Lao script ອັກສອນລາວ

The trick: Lao is written left to right, with no capitals, in rounded letters close to Thai. It has 27 consonants in three classes, **high**, **middle** and **low**, and the class helps decide the tone of the word.

27 consonants, by class

ກ k	ຂ kh	ຄ kh	ງ ng	ຈ j	ສ s	ຊ s	ຍ ny	ດ d
ຕ t	ຖ th	ທ th	ນ n	ບ b	ປ p	ຜ ph	ຝ f	ພ ph
ຟ f	ມ m	ຢ y	ຣ r	ລ l	ວ v	ຫ h	ອ silent	ຮ h

Classes: high ຂ ສ ຖ ຜ ຝ ຫ, **middle** ກ ຈ ດ ຕ ບ ປ ຢ ອ, **low** the other 13. High and low letters come in pairs with the same sound, like ຂ and ຄ (kh). ອ is silent: it holds a vowel at the start of a word.

Vowel signs, shown on ກ

after ກາ ka ມາ ma come	above ກິ ki ກິນ kin eat	above ກີ kee ດີ dee good	above ກຶ kue ມື mue hand	below ກຸ ku ກຸ້ງ kung prawn	above ກໍ ko ບໍ bo no, not
before ເກ ke ເລກ lek number	before ແກ kae ແມ່ mae mother	before ໂກ ko ໂມງ mong hour	before ໄກ kai ໄປ pai go	before ໃກ kai ໃຈ jai heart	after ກຳ kam ນ້ຳ nam water

Before, but said after: ເ ແ ໂ ໄ ໃ are written before the letter but said after it: ແມ່ mae, mother. Inside a word, ັ is a short a and ົ a short o: ກັບ kap, with; ຄົນ khon, person.

Four tone marks

ກ່ ໄม้เอก mai ek the most common	ก้ ไม้โท mai tho very common too	ก๊ ไม้ตี mai tee rare: borrowed and sound words
ก๋ ไม้จัตะวา mai jattava rare, like ไม้ตี		

Tones, the honest version: Vientiane Lao has six tones (other regions differ). Three things decide the tone of a syllable: the class of its first letter, the tone mark, if any, and how the syllable ends (a vowel or n, m, ng; or k, t, p; long or short). So one mark gives different tones on different letters. Listen first, learn the chart later. The romanization here does not show tones, so these look the same: ມາ ma come, ໝາ ma dog, ມ້າ ma horse; ໄກ kai far, ໄກ່ kai chicken, ໃກ້ kai near.

No spaces between words

ຂ້ອຍກິນເຂົ້າ khoi kin khao, I eat rice, is one block. A space ends a phrase or a sentence, like a comma.

A silent ຫ in front

Before ງ ຍ ນ ມ ລ ອ, ຫ is not said: it moves the letter to the high class. ໜ ໝ ໜ are joined forms: ໝາ ma, dog.

Only 8 end letters

A syllable can end in ກ k, ດ t, ບ p, ງ ng, ນ n, ມ m, ຍ i or ອ o, and nothing else.

Lao digits

๐ 0	๑ 1	๒ 2	๓ 3	๔ 4	๕ 5	๖ 6	๗ 7	๘ 8	๙ 9

How words work ໄວຍາກອນ

Romanization on this sheet: simple, close to the spellings you see in Laos, like sabaidee. It does not show tones or long vowels, so learn each word by ear. a is the a in father, e in bed, u in food; the rest are below.

ee, i	ee in see; i before an end letter	ກີບ kip Lao money
ae	a in cat	ແມ່ mae mother
ue	oo with your lips spread, smiling	ມື້ mue day
oe	er in her, with no r	ເງິນ ngoen money
o	o in go, or aw in law	ບໍ່ bo no

ny, ng	ny in canyon; ng in sing	ຫຍັງ nyang what
j	j in jam, softer	ໃจ jai heart
kh, th, ph	a puff of air; ph is never f	ພໍ່ pho father
v	soft, halfway between v and w	ວຽກ viak work
end k, t, p	stopped, not let out	ລາບ lap larb

Word order is like English

ຂ້ອຍ
khoi
I

ກິນ
kin
eat

ເຂົ້າ
khao
rice

No a, the or plurals: ແມວ maeo is a cat, the cat or cats. To count, say the thing, the number, then a counting word: ແມວສອງໂຕ maeo song to, two cats (ໂຕ is for animals). **Describing words go after:** ເຮືອນໃຫຍ່ huean nyai, a big house. You don't need is: ອາຫານແຊບ ahan saep, the food is tasty.

The verb never changes: a little word says when

ຂ້ອຍຈะกิน
khoi ja kin
I'll eat *(จะ: later)*

ຂ้อยกำลังกิน
khoi kamlang kin
I'm eating *(กำลัง: right now)*

ຂ้อยกินแล้ว
khoi kin laeo
I've eaten *(แล้ว: done)*

ຂ้อยเคยกิน
khoi khoei kin
I've had it before *(เคย: ever)*

Or just a time word: ມື້ວານ mue van yesterday, ມື້ນີ້ mue nee today, ມື້ອື່ນ mue uen tomorrow, at the start or the end.

Being polite is easy

add it at the end

ເจ้า jao

men and women both: ຂอบใจเจ้า khop jai jao, thank you. On its own, it's a polite yes.

to ask for something

ขໍ kho ... แด่ dae

ขໍ kho at the start, แด่ dae at the end: ขໍเบิ่งแด่ kho boeng dae, can I see?

No: put บ่ bo before the verb: ข้อยบ่ฮู้ khoi bo hu, I don't know. **Questions:** put บໍ bo at the end: เจ้ามักบໍ? jao mak bo?, do you like it? The question บໍ has no tone mark; the no บ่ has one. Question words go at the end too: อันนี้แม่นหยัง? an nee maen nyang?, what's this?

I and you

Word	It means	Use it for
ข้อย khoi	I, me	everyday, safe with anyone
ข้าน้อย kha noi	I, me	very polite: to someone much older, or formal
เจ้า jao	you	polite, to anyone
ลาว lao	he, she	everyday; the same word as Lao
เพิ่น phoen	he, she	respectful, for someone older
พวกเฮา phuak hao	we, us	พวก makes a group: พวกเขา, they

The first 252 words ຄຳສັບ

How: learn five a day, then hunt for them in Kitsumi subtitles. *(Notes in brackets)* say how a word is used.

Hello with your hands: ສະບາຍດີ sabaidee works all day, for hello and goodbye. With someone older, press your palms together at your chest as you say it; add ເຈົ້າ jao to sound polite: ສະບາຍດີເຈົ້າ sabaidee jao.

Greetings and survival

ສະບາຍດີ sabaidee
hello; also goodbye

ຂອບໃຈ khop jai
thank you

ຂອບໃຈຫຼາຍໆ khop jai lai-lai
thank you very much *(ໆ says it twice)*

ບໍ່ເປັນຫຍັງ bo pen nyang
never mind, it's OK; you're welcome

ຂໍໂທດ kho thot
sorry; excuse me

ລາກ່ອນ la kon
goodbye *(for a long time)*

ໂຊກດີ sok dee
good luck; bye, take care

ພົບກັນໃໝ່ phop kan mai
see you again

ແມ່ນ maen
yes, that's right; also is

ບໍ່ bo
no, not

ເຈົ້າສະບາຍດີບໍ່? jao sabaidee bo?
how are you? *(are you well?)*

ຂ້ອຍສະບາຍດີ khoi sabaidee
I'm fine

ເຈົ້າຊື່ຫຍັງ? jao sue nyang?
what's your name?

ຂ້ອຍບໍ່ເຂົ້າໃຈ khoi bo khao jai
I don't understand

ຂ້ອຍບໍ່ຮູ້ khoi bo hu
I don't know

Question words

ຫຍັງ nyang
what

ໃຜ phai
who

ໃສ sai
where *(ຢູ່ໃສ? where is it?)*

ເມື່ອໃດ muea dai
when

ເປັນຫຍັງ pen nyang
why

ແນວໃດ naeo dai
how

ເທົ່າໃດ thao dai
how much, how many

ອັນໃດ an dai
which one

Me, you, this

ຂ້ອຍ khoi
I, me

ເຈົ້າ jao
you *(polite)*

ລາວ lao
he, she; also Lao

ເພິ່ນ phoen
he, she *(respectful)*

ພວກເຮົາ phuak hao
we, us

ເຂົາເຈົ້າ khao jao
they

ຂອງຂ້ອຍ khong khoi
my, mine *(it means thing of me)*

ນີ້ nee
this *(after the word: ອັນນີ້, this one)*

ນັ້ນ nan
that

ທີ່ນີ້ thee nee
here

ທີ່ນັ້ນ thee nan
there

Numbers

0 ๐	1 ๑	2 ๒	3 ๓	4 ๔	5 ๕	6 ๖	7 ๗	8 ๘
ສູນ	ໜຶ່ງ	ສອງ	ສາມ	ສີ່	ຫ້າ	ຫົກ	ເຈັດ	ແປດ
sun	nueng	song	sam	see	ha	hok	jet	paet

9 ๙	10 ๑๐	11 ๑๑	20 ๒๐	21 ๒๑	30 ๓๐	40 ๔๐	100 ๑๐๐	1,000 ๑๐๐๐
ເກົ້າ	ສິບ	ສິບເອັດ	ຊາວ	ຊາວເອັດ	ສາມສິບ	ສີ່ສິບ	ຮ້ອຍ	ພັນ
kao	sip	sip et	sao	sao et	sam sip	see sip	hoi	phan

Numbers are Lego: ສາມ sam 3, ສາມສິບ sam sip 30, ສາມສິບຫ້າ sam sip ha 35. Two surprises: 20 is ຊາວ sao, and a 1 at the end is ເອັດ et: ສິບເອັດ sip et, 11. Prices come in ກີບ kip.

Time, people, food ຄອບຄົວ ແລະ ອາຫານ

Time

ດຽວນີ້ diao nee
now

ມື້ນີ້ mue nee
today

ມື້ອື່ນ mue uen
tomorrow

ມື້ວານ mue van
yesterday

ຕອນເຊົ້າ ton sao
morning

ຕອນບ່າຍ ton bai
afternoon

ຕອນແລງ ton laeng
evening

ກາງຄືນ kang khuen
night

ມື້ mue
day

ອາທິດ athit
week

ເດືອນ duean
month

ປີ pee
year

ໂມງ mong
hour; o'clock

ເວລາ vela
time

Family

ແມ່ mae
mother, mum

ພໍ່ pho
father, dad

ອ້າຍ ai
older brother

ເອື້ອຍ ueai
older sister

ນ້ອງຊາຍ nong sai
younger brother

ນ້ອງສາວ nong sao
younger sister

ລູກ luk
child *(a son or a daughter)*

ລູກຊາຍ luk sai
son

ລູກສາວ luk sao
daughter

ຜົວ phua
husband

ເມຍ mia
wife

ຄອບຄົວ khop khua
family

ພໍ່ຕູ້ / ແມ່ຕູ້ pho tu / mae tu
grandpa / grandma

People

ຄົນ khon
person, people

ຜູ້ຊາຍ phu sai
man

ຜູ້ຍິງ phu nying
woman

ເດັກນ້ອຍ dek noi
child, kid

ໝູ່ mu
friend

ຄູ khu
teacher

ນັກຮຽນ nak hian
student, pupil

ທ່ານໝໍ than mo
doctor

Food and drink

ເຂົ້າ khao
rice; also a meal

ເຂົ້າໜຽວ khao niao
sticky rice

ນ້ຳ nam
water

ກາເຟ kafe
coffee

ຊາ sa
tea

ເບຍ bia
beer

ຊີ້ນ sin
meat

ໄກ່ kai
chicken

ໝູ mu
pork; also pig

ງົວ ngua
beef; also cow

ປາ pa
fish

ກຸ້ງ kung
prawns

ໄຂ່ khai
egg

ຜັກ phak
vegetables

ໝາກໄມ້ mak mai
fruit

ໝາກກ້ວຍ mak kuai
banana

ເຝີ foe
noodle soup

ລາບ lap
larb, minced meat salad

ຕຳໝາກຫຸ່ງ tam mak hung
papaya salad

ໝາກເຜັດ mak phet
chilli

ອາຫານ ahan
food; a meal

ແຊບ saep
delicious, tasty

ເຜັດ phet
spicy, hot

ຫວານ van
sweet

ສົ້ມ som
sour

ຫິວ hio
hungry

ອີ່ມ im
full *(I've eaten enough)*

ໄວ່ເງິນແດ່ lai ngoen dae
the bill, please *(it means count the money)*

Rice means a meal: ກິນເຂົ້າ kin khao, eat rice, just means eat. Ask with ຂໍ kho and a soft ແດ່ dae at the end: ຂໍນ້ຳແດ່ kho nam dae, water, please.

Sticky rice: ເຂົ້າໜຽວ khao niao comes in a little basket. Roll a ball with your fingers and dip it. When it's good, say ແຊບ saep!

Places and verbs ສະຖານທີ່

Places

ເຮືອນ huean
house, home

ໂຮງຮຽນ hong hian
school

ຕະຫຼາດ talat
market

ຮ້ານ han
shop

ຮ້ານອາຫານ han ahan
restaurant

ໂຮງໝໍ hong mo
hospital

ຫ້ອງນ້ຳ hong nam
toilet, bathroom

ໂຮງແຮມ hong haem
hotel

ສະໜາມບິນ sanam bin
airport

ທະນາຄານ thanakhan
bank

ຖະໜົນ thanon
road, street

ເມືອງ mueang
town, city

ບ້ານ ban
village; also home

ປະເທດ pathet
country

ວຽງຈັນ viang jan
Vientiane

ແມ່ນ້ຳ mae nam
river *(it means mother water)*

ພູ phu
mountain, hill

Getting around, things

ຂວາ / ຊ້າຍ khwa / sai
right / left

ກົງໄປ kong pai
straight on

ລົດ lot
car

ລົດເມ lot me
bus

ລົດຈັກ lot jak
motorbike

ລົດຖີບ lot thip
bicycle

ຍົນ nyon
plane

ເຮືອ huea
boat

ເງິນ ngoen
money

ກີບ kip
kip, Lao money

ໂທລະສັບ tholasap
phone

ປຶ້ມ puem
book

ກະແຈ kajae
key

ປະຕູ patu
door

ເສື້ອຜ້າ suea pha
clothes

ຮູບ hup
photo, picture

ເພງ pheng
song

Verbs

ກິນ kin
eat

ດື່ມ duem
drink

ໄປ pai
go

ມາ ma
come

ນອນ non
sleep, lie down

ເບິ່ງ boeng
look, watch

ເຫັນ hen
see

ຟັງ fang
listen

ອ່ານ an
read

ຂຽນ khian
write

ເວົ້າ vao
speak, say

ເຮັດ het
do, make

ເຮັດວຽກ het viak
work

ຊື້ sue
buy

ຂາຍ khai
sell

ລໍຖ້າ lo tha
wait

ຮູ້ hu
know

ເຂົ້າໃຈ khao jai
understand

ມັກ mak
like

ຮັກ hak
love

ຢາກ yak
want to *(ຢາກໄປ, want to go)*

ຮຽນ hian
study, learn

ຊ່ວຍ suai
help

ນັ່ງ nang
sit

ຍ່າງ nyang
walk

ໃຫ້ hai
give

ເອົາ ao
take; I'll have

ຫຼິ້ນ lin
play

ຫົວ hua
laugh; also head

ຄິດ khit
think

ພົບ phop
meet

ເປີດ poet
open

ປິດ pit
close, shut

ອາບນ້ຳ ap nam
have a shower, bathe

Verbs never change: ໄປ pai is go, goes, went and gone. Two verbs can sit side by side: ຢາກໄປ yak pai, want to go. For can, put ໄດ້ dai after the verb: ໄປໄດ້ pai dai, I can go.

Feelings and show words ມ່ວນຫຼາຍ!

Describing words

ໃຫຍ່ / ນ້ອຍ nyai / noi
big / small

ຮ້ອນ / ໜາວ hon / nao
hot / cold *(weather)*

ໃໝ່ / ເກົ່າ mai / kao
new / old *(things)*

ຖືກ / ແພງ thuek / phaeng
cheap / expensive

ງ່າຍ / ຍາກ ngai / nyak
easy / hard

ໄວ / ຊ້າ vai / sa
fast / slow

ດີ dee
good

ງາມ ngam
beautiful

ມ່ວນ muan
fun

ເມື່ອຍ mueai
tired

ເຈັບ jep
it hurts; ill

ຢ້ານ yan
scared

ດີໃຈ dee jai
glad, happy *(it means good heart)*

ເສຍໃຈ sia jai
sad; sorry *(it means lost heart)*

Little words

ແລະ lae
and

ກັບ kap
with; and

ແຕ່ tae
but

ຫຼື lue
or

ຫຼາຍ lai
very, a lot *(after the word)*

ໜ້ອຍໜຶ່ງ noi nueng
a little

ມີ mee
have; there is

ຢູ່ yu
be at, live, stay

ເປັນ pen
be *(ill, a teacher)*

ຍັງ nyang
still; not yet

ເພາะວ່າ pho va
because

ຖ້າ tha
if; also wait

ອີກ ik
more, again *(after the word)*

Reactions

ແຊບຫຼາຍ! saep lai!
so tasty!

ແທ້ບໍ? thae bo?
really? is it true?

ດີຫຼາຍ! dee lai!
great! very good!

ງາມຫຼາຍ! ngam lai!
so beautiful!

ມ່ວນຫຼາຍ! muan lai!
so much fun!

ແມ່ນແລ້ວ maen laeo
exactly, that's right

ບໍ່ແມ່ນ! bo maen!
no! that's not right!

ລະວັງ! lavang!
careful! watch out!

ຊ່ວຍແດ່! suai dae!
help!

ຢຸດ! yut!
stop!

ໄປເທาะ! pai tho!
let's go!

ໂອ້ຍ! oi!
ouch! oh no!

ໜ້າຮັກ na hak
cute, lovely *(it means worth loving)*

What to call people

ນ້ອງ nong
anyone younger; also how you call a waiter

ລຸง / ป้า lung / pa
uncle / auntie: any older man / woman

ท้าว thao
Mr, with the first name

ນาง nang
Ms, Mrs, with the first name

ท่าน than
sir, madam; you, very polite

ແฟน faen
boyfriend, girlfriend

ที่รัก thee hak
darling *(it means the one I love)*

The big scenes

ຂ້อยรักเจ้า khoi hak jao
I love you

คิดฮอดเจ้า khit hot jao
I miss you

ย่าไป! ya pai!
don't go!

บ่ต้องห่วง bo tong huang
don't worry

Useful phrases

อันนี้แม่นหยัง? an nee maen nyang?
what's this?

อันนี้เท่าใด? an nee thao dai?
how much is this?

แพงโพด phaeng phot
too expensive

ฮูดได้บ่? lut dai bo?
can you knock a bit off?

ห้องน้ำอยู่ใส? hong nam yu sai?
where's the toilet?

จักโมงแล้อ? jak mong laeo?
what time is it?

เอ้าช้าๆแด่ vao sa-sa dae
please speak slowly

ข้อยเอ้าพาสาลาวได้หน้อยหึ่ง
khoi vao phasa lao dai noi nueng
I speak a little Lao

กินเข้าแล้บ่? kin khao laeo bo?
have you eaten? *(a friendly hello)*

Everyone is family: people call each other by family words, even strangers. A man a bit older is อ้าย ai, a woman a bit older is เอื้อย ueai, anyone younger is น้อง nong. In love songs and scenes, he is อ้าย and she is น้อง.

Practice ແບບຝຶກຫັດ

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

Find the words you know first: there are no spaces, so look for ຂ້ອຍ khoi, ບໍ bo and ຫຼາຍ lai, and the rest of the line falls into place around them.

Read these sentences

1. ສະບາຍດີ! ຂ້ອຍຊື່ນ້ອຍ.

   sabaidee! khoi sue noi.
   Hello! My name is Noi.

2. ເຈົ້າສະບາຍດີບໍ? ຂ້ອຍສະບາຍດີ ຂອບໃຈ.

   jao sabaidee bo? khoi sabaidee, khop jai.
   How are you? I'm fine, thank you.

3. ຕະຫຼາດຢູ່ໃສ?

   talat yu sai?
   Where's the market?

4. ຂໍນ້ຳແດ່.

   kho nam dae.
   Some water, please.

5. ມື້ນີ້ຮ້ອນຫຼາຍ.

   mue nee hon lai.
   It's very hot today.

6. ຂ້ອຍບໍ່ກິນຊີ້ນ.

   khoi bo kin sin.
   I don't eat meat.

7. ມື້ອື່ນ ຂ້ອຍຈະໄປວຽງຈັນ.

   mue uen khoi ja pai viang jan.
   Tomorrow I'll go to Vientiane.

8. ລາວແມ່ນອ້າຍຂອງຂ້ອຍ.

   lao maen ai khong khoi.
   He's my older brother.

9. ອາຫານລາວແຊບຫຼາຍ!

   ahan lao saep lai!
   Lao food is so tasty!

10. ຂ້ອຍກຳລັງຮຽນພາສາລາວ.

    khoi kamlang hian phasa lao.
    I'm learning Lao.

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