

THAI
LANGUAGE 

พูดอ่าน หนังสือไทย

FOR THE BEGINNER

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Mantana Kiettipongse

ดวงกมลพับลิชชิ่ง
นำเสนอหนังสือดี มีคุณค่า

Thai language for the Beginner

“หัดอ่านหนังสือไทย”



/ hət àan nǎŋ -sǐ thay /

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Introduction

Thailand is a beautiful country, there is no way of enjoying your stay without knowing how to communicate with the people. No matter how difficult it is, if you want your stay to be memorable, learning the language is a must.

The author of this book had a lot of experience in teaching Thai to foreign students in the university both in group as well as in individual for quite a number of years, she knows where the difficulty lies. Therefore, in order to help those who want to learn Thai language by themselves, she compiled her knowledge in Thai language teaching into this little book "Thai language for the Beginner".

The publisher hopes, if the learners persist in learning and follow the steps given in this book, they will surely be fluent in speaking and reading in no time.

Words of advice, intonation is one of the most important in Thai language, so try to pronounce the words correctly from the very beginning and you will have no difficulty later on. Remember pronounce the wrong tone is like playing the wrong key.

Enjoy your stay and have fun in learning the language.

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The phonetic transcription for Thai language

1.1 Vowels

There are 21 vowel sounds, divided into 2 groups:
18 single vowels and 3 diphthongs.

Chart 1 : Vowel sounds

	Sounds	Thai Examples	Meanings	Similar Sounds in English
ิ ี	/ i /	/ bin /	to fly	bin
ิ ี	/ ii /	/ pii /	year	pea
เ เอ	/ e /	/ yen /	cool	yen
เ	/ ee /	/ keen /	to conscript	gain
เ เอ	/ ɛ /	/ bɛn /	to share	bank
เ	/ ɛɛ /	/ phɛɛ /	raft	pear
ุ ู	/ ɨ /	/ diɨ /	to pull	pedal
ุ ู	/ ʉ /	/ miʉ /	hand	-
อ-อ	/ ə /	/ prə /	dirty	about, the
อ-อ	/ əə / əə	/ dɛən /	to walk	burn
อ	/ a /	/ kan /	to prevent	gun
า	/ aa /	/ kaa /	crow	father
อ	/ u /	/ yuɨ /	mosquito	foot
อ	/ uu /	/ puun /	cement	food



	/ o /	/ bon /	on, up	obey
	/ oo /	/ too /	big	toe
	/ ɔ /	/ hɔ̌ /	to soar	horrid
	/ ɔɔ /	/ khɔɔ /	neck	corner
	/ iɑ /	/ rɪɑ /	boat	-
	/ ua /	/ khrua /	kitchen	croissant, tour

1.2 Consonants

The sounds of Thai consonants consist of 20 initial consonants and 8 final constants. The initial consonants are further divided into single consonants and clusters.

Chart 2: Single Initial Consonants

	Sounds	Thai Examples	Meanings	Similar Sounds in English
บ	/ b /	/ bin /	to fly	be
ป	/ p /	/ puu /	a crab	spoon
พ	/ ph /	/ phan /	thousand	pun
ด	/ d /	/ duu /	to look at	do
ต	/ t /	/ taa /	eye	star
ท	/ th /	/ thɔɔŋ /	gold	tongs
ข	*/ k /	/ kɛɛn /	axis	gander
ค	/ kh /	/ kham /	word	come
จ	*/ c /	/ ciin /	Chinese	jean
ช	/ ch /	/ chaam /	bowl	charm
ฟ	/ f /	/ fan /	tooth	fun
ทร	/ s /	/ saay /	sand	sign
ห	/ h /	/ hây /	to give	hi



ว	/ w /	/ wan /	day	won
ย	/ y /	/ yaŋ /	still	young
ม	/ m /	/ maa /	to come	mar
น	/ n /	/ nɔɔn /	to lie down	naught
ง	/ ŋ /	/ ŋaw /	shadow	singing
ร	/ r /	/ ram /	bran	rum
ล	/ l /	/ lem /	to nibble	lemon

(* / k, c / are unvoiced while “g, j” are voiced)

Chart 3: Clusters

	Sounds	Thai Examples	Meanings	Similar Sounds in English
กร	*/ kr /	/ kraam /	molar	gramme
กล	*/ kl /	/ klua /	to be scared	glow
กว	*/ kw /	/ kwaaŋ /	deer	language
(* / kr, kh, kw / are unvoiced, while “gr, gl, gw” are voiced).				
คร	/ khr /	/ khray /	who	cry
คล	/ khl /	/ khlam /	to fumble	clam
คว	/ khw /	/ khwan /	smoke	queen
ตร	/ tr /	/ troŋ /	straight	strong
ปร	/ pr /	/ prɛɛŋ /	brush	spring
ปล	/ pl /	/ plaa /	fish	splash
พร	/ phr /	/ phraan /	hunter	pray
พล	/ phl /	/ phleeŋ /	song	play

Chart 4: Final Consonants

	Sounds	Thai Examples	Meanings	Note
ป	/ -p /	/ síp /	ten	The sound of the final consonant is not released.
ต	/ -t /	/ pèt /	eight	
ก	/ -k /	/ hòk /	six	
ม	/ -m /	/ sǎam /	three	
น	/ -n /	/ sŭun /	zero	
ง	/ -ŋ /	/ sǎwŋ /	two	
ย	/ -y /	/ rǎoy /	hundred	
ว	/ -w /	/ kâaw /	nine	

1.3 Tones

There are 5 tones which signify the meaning of the words.

Chart 5: Tones

Symbols	Labels	Tone Distribution	Meanings
-	mid	/ khaaw / คาว	smell of flesh fish
˘	low	/ khàaw / ข่าว	news
ˆ	falling	/ khâaw / ข้าว	rice
˙	high	/ kháaw / ข้าว	a kind of fish
ˋ	rising	/ khǎaw / ขาว	white

The Characteristics of Thai language

2.1 Thai is a tonal language, which is the meaning of a word depends upon the tone. eg.

เสื่อ / sǎa / (low tone) = a mat.

เสื้อ / sǎa / (falling tone) = a blouse, shirt.

เสือ / sǎa / (rising tone) = a tiger.

2.2 There are not indefinite or definite articles (a, an, the), but there are many final particles to show the politeness, question, request, persuasions and enforcement. They are / khráp khǎ, cǎ, cá, ná, lǎ, sǐ, máy / etc.

ครับค่ะ คำคะ นะ ล่ะ ชี้ ไหม

2.3 Adjective follows noun e.g.

English: Black cat is in the white room.

Thai : / mɛɛw dam yùu nay hôŋ khǎaw / (black = / dam /, cat = / mɛɛw /, is = / yùu / in = / nay /, white = / khǎaw / room = / hôŋ /)

2.4 There are words called “Classifiers”, used

a) After the numeral e.g.

English: One house Thai: /Bâan nǐŋ lǎŋ/

Two houses /Bâan sǎwŋ lǎŋ/

(house, houses = /bâan/, one = /nǐŋ/, two = /sǎwŋ/, /lǎŋ/ is a classifier for house)



b) Before the ordinal or demonstrative e.g.

English: The first house. Thai: /bâan lăŋ thîi nîi/ บ้านหลังที่หนึ่ง
The second house. /bâan lăŋ thîi sǎwŋ/ บ้านหลังที่สอง
This house /bâan lăŋ nîi/ บ้านหลังนี้
That house /bâan lăŋ nán/ บ้านหลังนั้น
(First = /thîi nîi/, second = /thîi sǎwŋ/, this = /nîi/, that = nán)
ที่หนึ่ง ที่สอง นี้ นั้น

2.5 A word does not change its form, regardless of how it is used in a sentence e.g.

1. English: I go to school. Thai: /phôm pay rooŋrian/
ผมไปโรงเรียน

He goes to school. /Khăw pay rooŋrian/ เขาไปโรงเรียน

I went to school. /phôm pay rooŋrian/ ผมไปโรงเรียน

(I = /phôm/ go, goes, went = /pay/, school = /rooŋrian/)
ผม ไป โรงเรียน

2. English: One tooth. Thai: /fan nîi sîi/ ฟันหนึ่งซี่

Two teeth. /fan sǎwŋ sîi/ ฟันสองซี่

(tooth, teeth = /fan/, /sîi/ is a classifier for tooth, teeth.)
ฟัน ซี่

2.6 A word may be repeated in order to express plurality or emphasis e.g.

1. English: Friend Thai: /phân/ เพื่อน

Friends /phân phân / เพื่อน เพื่อน

2. English: good Thai: /dii/. ดี

very good /dîi-dii, dii mâak/ ดีดี, ดีมาก

Thai writing system

Thai writing is an alphabetical system with 44 consonants, 32 vowels and 4 tone marks. Phonologically, it appears that a certain sound is represented by more than one symbol. Phonetically, the Thai language has 20 consonants, 21 vowels and 5 tones.

The Thai languages write from left to right without punctuation between words. The punctuation will come at the end of sentence or a long phrase, for example:

ภาษาไทยไม่ยากเลย : Thai language is not difficult at all.
Pronouncing: /phaa-sǎa thay mâi yâak ləəy/.

Since Thai language has a lot of loan words from neighboring languages, many words are spelled in such a way that they represent the original words, such as Pali or Sanskrit, but they are usually pronounced in a Thai way, some consonants are silent and some symbols vary in sound representation.

3.1 Consonants (พยัญชนะ /phá-yan-chá-ná)

Symbols

A Thai consonant alphabet is always named in association with an object or a living thing, and that alphabet



is usually an initial consonant of the syllable meaning that object or living thing. For example, က, is named က. ကို, pronouncing /kəw kày/. The word “ကို” which means a chicken has က. as an initial consonant. All consonants are pronounced by putting / ဘ / after the sound which they represent.

Below are the consonants symbols, their names, the meanings of names, and their phonetic symbols. They are presented in alphabetical order.

No.	Consonant Symbols.	Names	Meanings	Phonetic symbols.
1	က	ကဘ် ကယ	chicken	/k/
2	ခ	ခဘ် ခယ	egg	/kh/
3	ဗ*	ခဘ် ခယတ်	bottle	/kh/
4	ဖ	ခဘ် ခယာယ	water buffalo	/kh/
5	ဇ*	ခဘ် ခယ	human	/kh/
6	ဇ	ခဘ် ရာ-ခယ	bell	/kh/
7	င	ဂဘ် ဂယ	snake	/ŋ/
8	စ	ဆဘ် ဆယ	plate	/c/
9	ည	ဆဘ် ဆိ	cymbal	/ch/
10	တ	ဆဘ် ဆာ	elephant	/ch/
11	ထ	ဆဘ် ဆာ	chain	/s/
12	ဓ	ဆဘ် ဆာ	tree	/ch/
13	ဓ	ယဘ် ယိ	woman	/y/
14	ဓ	သဘ် ဆာ-သာ	pinnacled coronet	/d/
15	ဓ	တဘ် ပာ-တဲ	goat	/t/
16	ဓ	ထဘ် ထာ	base	/th/
17	ဓ	ထဘ် monthoo	a character in Ramayana	/th/
18	ဓ	ထဘ် phūu thāw	aged person	/th/
19	ဓ	နဘ် နယ	novice monk	/n/
20	ဓ	သဘ် သဲ	child	/d/



No.	Consonant Symbols.	Names	Meanings	Phonetic symbols.
21	ด	tɔw tǎw	tortoise	/t/
22	ถ	thɔ́w thǔŋ	bag	/th/
23	ท	thɔw thǎ-hǎan	soldier	/th/
24	ธง	thɔw thoŋ	flag	/th/
25	น	nɔw nǔu	mouse	/n/
26	บ	bɔw baymáay	leaf	/b/
27	ป	pɔw plaa	fish	/p/
28	ผ	phɔ́w phǐŋ	bee	/ph/
29	ฝ	fɔ́w fǎa	lid, partition	/f/
30	พ	phɔw phaen	a plate with high base	/ph/
31	ฟ	fɔw fan	tooth	/f/
32	ภ	phɔw sǎmphaw	Chinese schooner	/ph/
33	ม	mɔw máa	horse	/m/
34	ย	yɔw yák	demon	/y/
35	ร	rɔw rǎa	boat, ship	/r/
36	ล	lɔw liŋ	monkey	/l/
37	ว	wɔw wǎen	ring	/w/
38	ศ	sɔ́w sǎa-laa	pavilion	/s/
39	ษ	sɔ́w rǎ-sǐi	hermit	/s/
40	ฐ	sɔ́w sǎa	tiger	/s/
41	ห	hɔ́w hǐip	case, baggage	/h/
42	ฬ	lɔw cù-laa	name of a kite	/l/
43	อ	wɔ -ǎaŋ	owl	-
44	ฮ	hɔw nók hūuk	owl	/h/

*๗ and ๓ are obsolete. Consonant no. 43, อ, only fills in the initial consonant position in the syllable which has no initial consonant. It takes the tone distribution of the mid consonants.

Thai consonants are classified into three groups, according to their characteristics: mid consonants, low consonants and high consonants. These three groups of consonants will effect different tone distributions, which will be discussed later.

3.1.1 Mid consonants. There are nine letters but six sounds in the mid group, as shown in the following chart.

Consonants	Pronouncing	Phonetic Symbols
ก	กว	/k/
ข	คว	/c/
ฃ	ดว	/d/
ค	ดว	/d/
ฅ	ตว	/t/
ต	ตว	/t/
บ	บว	/b/
ป	ปว	/p/
อ*	ว	-

*The sound of “อ” is the sound of a vowel as shown in chart 1 (1.1)

2 High consonants. There are eleven letters but only two of high group. The following chart shows all members of the class

Consonants	Pronouncing	Phonetic Symbols
ก	kh	/kh/
ข (obsolete)	kh	/kh/
ฅ	ch	/ch/
ฉ	th	/th/
ช	th	/th/
ผ	ph	/ph/
ฝ	f	/f/
ส	s	/s/
ษ	s	/s/
ศ	s	/s/
ห	h	/h/

*A high consonant is usually pronounced with a rising tone.

3.1.3 Low Consonants. There are twenty-four letters but fourteen sounds of low group. The chart below shows all of them.

No.	Consonants	Pronouncing	Phonetic symbols
1	ก	khว	/kh/
2	ก (obsolete)	khว	/kh/
3	ข	khว	/kh/
4	ง	ŋว	/ŋ/
5	ช	chw	/ch/
6	ซ	sw	/s/
7	ฌ	chw	/ch/
8	ญ	yว	/y/
9	ท	thว	/th/
10	ฒ	thว	/th/
11	ณ	nv	/n/
12	ด	thว	/th/
13	ต	thว	/th/
14	น	nv	/n/
15	พ	phว	/ph/

16	ฟ	ฟว	/f/
17	ภ	ภว	/ph/
18	ม	มว	/m/
19	ย	ยว	/y/
20	ร	รว	/r/
21	ล	ลว	/l/
22	ว	พว	/w/
23	พ	ลว	/l/
24	ฮ	หว	/h/

Either a mid consonant or a low consonant is usually pronounced with a mid tone. The difference will occur in the word formation.

3.2 Vowels (สระ - sà-rà)

There are thirty-two forms of vowel in Thai. Among them, eighteen are single vowels: short and long, six are diphthongs, the four contain the sounds of two initial consonants /r/, /l/.

The following 3 charts are the forms of single, diphthong and special vowels: the ones which contain the sounds of consonants.

Chat 1: Single Vowels

Short forms	Phonetic Symbols	Long forms	Phonetic symbols
า	/a/	-า	/aa/
ิ	/i/	-ิ	/ii/
ึ	/ɪ/	-ึ	/ih/
ู	/u/	-ู	/uu/
เ-ะ	/e/	เ-	/ee/
เ-ะ	/ɛ/	เ-	/εε/
โ-ะ	/o/	โ-	/oo/
เ-า	/ɔ/	-อ	/ɔɔ/
เ-อ	/ə/	เ-อ	/əə/

Note: A blank as marked by a dash is a position where a consonant is inserted to form a syllable or a word.

Chart 2: Diphthongs

Short forms	Phonetic Symbols	Long forms	Phonetic symbols
เ-ีย	/ia/	เ-ีย	/ia/
เ-ือ	/ɛa/	เ-ือ	/ɛa/
-ัว	/ua/	-ัว	/ua/

The phonetic symbols /ia,ɛa, ua/ are used for both short and long vowels forms because the short forms are scarcely used.

Chart 3: Special Vowels

Forms	Phonetic Symbols
ำ	/am/
เีย	/ay/
เีย	/ay/
เ้า	/aw/
ีย	/ri/
ีย	/ri/
ีย	/li/
ีย	/li/

3.2.1 Order of vowels.

There are two ordering systems in the Thai vowels, the traditional order, the dictionary order. The traditional order will go by sounds and it does not cover all variant of vowel forms. The traditional order system is as follows.

No.	Forms	Sounds	Examples	Pronunciation	Meaning
1	ะ	a	กะ	kà	to estimate
2	า	aa	กา	kaa	crow
3	ิ	i	ติ	tì	to blame
4	ี	ii	ดี	dii	good
5	ุ	ì	ดึง	dìŋ	to pull
6	ุ	ì	*มือ	mì	hand
			ยืน	yìn	to stand

7	ุ	u	สุก	sùk	ripe
8	ู	uu	ดู	duu	to look
9	เ-ะ	e	เตะ	tè	to kick
10	เ-	ee	เท	thee	to pour
11	แ-ะ	ɛ	และ	lɛ	and
12	แ-	ɛɛ	แพ	phɛɛ	raft
13	เ-อะ	ə	เลอะ	lá	messy
14	เ-อ	əə	เรอ	rəə	to belch
15	โ-ะ	o	โปะ	pò	to coat over
16	โ-	oo	โต	too	big
17	เ-าะ	ɔ	เคาะ	khó	to knock, rap
18	-อ	vv	คอ	khvv	neck
19	ัวะ	ua (short)	ผัวะ	phùà	-
20	ัว	ua (long)	ผัว	phũa	husband
21	เ-ียะ	ia (short)	เมียะ	phìa	-
22	เ-ีย	ia (long)	เมีย	mia	wife
23	เ-ือะ	ie (short)	เผือะ	phia	-
24	เ-ือ	ie (long)	เรือ	ria	a boat



25	ำ	am	ดำ	dam	black
26	เ-	ay	ใน	nay	in
27	เ-	ay	ใน	nay	spinning wheel
28	เ - ำ	aw	เดา	daw	to guess
29	ฤ	rī	ฤดู	rī-duu	season
30	ฤ	rī	ฤๅ	rī-sǎi	hermit
31	ลี	li	ระลึก	rá-lik	to recall
32	ลี	li	ภาษา	li-chaa	widely known

อ is filled in after the initial consonant when the syllable with ำ has no final consonant.

No. 19, 21, 23 are used in onomatopoeia.

No. 31, 32 are obsolete.

3.2.2 Positions of vowels

The vowels occur in five positions: before, after, above, below and surround a consonant. The following charts show vowels in all positions in words.

Chart 1. Vowels before consonants.

Forms	Words	Pronunciation	Meanings
เ-	เกร	kee-ree	wayward
แ-	แบน	bæen	flat
โ-	โยน	yoon	to throw
ไป-	ไป	pay	to go
ใจ-	ใจ	cay	heart



Chart 2. Vowels after consonants

Forms	Words	Pronunciation	Meanings
-ะ	จะ	cà	shall, will
-า	นา	naa	rice field
-ำ	คำ	kham	word
-อ	พอ	phoo	enough
-ัวะ	จัวะ	cúa	* very
-ัว	บัว	bua	water lily

*จัวะ is used after the word “ขาว” /khăaw/ =white, used as intensifier, means “really white.”

Chart 3. Vowels above consonants

Forms	Words	Pronunciation	Meanings
-ิน	ดิน	din	soil
-ีน	ปีน	piin	to climb
-ิม	ซึม	sīm	drowsy
-ีม	ลืม	liim	to forget

Chart 4. Vowels below consonants.

Forms	Words	Pronunciation	Meanings
-ุ	ดู	dù	to scold
-ู	ดู	duu	to look

Chart 5. Vowels surround consonants

Forms	Words	Pronunciation	Meanings
เ - ะ	เตะ	lé	crushed, mushy
แ - ะ	เกาะ	kè	sheep
เ - าะ	เกาะ	kò	island
เ - อะ	เถอะ	thò	a particle expressing decision
เ - อ	เธอ	thəə	you, she
โ - ะ	โตะ	ló	to throw down
เ - ย	เลีย	lia	to lick
เ - อ	เดือน	dian	month
เ - ำ	เสา	sǎw	post

No words for the forms เ - ยะ, เ - อะ

3.3 Tones (วรรณยุกต์ – wan-ná-yúk)

There are five tones in Thai language: mid, low, falling, high and rising. There are four tone markers for low, falling, high and rising tones. There is no tone marker for mid tone. The following charts show the tones and tone markers.