ | sh in shop | **aṣọ / ṣùgbọ́n** clothes / but |
| s | s in sun, never z | **sùn / ìrẹsì** sleep / rice |
| gb | g and b said at the same time: one short sound | **gbọ́ / àgbà** hear / elder |
| p | k and p at the same time, kp: Yoruba has no plain p | **pupa / àpò** red / bag |
| g, j | g in go, always hard; j in jam | **igi / ọjọ́** tree / day |
| r | a quick tap of the tongue | **rí / ọ̀rẹ́** see / friend |
| y, w | y in yes; w in wet | **yàrá / wá** room / come |
| an ẹn in ọn un | nasal: the n is not said, the vowel goes through the nose | **iyán / funfun** pounded yam / white |
| ń, ǹ | an n on its own is a syllable with its own tone: hum it | **Mo ń lọ / nǹkan** I'm going / thing |

## Ẹ ẹ · Ọ ọ · Ṣ ṣ

**the dot below makes a different letter**

**owó** money · **ọwọ́** hand

**sọ** say · **ṣe** do

## á · a · à

**three tones: high, mid and low**

**ọkọ** husband · **ọkọ̀** car · **ọkọ́** hoe

**igba** 200 · **ìgbà** time · **igbá** calabash

**Tones:** mid is your normal voice, high a little higher, low a little lower. Every vowel has a tone, and so does an n on its own. A word with no marks is all mid: omi, water. Change the tone and you change the word.

**Two marks on one letter:** ẹ and ọ can carry a tone too: ọ̀rẹ́, friend; Gẹ̀ẹ́sì, English. In texts and on signs people often leave the marks out; this sheet prints them all, so you learn each word with its tones.

**Sing it:** the three tones are like do, re, mi. Low à is do, mid a is re, high á is mi. Hum the tune of a word first, then add the letters: ọ̀rẹ́ is do-mi.

# How words work Ọrọ àti gbólóhùn



**No gender, no a or the:** Yoruba has no masculine or feminine and no word for a or the. ilé is a house or the house. Say náà after the noun for the one you mean: ilé náà, the house. ó is he, she and it.

## Words in colour

**noun**
a thing, a person or a place
**ilé** house · **omi** water

**describing word**
comes after the noun
**tuntun** new · **funfun** white

**verb**
often one short syllable, and it never changes
**lọ** go · **jẹ** eat

**other**
little words and phrases
**àti** and · **òní** today

## Little words around the noun

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ilé<br>a house, the house | ilé **náà**<br>the house | ilé **kan**<br>a house, one house | **àwọn** ilé<br>houses | **àwọn** ilé **mi**<br>my houses |

**More than one:** àwọn goes before the noun: àwọn ọmọ, children. With a number, leave it out: ìwé méjì, two books. Words like the, my and this go after the noun.

## Whose: after the noun

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ilé **mi**<br>my house | ilé **rẹ**<br>your house, to a friend | ilé **rẹ̀**<br>his or her house | ilé **wa**<br>our house | ilé **yín**<br>your house, polite | ilé **wọn**<br>their house |

**Listen for the tone:** rẹ and rẹ̀ differ only by their tone: ilé rẹ, your house; ilé rẹ̀, his or her house. ó, he, and o, you, work the same way.

## Who, and when: lọ, to go

| | I'm going | I've gone | I'll go | I didn't go |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **mo** I | Mo **ń** lọ | Mo **ti** lọ | Mo **máa** lọ | Mi **ò** lọ |
| **o** you | O **ń** lọ | O **ti** lọ | O **máa** lọ | O **ò** lọ |
| **ó** he, she, it | Ó **ń** lọ | Ó **ti** lọ | Ó **máa** lọ | **Kò** lọ |
| **a** we | A **ń** lọ | A **ti** lọ | A **máa** lọ | A **ò** lọ |
| **ẹ** you, polite | Ẹ **ń** lọ | Ẹ **ti** lọ | Ẹ **máa** lọ | Ẹ **ò** lọ |
| **wọ́n** they | Wọ́n **ń** lọ | Wọ́n **ti** lọ | Wọ́n **máa** lọ | Wọn **ò** lọ |

**The verb never changes,** the little word in front of it does: ń for now, ti for already, máa for will. A verb on its own says it happened: Mo lọ, I went. The order is like English: Mo ń jẹ ẹja, I'm eating fish.

**Saying no:** kò goes before the verb: Kò dára, it's not good. After a pronoun it shrinks to ò, mo becomes mi and wọ́n becomes wọn: Mi ò mọ̀, I don't know. ó drops out: Kò lọ, he didn't go. For habits use kì í: Mi kì í mu ọtí, I don't drink alcohol.

**Questions:** start with Ṣé for a yes or no question: Ṣé o ti jẹun? Have you eaten? Put ńkọ́ after a word for what about: Ìwọ ńkọ́? And you? Question words come first: Kí ni? What? Ta ni? Who?

# The first 261 words Ọ̀rọ̀ àkọ́kọ́



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

## Greetings and survival

Ẹ káàárọ̀
good morning *(to a friend, Káàárọ̀)*

Ẹ káàsán
good afternoon

Ẹ kú alẹ́
good evening

Ó dàárọ̀
good night *(it means until morning)*

Ó dàbọ̀
goodbye

Báwo ni?
how are you? how's it going?

Dáadáa ni
I'm fine *(it means it's good)*

Ìwọ ńkọ́?
and you? *(to a friend)*

Ẹ ṣé / O ṣé
thank you *(polite / to a friend)*

Mo dúpẹ́
thank you, I'm grateful

Ẹ jọ̀ọ́
please

Ẹ má bínú
sorry *(it means don't be angry)*

Pẹ̀lẹ́
sorry, to someone hurt or tired; also a gentle hello

Ẹ kú àbọ̀
welcome

Ẹ kú iṣẹ́
well done, to someone at work

Kí ni orúkọ yín?
what's your name? *(polite)*

Orúkọ mi ni ...
my name is ...

Bẹ́ẹ̀ni / Rárá
yes / no

Ṣé ẹ ń sọ Gẹ̀ẹ́sì?
do you speak English?

Ó yé mi / Kò yé mi
I understand / I don't understand

Mi ò mọ̀
I don't know

Kò burú
not bad

## Question words

kí ni
what *(Kí ni èyí? What's this?)*

ta ni
who

ibo
where *(Ibo ni? Where?)*

nígbà wo
when

kí ló dé
why? what's wrong?

báwo
how

mélòó
how many, how much

èwo
which

## Me and you

èmi
I, me, said on its own *(èmi náà, me too)*

ìwọ
you, to a friend or a child

òun
he, she

àwa
we

ẹ̀yin
you, polite; also to more than one

àwọn
they; also the word for more than one *(page 2)*

mi / rẹ
my / your *(ilé mi, my house)*

èyí / ìyẹn
this / that

yìí / yẹn
this / that, after the noun *(ilé yìí, this house)*

## Little words

àti
and *(ìwé àti owó, a book and money)*

ṣùgbọ́n
but

tàbí
or

pẹ̀lú
with; also too

nítorí
because

náà
the, after the noun; also too

sí
to *(lọ sí ọjà, go to the market)*

díẹ̀
a little

púpọ̀
a lot, many, much

gan-an
very, really *(dáadáa gan-an, really well)*

nìkan
only, alone

níbí / níbẹ̀
here / there

bóyá
maybe

tún
again

**o or ẹ:** o is you to a friend or a child. Say ẹ to anyone older, to a stranger and to more than one. Greetings start with ẹ for the same reason, so when in doubt, say ẹ.

**Thanks and please:** Ẹ ṣé is thank you to anyone you call ẹ, O ṣé to a friend. Ẹ jọ̀ọ́ is please, and also excuse me.

# People and time Ènìyàn àti àkókò



## Family

**ìyá / bàbá**
mother / father, dad

**òbí**
parent *(àwọn òbí, parents)*

**ẹ̀gbọ́n**
older brother or sister

**àbúrò**
younger brother or sister

**ọmọ**
child; also son or daughter

**ọmọkùnrin / ọmọbìnrin**
son, boy / daughter, girl

**ìyá àgbà / bàbá àgbà**
gran / grandad

**ọkọ**
husband

**ìyàwó**
wife

**ìdílé**
family

## People

**ènìyàn**
person *(àwọn ènìyàn, people)*

**ọkùnrin / obìnrin**
man / woman

**ọmọdé**
child, young one

**ọ̀rẹ́**
friend

**aládùúgbò**
neighbour

**olùkọ́**
teacher

**akẹ́kọ̀ọ́**
student

**dókítà**
doctor

**àlejò**
guest, visitor

**àgbà**
elder, grown-up

## When

**òní**
today *(lónìí in a sentence)*

**ọ̀la**
tomorrow *(lọ́la in a sentence)*

**àná**
yesterday

**nísinsìnyí**
now

**láìpẹ́**
soon

**àárọ̀**
morning

**ọ̀sán**
afternoon

**alẹ́**
night, evening

**ọjọ́**
day

**ọ̀sẹ̀**
week

**oṣù**
month

**ọdún**
year

**wákàtí**
hour

**àkókò**
time *(Mi ò ní àkókò, I haven't got time)*

**ìgbà**
time, a while, a season

## Things

**owó**
money

**kọ́kọ́rọ́**
key

**ìwé**
book; also paper, letter

**ilẹ̀kùn**
door

**fèrèsé**
window

**aṣọ**
clothes, cloth

**bàtà**
shoes

**àpò**
bag; also pocket

**ẹ̀bùn**
present, gift

**ọkọ̀**
car; also any vehicle, or a boat

## Weather and nature

**oòrùn**
sun

**òjò**
rain *(Òjò ń rọ̀, it's raining)*

**òṣùpá**
moon

**ìràwọ̀**
star

**igi**
tree; also wood

**odò**
river

**òkun**
sea

**afẹ́fẹ́**
wind, air

**iná**
fire; also light

**ajá / ológbò**
dog / cat

**ẹyẹ**
bird

**ewúrẹ́**
goat

## Numbers

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 100 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| òdo | ọ̀kan | èjì | ẹ̀ta | ẹ̀rin | àrún | ẹ̀fà | èje | ẹ̀jọ | ẹ̀sán | ẹ̀wá | ọ̀kanlá | èjìlá | ogún | ọgbọ̀n | ogójì | ọgọ́rùn-ún |

**Numbers:** after a noun they change shape: èjì is two, but ìwé méjì is two books; ẹ̀ta is three, ọmọ mẹ́ta, three children. Yoruba counts in twenties: ogún is 20 and ogójì, 40, is two twenties.

**Older or younger:** Yoruba says older or younger, not brother or sister: ẹ̀gbọ́n is an older brother or sister, àbúrò a younger one. ọmọ is a child, and ọmọkùnrin a male child, a son.

# Food, places, verbs Oúnjẹ àti ìlú



## Food and drink

**omi**
water

**oúnjẹ**
food

**búrẹ́dì**
bread

**ẹran**
meat

**ẹja**
fish

**adìyẹ**
chicken

**ẹyin**
egg

**ìrẹsì**
rice

**ẹ̀wà**
beans

**iṣu**
yam

**ọ̀gẹ̀dẹ̀**
plantain, banana

**dòdò**
fried plantain

**iyán**
pounded yam

**àmàlà**
a soft dough of yam flour, eaten with soup

**àkàrà**
bean fritters

**ọbẹ̀**
soup, stew

**ata / iyọ̀**
pepper / salt

**ọsàn**
orange

**wàrà**
milk

**ọtí**
a drink with alcohol

**oúnjẹ àárọ̀ / oúnjẹ alẹ́**
breakfast / dinner *(it means morning food / night food)*

## Places and getting around

**ilé**
house, home

**ilé ìwé**
school *(it means book house)*

**iṣẹ́**
work, job

**ọjà**
market

**ilé ìwòsàn**
hospital

**ilé ìgbọ̀nsẹ̀**
toilet

**ilé oúnjẹ**
restaurant *(it means food house)*

**yàrá**
room

**ìlú / abúlé**
town / village

**ọ̀nà**
road, way

**òpópónà**
street

**ọ̀tún / òsì**
right / left

**èdè Yorùbá**
Yoruba, the language *(èdè, language)*

## Verbs

**lọ**
go

**wá**
come

**jẹ**
eat

**mu**
drink

**rí**
see

**wò**
look, watch

**ṣe**
do, make

**sùn**
sleep

**sọ**
say; also speak a language

**sọ̀rọ̀**
talk

**gbọ́**
hear; also understand

**mọ̀**
know

**fẹ́**
want

**fẹ́ràn**
like

**nífẹ̀ẹ́**
love

**ka**
read

**kọ**
write

**kọ́**
learn; also teach

**ṣiṣẹ́**
work

**gbé**
live; also carry

**rà / tà**
buy / sell

**sanwó**
pay

**fún**
give; also for

**ní**
have; also in, at

**jókòó**
sit down

**rìn**
walk

**pè**
call

**dé**
arrive, get here

**ṣí / tì**
open / close

**bẹ̀rẹ̀ / parí**
start / finish

**gbàgbé / rántí**
forget / remember

## Describing words

**dára / burú**
good / bad *(Ó dára, it's good)*

**tóbi / kékeré**
big / small

**gbóná / tutù**
hot / cold

**tuntun**
new

**dùn**
tasty, sweet; also nice

**lẹ́wà**
beautiful

**ga / kúrú**
tall / short

**rọrùn / ṣòro**
easy / hard

**funfun / dúdú / pupa**
white / black / red

**Verbs never change:** Mo lọ, I went; Ó lọ, he went; Wọ́n lọ, they went. The little word in front says when: Mo ń lọ, I'm going (page 2).

**Describing words come after the noun:** ilé tuntun, a new house; aṣọ funfun, white clothes. Many work like a verb: Ilé wa tóbi, our house is big; Oúnjẹ yìí dùn, this food is tasty.

# Show words Ọ̀rọ̀ eré



## Reactions

**Ṣé òótọ́ ni?**
really? *(it means is it true?)*

**Ó dáa**
OK, fine, all right

**Ó dára!**
good! nice!

**Kò sí wàhálà**
no problem, no worries

**Kò sí nǹkan**
it's nothing, never mind

**Ẹ kú oríire!**
congratulations!

**Ó tó!**
that's enough! stop it!

**Ó yá!**
come on! it's time! *(it means it's ready)*

**Wò ó!**
look! *(it means look at it)*

**Ẹ ṣé gan-an**
thanks a lot

## The big scenes

**Mo nífẹ́ẹ́ rẹ**
I love you

**Ẹ ràn mí lọ́wọ́!**
help me!

**Ṣọ́ra!**
be careful!

**Dúró!**
wait! stop!

**Má lọ!**
don't go!

**Má bẹ̀rù!**
don't be scared!

**Kí ló ṣẹlẹ̀?**
what happened?

**Yára!**
hurry up!

**Dákẹ́!**
be quiet!

**Fi mí sílẹ̀!**
leave me alone!

**Jẹ́ ká lọ**
let's go

**Mo ti dé**
I'm back, I'm home *(it means I've arrived)*

**Ó rẹ̀ mí**
I'm tired

**Inú mi dùn**
I'm happy *(it means my inside is sweet)*

**Ebi ń pa mí**
I'm hungry *(it means hunger is killing me)*

## What to call people

**Ọ̀gbẹ́ni / Ìyáàfin**
Mr / Mrs, before the name

**Ìyá Adé / Bàbá Adé**
Adé's mum / Adé's dad *(see below)*

**Ọ̀gá**
boss; also to a man in charge

**ọ̀rẹ́ mi**
my friend, mate

**olùfẹ́ mi**
my love, darling

**ọmọ mi**
my child

**Ẹ for respect:** the Ẹ at the start of a greeting shows respect. Say it to anyone older than you and to more than one person. To a friend or a child, leave it out: Káàárọ̀! Káàsán!

**Ẹ kú ...:** Yoruba greets you for what you're doing: Ẹ kú iṣẹ́ to someone at work, Ẹ kú àbọ̀ when they arrive, Ẹ kú oríire for good news. A little o at the end makes it warmer: Ẹ ṣé o! Ó dàbọ̀ o!

**Ìyá Adé:** parents are often called after their first child: Ìyá Adé is Adé's mum, Bàbá Adé his dad. Ọ̀gbẹ́ni and Ìyáàfin are polite with a surname. It's warm and polite, not odd.

# Practice Ìdánwò



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

**Have:** ní is have: Mo ní owó, I have money. Mi ò ní àkókò, I haven't got time.

**Like:** fẹ́ràn is like: Mo fẹ́ràn ẹja, I like fish. fẹ́ is want: Mo fẹ́ omi, I want water.

**It happened:** a verb on its own says it's done: Mo jẹun, I ate. ti says already: Mo ti jẹun, I've eaten.

## Read these sentences

1. Ẹ káàárọ̀, orúkọ mi ni Adé.
   Good morning, my name is Adé.

2. Ibo lo ti wá?
   Where are you from?

3. Ẹ jọ̀ọ́, ibo ni ilé ìgbọ̀nsẹ̀ wà?
   Excuse me, where is the toilet?

4. Mo fẹ́ omi, ẹ jọ̀ọ́.
   I'd like some water, please.

5. Mo ń kọ́ èdè Yorùbá.
   I'm learning Yoruba.

6. Òjò ń rọ̀ lónìí.
   It's raining today.

7. A máa lọ sí ọjà lọ́la.
   We're going to the market tomorrow.

8. Oúnjẹ yìí dùn gan-an!
   This food is really tasty!

9. Mi ò ní àkókò nísinsìnyí.
   I haven't got time right now.

10. Ilé wa kò jìnnà.
    Our house isn't far.

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