The Persian letters الفبا

Right to left: Persian is written and read from right to left, and the letters in a word join up, like handwriting. There are no capital letters. **Romanization on this sheet:** ā as in father, a as in cat, e as in bed, o as in more, i as in see, u as in moon; kh is the ch in Scottish loch, gh a soft gargled sound, zh the s in pleasure, ' a little catch.

The 32 letters, in alphabet order

1 ا alef ā, a, e, o اسم esm, name	2 ب be b باران bārān, rain	3 پ pe p پدر pedar, father	4 ت te t تخت takht, bed	5 ث se s ثانیه sāniye, second	6 ج jim j جوان javān, young	7 چ che ch چای chāy, tea	8 ح he h حمام hammām, bathroom
9 خ khe kh خانه khāne, house	10 د dāl d دست dast, hand	11 ذ zāl z ذرت zorrat, corn	12 ر re r روز ruz, day	13 ز ze z زن zan, woman	14 ژ zhe zh ژاپن zhāpon, Japan	15 س sin s سیب sib, apple	16 ش shin sh شب shab, night
17 ص sād s صبح sobh, morning	18 ض zād z ضعیف za'if, weak	19 ط tā t طلا talā, gold	20 ظ zā z ظهر zohr, noon	21 ع eyn ' عشق eshgh, love	22 غ gheyn gh غذا ghazā, food	23 ف fe f فیلم film, film	24 ق ghāf gh قند ghand, sugar lump
25 ک kāf k کتاب ketāb, book	26 گ gāf g گربه gorbe, cat	27 ل lām l لب lab, lip	28 م mim m ماه māh, moon, month	29 ن nun n نان nān, bread	30 و vāv v, u, o ورزش varzesh, sport	31 ه he h هوا havā, air, weather	32 ی ye y, i یک yek, one

Four letters only Persian has: Persian uses the Arabic letters and adds four sounds Arabic doesn't write: پ p, چ ch, ژ zh, گ g. They're marked in orange above.

Same sound, learn the spelling with the word

ت ط t	س ص ث s	ز ذ ض ظ z	ه ح h	ق غ gh

These letters came in with Arabic words, and in Persian each group sounds the same. You can't hear which one a word uses, so learn the spelling together with the word: صبح sobh, morning, but سیب sib, apple.

Dots matter: ب پ ت ث share one shape, and only the dots tell them apart. So do خ ح چ ج, ژ ز ر, ش س and گ ک, where one extra line makes k into g.

Be gentle with yourself: خ kh and ق غ gh take some listening. If they come out as k and g at first, people will still understand you.

Letters join حروف

One letter, up to four shapes: a letter looks a little different at the start, in the middle and at the end of a word, because it joins its neighbours. The core shape stays, so you'll soon see it.

Five letters in every position

Letter	Alone	Start	Middle	End	In a word
be	ب	بـ	ـبـ	ـب	کباب kabāb kebab
kāf	ک	کـ	ـکـ	ـک	کوچک kuchek small
gāf	گ	گـ	ـگـ	ـگ	سگ sag dog
he	ه	هـ	ـهـ	ـه	شهر shahr city
ye	ی	یـ	ـیـ	ـی	سیب sib apple

Seven letters never join forward

ا د ذ ر ز ژ و join the letter before them, but never the one after, so a small gap follows them. In روز ruz, day, no letter touches. In مادر mādar, mother, there's a gap after ا and after د.

و and ی do two jobs

و is v, or the long vowel u, or o: ورزش varzesh, sport; روز ruz, day; تو to, you. ی is y, or the long vowel i: یک yek, one; سیب sib, apple. After خ, a و is often silent: خواهر khāhar, sister.

Alef at the start: in the middle, ا is a long ā: بابا bābā, dad. At the start of a word it carries any vowel: اسم esm, name; او u, he or she. With a little hat, آ is ā at the start: آب āb, water.

Short vowels are usually not written

بَ
ba
zabar
a short a

بِ
be
zir
a short e

بُ
bo
pish
a short o

گل
written without marks, it can be
گُل gol, flower, or گِل gel, mud

You learn words by shape: the long vowels ā, i and u are letters, but a, e and o are small marks above or below, and subtitles, signs and books leave them out. Context tells you which word it is. Children's books keep the marks.

The half-space: می‌خواهم mikhāham, I want, is one word, but می doesn't join the next letter: a half-space keeps them apart, so you see the parts.

How words work دستور زبان

No he or she: او u means he and she. Persian has no gender at all: no masculine or feminine words, and describing words never change.

No word for the: کتاب ketāb is book, or the book. For a, put یک yek, one, before it, or add ی to the end: یک کتاب yek ketāb or کتابی ketābi, a book.

I, you, he and she

من man I	تو to you (one friend)	او u he and she	ما mā we	شما shomā you (polite, or more than one)	آنها ānhā they

Two kinds of you: شما shomā is the polite you, for anyone older, strangers and people in shops. تو to is for friends, family and children. When in doubt, say شما shomā.

The ezafe: a little -e that links words

کتابِ من ketāb-e man my book	خانهٔ بزرگ khāne-ye bozorg a big house	دوستِ خوب dust-e khub a good friend

How it works: when a word is followed by the word that describes it or owns it, you add -e between them. After a vowel it's -ye. You hear it, but it's usually not written: کتاب من ketāb-e man, my book. So the describing word comes after, and so does the owner.

The verb goes last

من چای می‌خورم. man chāy mikhoram. I drink tea.	او در خانه است. u dar khāne ast. He's at home, or she's at home.	ما فارسی یاد می‌گیریم. mā fārsi yād migirim. We're learning Persian.

Is: ast, or just -e

هوا سرد است. havā sard ast. The weather is cold.	هوا سرده. havā sarde. The same, the way people say it.	من خوبم. man khubam. I'm fine: -am is I am.

Not, and questions: add ن, said ne or na, to the front of a verb for not: نمی‌دانم nemidānam, I don't know; نترس natars, don't be afraid. For a question, raise your voice at the end: خوبی؟ khubi? Are you OK?

The first 168 words کلمه‌ها

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

Greetings and survival

سلام salām
hello, hi

خداحافظ khodāhāfez
goodbye

صبح بخیر sobh bekheyr
good morning

شب بخیر shab bekheyr
good night

مرسی mersi
thanks *(everyday, from French)*

ممنون mamnun
thank you

متشکرم motashakkeram
thank you *(more formal)*

خیلی ممنون kheyli mamnun
thanks a lot

خواهش می‌کنم khāhesh mikonam
you're welcome; also please

لطفاً lotfan
please

ببخشید bebakhshid
excuse me, sorry

بفرمایید befarmāyid
please, go ahead, help yourself

بله bale
yes *(polite)*

نه na
no

حالت چطوره؟ hālet chetore?
how are you? *(to a friend)*

خوبم khubam
I'm fine

خوش آمدید khosh āmadid
welcome

نمی‌فهمم nemifahmam
I don't understand

Question words

چی chi
what; in writing often چه che

کی ki
who; also key, when: same spelling

کجا kojā
where

چرا cherā
why

چطور chetor
how

چند chand
how many

چقدر cheghadr
how much

کدام kodām
which

Little words

و va
and *(often said o)*

یا yā
or

اما ammā
but

در dar
in

با bā
with

از az
from

به be
to

اینجا injā
here

آنجا ānjā
there

خیلی kheyli
very, a lot

کمی kami
a little

الان alān
now

هم ham
also, too

چون chon
because

آن / این in / ān
this / that

Family

پدر pedar
father

مادر mādar
mother

بابا bābā
dad

مامان māmān
mum

برادر barādar
brother

خواهر khāhar
sister

پسر pesar
son; also boy

دختر dokhtar
daughter; also girl

پدربزرگ pedarbozorg
grandfather

مادربزرگ mādarbozorg
grandmother

شوهر shohar
husband

زن zan
wife; also woman

خانواده khānevāde
family

بچه bachche
child, kid

دوست dust
friend

Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
۰	۱	۲	۳	۴	۵	۶	۷	۸	۹	۱۰
صفر	یک	دو	سه	چهار	پنج	شش	هفت	هشت	نه	ده
sefr	yek	do	se	chahār	panj	shesh	haft	hasht	noh	dah

Digits: Persian has its own digits, and they run left to right, even inside Persian text: ۱۰ is 10, ۲۵ is 25. ۴, ۵, ۶ look different from the Arabic ٤, ٥, ٦. Watch out: ۰ is zero, and نه na is no, but نه noh is nine.

Food, places, verbs روزمره

Verbs: dictionaries list a verb ending in -an: خوردن khordan, to eat. For I do it, add می mi- and -am: می‌خورم mikhoram, I eat.

Some change more: رفتن raftan, می‌روم miravam, I go.

People

مرد mard
man

معلم mo'allem
teacher

دکتر doktor
doctor

دانشجو dāneshju
student

Food and drink

آب āb
water

چای chāy
tea

قهوه ghahve
coffee

شیر shir
milk; also lion

نان nān
bread

برنج berenj
rice

گوشت gusht
meat

مرغ morgh
chicken

ماهی māhi
fish

میوه mive
fruit

سبزی sabzi
fresh herbs, greens

غذا ghazā
food

صبحانه sobhāne
breakfast

ناهار nāhār
lunch

شام shām
dinner

کباب kabāb
kebab

خوشمزه khoshmaze
tasty

گرسنه gorosne
hungry

تشنه teshne
thirsty

نوش جان nush-e jān
enjoy your meal

Places

خانه khāne
house, home

مدرسه madrese
school

دانشگاه dāneshgāh
university

رستوران resturān
restaurant

کافه kāfe
café

بازار bāzār
market, bazaar

مغازه maghāze
shop

بیمارستان bimārestān
hospital

هتل hotel
hotel

فرودگاه forudgāh
airport

خیابان khiyābān
street

شهر shahr
city

دریا daryā
sea

دستشویی dastshuyi
toilet

Verbs

خوردن khordan
eat; also drink

نوشیدن nushidan
drink

رفتن raftan
go

آمدن āmadan
come

خوابیدن khābidan
sleep

دیدن didan
see

شنیدن shenidan
hear

گفتن goftan
say

خواندن khāndan
read; also sing

نوشتن neveshtan
write

دانستن dānestan
know

فهمیدن fahmidan
understand

خواستن khāstan
want

داشتن dāshtan
have

دوست داشتن dust dāshtan
love; also like

کار کردن kār kardan
work

حرف زدن harf zadan
talk, speak

کمک کردن komak kardan
help

خریدن kharidan
buy

Describing words

کوچک / بزرگ bozorg / kuchek
big / small

بد / خوب khub / bad
good / bad

کهنه / نو kohne / no
new / old *(things)*

سرد / گرم garm / sard
warm / cold

سخت / آسان āsān / sakht
easy / hard

دور / نزدیک nazdik / dur
near / far

ارزان / گران gerān / arzān
expensive / cheap

قشنگ ghashang
pretty, lovely

خوشحال khoshhāl
happy

ناراحت nārāhat
upset, sad

خسته khaste
tired

More than one: add ها hā, often after a half-space: کتاب‌ها ketābhā, books. Describing words never change: کتاب‌های خوب ketābhā-ye khub, good books.

Show words فیلم و سریال

Reactions

وای! vāy!
wow! oh no!

ای وای ey vāy!
oh no! oh dear

باشه bāshe
OK, fine

خب khob
well..., so, OK

آره āre
yeah

نه بابا na bābā!
no way! come on! *(nothing to do with dad)*

عالیه āliye!
great! that's excellent

جدی؟ jeddi?
really? seriously?

حتماً hatman
sure, definitely

دمت گرم damet garm!
nice one! thanks *(casual)*

بی‌خیال bikhiyāl
never mind, forget it

What to call people

عزیزم azizam
my dear *(family, partners, close friends)*

علی جان ali jān
dear Ali: jān after any name makes it warm

داداش dādāsh
bro: a brother, or any friend

آبجی ābji
sis: a sister, or a close friend

آقا āghā
sir, Mr

خانم khānom
madam, Mrs, Ms

عمو amu
uncle; children call any older man this

The big scenes

دوستت دارم dustet dāram
I love you

دلم تنگ شده delam tang shode
I miss you *(it means my heart has grown tight)*

نترس natars
don't be afraid

کمک! komak!
help!

مواظب باش movāzeb bāsh
be careful, take care

چی شد؟ chi shod?
what happened?

بریم berim!
let's go!

Taarof, the art of being polite: تعارف ta'ārof is the warm back-and-forth of Persian manners. A host offers more food, you say no thank you, they offer again, and on the second or third time you accept. A taxi driver or shopkeeper may say قابل نداره ghābel nadāre, it's nothing, don't pay: it's kindness, so thank them and pay anyway. At a door, both people say بفرمایید befarmāyid, after you, until one goes first. Friends cut it short with تعارف نکن ta'ārof nakon, no need to be polite, just take it.

Shows speak, books write: on screen people use spoken forms. است ast, is, becomes -e: خوبه khube, it's good. می‌روم miravam becomes می‌رم miram, I'm going, and آن ān, that, becomes اون un.

Swear words are strong: Persian has very strong swear words, and you'll hear them in fights on screen. They hit much harder than the subtitles show: recognise them, but don't say them. ای وای ey vāy! and نه بابا na bābā! are the ones you can say in front of anyone.

Practice تمرین

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

Find the shapes you know: there are no short vowels, so look for the words you know first: من man, است ast, and verbs that start with می mi-. The rest of the line falls into place around them.

Read these sentences

1. سلام، من سارا هستم.
   salām, man sārā hastam.
   Hello, I'm Sara.

2. اسم شما چیست؟
   esm-e shomā chist?
   What's your name?

3. من از کانادا هستم.
   man az kānādā hastam.
   I'm from Canada.

4. دستشویی کجاست؟
   dastshuyi kojāst?
   Where's the toilet?

5. این چقدر است؟
   in cheghadr ast?
   How much is this?

6. یک چای می‌خواهم، لطفاً.
   yek chāy mikhāham, lotfan.
   A tea, please. (it means I want a tea)

7. غذا خیلی خوشمزه است!
   ghazā kheyli khoshmaze ast!
   The food is really tasty!

8. امروز هوا گرم است.
   emruz havā garm ast.
   It's warm today.

9. فردا به دریا می‌روم.
   fardā be daryā miravam.
   Tomorrow I'm going to the sea.

10. کمی فارسی حرف می‌زنم.
    kami fārsi harf mizanam.
    I speak a little Persian.

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