

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

It is important to read this section thoroughly if your aim is to learn to speak Thai using phonetic letters or transliteration. Skip this only if you can read Thai script.

What are Phonetic Letters?

There are many different practices for learning to speak a language without learning the scripts of the language.

Romanisation is the conversion of writing from a different writing system to the Roman (Latin) script, or a system for doing so. Methods of romanisation include transliteration, for representing written text, and transcription, for representing the spoken word, and combinations of both.

Phonetic transcription (also known as Phonetic Script or Phonetic Notation) is the visual representation of speech sounds (or phones). The most common type of phonetic transcription use a phonetic alphabet such as the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)**.

Transliteration is the practice of converting a text from one script into another by writing or printing (a letter or word) using the closest corresponding letters of a different alphabet or language.

Royal Thai Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) is a system used as a standard for transcribing Thai words, names of a person, place, thing, into English.

Romanisation In Thai is called ทับศัพท์ : Túb~Súb or ทับเสียง : Túb~Sĕang and colloquially called ภาษาคาราโอเกะ : Paa-săa Kaa-raa-o-ge' = Karaoke language.

(ทับ : Túb = place on top of, ศัพท์ : Súb = vocabulary, เสียง : Sĕang = sound, คาราโอเกะ : Kaa-raa-o-ge' = karaoke)

At Thai Style, we have developed our own system using the English alphabet as **phonetic letters**. This is because we would like to compare the sounds in English and Thai by using the English alphabet, like if you are a native English speaker learning French which uses the same alphabet but some letters are pronounced with completely different sounds.

For example, ดี has 2 letters or nucleus/basis sounds which are ด and ี .

We transliterate the letter or nucleus/base sound ด using the English letter **D** and the letter or nucleus/base sound ี using the English letters **ee (as in bee)**, which becomes **Dee**.

Within this course, we use English/Latin letters based on a southern British English or London pronunciation. However, it doesn't matter which accent it is based on because no English accent has perfect sound comparisons to Thai.

Thai and English are very different languages with different sounds. Even in English, we pronounce and use our tongue differently when we speak with different accents. Therefore, we cannot always rely on English letters to read Thai correctly. You should learn with Native Thai Speakers to get feedback on how to pronounce the Thai sounds correctly and how to mix the sounds to make a syllable and a word. It is very important to learn with a native Thai speaker to receive feedback and correct your pronunciation.

Some say the '[International Phonetic Alphabet \(IPA\)](#)' is the best phonetic method to help you learn Thai sounds. This may be true for a linguist, however, I feel IPA is a complicated system that is not suitable for beginner language learners whose aim is to only speak some basic Thai. If you are going to spend your time learning to read IPA for speaking Thai, why not spend this time to learn Thai script instead?

If you just want to speak Thai, I have developed a simple phonetic system using the English alphabet that, if you can read this, you already understand. If your long term aim is to learn Thai script, I would advise you to start learning Thai script sooner rather than later.

Before you start speaking and learning to pronounce Thai syllables and words, **it is also important for you to understand what the alphabet is**, the differences between the English and Thai alphabet and how to pronounce different sounds in Thai.

Within this section you will learn to understand the Thai word system to help you pronounce Thai syllables and words correctly. This is not only essential to be able to speak Thai clearly but, if you choose to learn to read and write Thai in the future, it will make the learning process much easier.

Study this section to understand Thai sounds and what English letters (or combination of letters) we use for each Thai sound. Ask questions and get feedback from native speakers and you will speak clearly.

What is an alphabet, a consonant and a vowel?

- **ตัวอักษร/ตัวหนังสือ** : An **alphabet** is a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order, used to represent the basic sounds of a language.
- **English alphabet** is a set of letters from A to Z. English vowel letters are A, E, I, O, U and the other letters are consonants.
- **Thai alphabet** is a set of letters that separate into 2 sub-sets; consonants and vowels.

พยัญชนะ : Pá-yun-chá-ná : Thai Consonant Letters & Sounds

- There are 44 Thai consonant letters for writing.
- There are 21 Thai consonant sounds when speaking.
- Each Thai consonant letter has a tone, either medium tone or rising tone. (Thai consonant letters in red in the table on page 3 are rising tone letters.)
- Each Thai consonant letter has a name.
- Each Thai consonant letter represents only one consonant sound. This is in contrast to English letters, such as the letter G, which is pronounced differently in the word 'gun' and 'giraffe'.
- One consonant sound can be written with different letters as specified on next page.

Practice:

1. Practise how to pronounce Thai consonant sounds
2. Memorise the English letter used as a phonetic letter/symbol for each sound



Audio: Pronunciation 1 Thai consonants



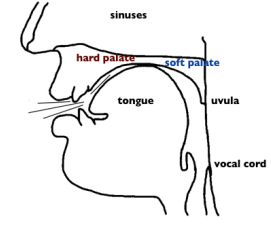
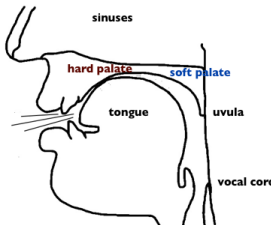
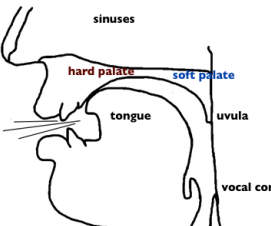
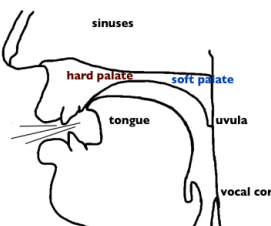
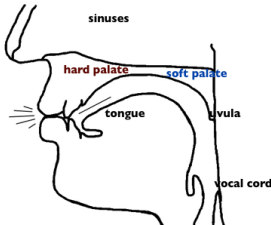
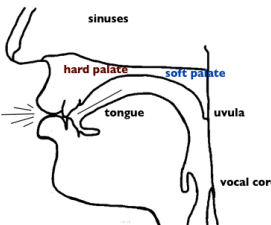
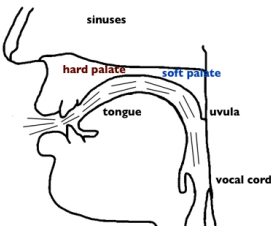
Video: Thai Pronunciation : Introduction to Thai Consonants (Episode 1)

When pronouncing a sound, you must practise how to move your tongue, lips and throat as well as understand how to push the air out. Practise with a native Thai language speaker and you learn to make Thai sounds correctly and naturally.

Note:

- 1). If you count the letters in the consonant table on the next pages you will count 44 but you will see some letters have the same pronunciation so if you count the sounds in the transliteration column you will count 21 sounds.
- 2). The phonetic letter in blue are nasal sounds.
- 3). You do not need to memorise the Thai consonant letters to learn to speak in this course, only learn to pronounce correctly by practising to move your tongue, lips and push the air out of your mouth to make the sound until it becomes natural.

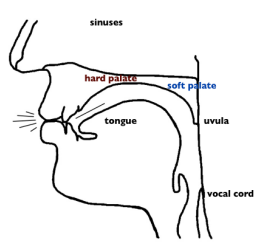


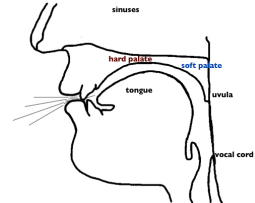
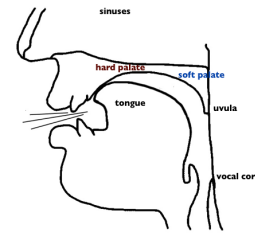

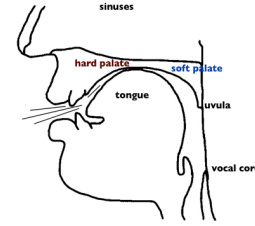
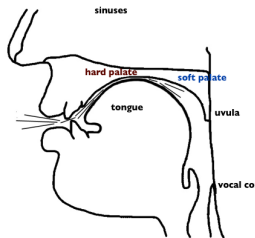





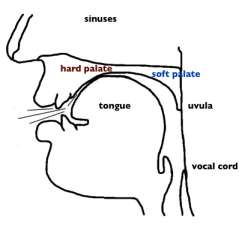

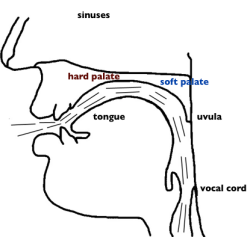
Letter	Read	Name of letter	Phonetic Letter	
ก	กอ : Gor	กอ ไก่ : Gor Gàì (Gàì means chicken)	G	
จ	จอ : Jor	จอ จาน : Jor Jaan (Jaan means plate)	J	
ด ฎ	ดอ : Dor ฎอ : Dor	ดอ เด็ก : Dor Dè'k (Dè'k means child) ฎอ ชฎา : Dor Chá-dàa (Chá-dàa means crown)	D	
ต ฏ	ตอ : Dtor ฏอ : Dtor	ตอ เต่า : Dtor Dtào (Dtào means turtle) ฏอ ปฏัก : Dtor Bpà-dtùk (Bpà-dtùk means goad; a traditional farming implement, used to spur or guide livestock)	Dt	
บ	บอ : Bor	บอ ใบไม้ : Bor Bai-mái (Bai-mái means leaf)	B	
ป	ปอ : Bpor	ปอ ปลา : Bpor Bplaa (Bplaa means fish)	Bp	
<p>ร : R is commonly pronounced ล/ฬ : L For example, the sound ร : R in the word 'อะไร : À-rai?' means what?' can be pronounced À-lai? (Ask your teacher to show you. See how to pronounce ล/ฬ : L below)</p>			<p>Close your lips (make the lips like you are about to spit) and push the air out to exaggerate the sound.</p>	
อ	ออ : Or	ออ อ่าง : Or Àang (Àang means basin)	A, E, I, O, U	
<p>Note : อ is a silent letter used in spelling grammar, beginners who haven't learnt Thai scripts please skip this.</p>			<p>Make the sound from your throat (close the vocal chord) and let it pass through the open mouth.</p>	



Letter	Read	Name of letter	Phonetic Letter	
ม	มอ : Mor	มอ ม้า : Mor M ^á a (M ^á a means horse)	M Close the lips and push the air out through the mouth and the nose to make the sound. (You should feel the vibration in your nose.)	
ง	งอ : Ngor	งอ งู : Ngor Ng ^{uu} (Ng ^{uu} means snake)	Ng Lift the back part of your tongue to touch the soft palate quickly and push the air through the open mouth to make the sound. (You should feel the vibration in your nose.)	
น	นอ : Nor	นอหนู : Nor N ^ũ u (N ^ũ u means mouse; rat)	N Lift the front part of your tongue to touch the hard palate quickly and push the air through the open mouth and the nose to make the sound. (You should feel the vibration in your nose.)	
ณ	ณอ : Nor	ณอ เณร : Nor N ^{ae} n (N ^{ae} n means novice monk)		
ว	วอ : Wor	วอแหวน : Wor W ^æ n (W ^æ n means ring)	W Push the lips forward and push the air through the open mouth and the nose to make the sound.	
ย	ยอ : Yor	ยอ ยักษ์ : Yor Y ^{úk} (Y ^{úk} means ogre)	Y Lift the back part of your tongue to touch the soft palate quickly to make the sound.	
ญ	ญอ : Yor	ญอ หญิง : Yor Y ^ĩ ng (Y ^ĩ ng means woman)		
ร	รอ : Ror	รอ เรือ : Ror R ^{uea} (R ^{uea} means boat)	R Fold the front half of your tongue back and the under part of your tongue touch the the hard palate then roll your tongue down to normal position to make the sound.	
ล	ลอ : Lor	ลอ ลิง : Lor Ling (Ling means monkey)	L Fold the front part of your tongue to touch just above your upper teeth then move the tongue down to normal position to make the sound.	
ฬ	ฬอ : Lor	ฬอ จุฬา : Lor J ^ù -laa (J ^ù -laa is a type of kite)		



Letter	Read	Name of letter	Phonetic Letter	
พ	พอ : Pŏr	พอ ผึ้ง : Pŏr Pŭeng (Pŭeng means bee)	P	 <p>Close your mouth and use the lips to make the sound by forcing air through the mouth.</p>
พ	พอ : Por	พอ พาน : Por Paan (Paan is a type of tray) → 		
ภ	ภอ : Por	ภอ สำเภา : Por Sŭm-pao (Sŭm-pao means junk, a flat-bottomed sailing vessel) → 		
ฝ	ฝอ : Fŏr	ฝอ ฝา : Fŏr Făa (Făa means lid)	F	 <p>Move your lower lip to touch upper teeth and force the air through your teeth to make the sound.</p>
ฟ	ฟอ : For	ฟอ ฟัน : For Fun (Fun means teeth)		
ถ	ถอ : Tŏr	ถอ ถุง : Tŏr Tŏng (Tŏng means sack ; bag)	T	 <p>Lift the front part near to the tip of your tongue to touch the hard palate just above your teeth quickly to make the sound.</p>
ฐ	ฐอ : Tŏr	ฐอ ฐาน : Tŏr Tăan (Tăan means base)		
ท	ทอ : Tor	ทอ ทหาร : Tor Tá-hăan (Tá-hăan means soldier)		
ธ	ธอ : Tor	ธอ ธง : Tor To'ng (To'ng means flag)		
ท	ทอ : Tor	ทอ มณเฑาะ : Tor Mo'n-to (Mo'n-to is a female character in a classical Thai play.) → 		
ฒ	ฒอ : Tor	ฒอ ผู้เฒ่า : Tor Pŭu-Tăo (Pŭu-Tăo means old person)		
ข	ขอ : Kŏr	ขอ ไข่ : Kŏr Kài (Kài means egg)	K	 <p>Lift the middle of your tongue to touch the hard palate quickly to make the sound.</p>
ข	ขอ : Kŏr	ขอ ขวด : Kŏr Kùad (Khùad means bottle) - obsolete		
ค	คอ : Kor	คอ ควาย : Kor Kwaay (Kwaay means water buffalo)		
ค	คอ : Kor	คอ คน : Kor Ko'n (Ko'n means person) - obsolete		
ฆ	ฆอ : Kor	ฆอ ระฆัง : Kor Rá-kung (Rá-kung means bell)		
ส	สอ : Sŏr	สอ เสือ : Sŏr Sŭea (Sŭea means tiger)	S	 <p>Move the middle part of your tongue up to almost touching the hard palate to make fricative sound by forcing air through narrow channel.</p>
ศ	ศอ : Sŏr	ศอ ศาลา : Sŏr Săa-laa → 		
ษ	ษอ : Sŏr	ษอ ฤๅษี : Sŏr Rue-sĕe → 		
ซ	ซอ : Sor	ซอ โซ่ : Sor Sŏ (Sŏ means chain)		

Letter	Read	Name of letter	Phonetic Letter	
ฉ	ฉอ : Chǒr	ฉอ ฉิ่ง : Chǒr Ching (Ching means cymbals) → 	Ch	
ช	ชอ : Chor	ชอ ช้าง : Chor Cháang (Cháang means elephant)		
ฌ	ฌอ : Chor	ฌอ กะฌอ : Chor (Ga)-cher ((Ga)-cher means bush; tree) The word 'Ga-cher' is not used in speaking any more.)		
ห	หอ : Hǒr	หอ หีบ : Hǒr Hèeb → 	H	
ฮ	ฮอ : Hor	ฮอ นกฮูก : Hor Nók~hûuk (Nók~hûuk means owl)		

สระ : Sà-rà : Vowel Letters & Vowel Sounds

- There are 28 vowel letters separated into 3 groups; single, combined and extra vowel letters.
- There are 24 vowel sounds when speaking.
- Each vowel letter represents only one vocal chord sound which is contrast to 'A, E, I, O, U' in English where one letter can be pronounced with more than one sound, for example the letter A/a in the words April, apple, father, adore are pronounced differently.

Practice:

1. Practise how to pronounce Thai vowel sounds (single, combined and extra vowel sounds)
2. Memorise the English letter used as a phonetic letter/symbol for each sound.



Audio: Pronunciation 2 Thai Vowels



Video: Thai Pronunciation : Introduction to Thai Vowels (Episode 5)

Note:

- 1). If you analyse the vowel sounds when you pronounce them you will notice that each movement / position in the mouth has both a short sound and long sound.
- 2). You do not need to memorise the Thai vowel letters to learn to speak Thai. Only learn to pronounce correctly by learning and practising to move your tongue, lips and push the air out to make the sound until it becomes natural.

สระเดี่ยว 18 เสียง : 18 single vowel sounds



Video: Thai Pronunciation : Single Vowels (Episode 6)

18 Single Vowel letter	9 movements/ positions in the mouth	Phonetic Letter	Similar Sound in English	Example words	
-ะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	a (or) u (short sound)	adore / up	กะ : Gà รัก : Rúk	and; to; estimate to love
-า		aa (long sound)	father, mother	กา : Gaa	crow, to mark
-ิ	1 movement / position in the mouth	i (short sound)	sick, nip	บี : Bì	to tear
-ี		ee (long sound)	see, bee	ดี : Dee	good
-ุ	1 movement / position in the mouth	ue (short sound)	similar to “du” in French	อู : Ûe	poo
-ู		uee (long sound)	similar to “due” in French	มู : Muee	hand
-ุ	1 movement / position in the mouth	u (or) oo (short sound)	look, book	ดู : Dù ลุก : Lóok	to scold to get up
-ู		uu (long sound)	too, zoo	ปู : Bpuu	crab
-ะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	e' (short sound)	neck, leg	เตะ : Dtè'	to kick
-เ		ay, e_ (long sound)	day, say	เท : Tay เล่น : Lê_n	to pour to play
-ะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	ae' (short sound)	at, cat	และ : Láe'	and
-เ		ae (long sound)	air, bear	แก : Gae	you, he, she
-ะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	o' (short sound)	poke	โปะ : Bpò'	to top
-เ		o (long sound)	go, so, load	โต : Dto	be grown

เ-าะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	Or' (short sound)	not, lot	เคาะ : Kór'	to knock
-อ		or (long sound)	or, door	พอ : Por	be enough
เ-อะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	er' (short sound)	the	เลอะ : Lér'	dirty
เ-อ		er (long sound)	were	เจอ : Jer	to meet

Note: The English letters used in the materials are a phonetic letter or symbol only. There are no English letters that can be compared perfectly to any Thai consonant or vowel sound. For example, we use **A/a** for the short sound **-ะ** (Sàrà À) as in **adore**. You can't change the sounds to **father** (long sound **aa**) or **man** (long sound **ae**) as you can in English.

We use a **standard Thai pronunciation and spelling system** to help you understand the pronunciation of each word using English letters.

For example,

เคย : **Keoy** (Keoi) means 'ever / used to',

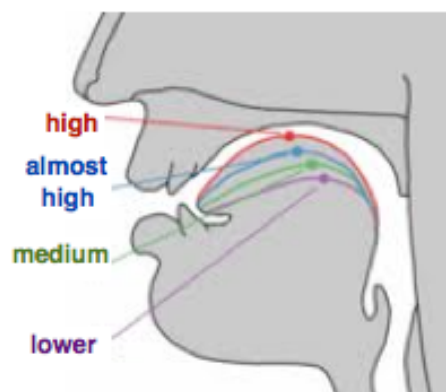
For our phonetic system, do not pronounce 'Keoy' as 'Curry' as we do in English. You must read it using the Thai pronunciation and spelling system which is;

a consonant ค : K + vowel เ-อ : er + final consonant ย : y

How to pronounce the 18 Single vowels

When pronouncing a sound, you must practise how to move your tongue, lips and throat as well as understand how to push the air out. Practise with a native Thai speaker and you will be able to make Thai sounds correctly and naturally.

	Front part of the beginning of the tongue		Back part of the beginning of the tongue			
	stretch mouth		stretch mouth		round mouth	
	short sound	long sound	short sound	long sound	short sound	long sound
lift the tongue to high level	i ㅣ movement / position in the mouth	ee เ movement / position in the mouth	ue เ movement / position in the mouth	uee เ-อ movement / position in the mouth	u (or) oo ุ movement / position in the mouth	uu ู movement / position in the mouth
lift the tongue to almost high level	e' เ-ะ movement / position in the mouth	ay (or) e_ เ-ะ movement / position in the mouth	er' เ-อ-ะ movement / position in the mouth	er เ-อ movement / position in the mouth	o' โ-ะ movement / position in the mouth	o โ- movement / position in the mouth
lift the tongue to medium level	ae' แ-ะ movement / position in the mouth	ae แ- movement / position in the mouth			or' เ-าะ movement / position in the mouth	or -อ movement / position in the mouth
move the tongue to lower level			a (or) u -ะ movement / position in the mouth	aa -า movement / position in the mouth		



สระเสียงผสม 6 เสียง : 6 combined vowel sounds

A combined vowel sound is a sound formed by a rapid movement of two single vowel sounds in a single syllable, in which the sound begins as one vowel and moves towards another (as in **coin**, **loud**, and **dual**). In English and some other languages, it is called diphthong. Often contrasted with monophthong, triphthong.

There are only 6 combined vowel sounds in Thai. See the table below.

How to pronounce the 6 combined vowels

 **Video: Thai Pronunciation : Combined Vowels (Episode 7)**

6 combined Vowel letters	3 movements/ positions in the mouth	Combined from	Transliteration	Similar Sound in English	Example words
เ-ยะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	ิ + -ะ i + a	ea' (short sound)	ear (with glottal stop)	เฝียะ : Pèa' onomatopoeia of slapping sound
เ-ย		เ + -า ee + aa	ear (or) ea (long sound)	ear	เมียะ : Mear wife (informal)
เ-อะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	ุ + -ะ ue + a	uea' (short sound)	pure	เืออะ : P'ea' onomatopoeia of vomiting sound
เ-อ		ุ + -า uee + aa	uea (long sound)	pure (long sound)	เรือ : R'uea boat
เ-าะ	1 movement / position in the mouth	ู + -ะ u + a	ua' (short sound)	sewer	ฝัวะ : P'ua onomatopoeia of slapping sound
เ-อ		ู + -า uu + aa	ua (long sound)	tour	ฝัว : P'ua husband (informal)

'Phonetic letters are not a perfect substitute for Thai letters. The pronunciation of English language is subjective depending on an individual's accent. If it helps you to remember the Thai sounds, you can write the phonetic letters in your own way.'

สระเกิน : Extra vowels

An extra vowel letter is used to represent a sound formed by one single vowel sound and one final consonant sound in a single syllable, in which the sound begins as one vowel and moves towards the final consonant sound. It is a lavish use of Thai spelling grammar that is not needed but used to diversify the spelling system. This is why they are called 'Extra vowels'.

If you are learning to speak Thai using phonetic letters, you do not need to learn the Thai letters. You just need to remember what English letters are used to transcribing what sound.

The Phonetic Letters for Extra vowels in Thai language

 **Video: Thai Pronunciation : Extra Vowels (Episode 8)**

Extra Vowel letters	Combined from or modified from	Transliteration	Similar sound in English	Example
ำ	ะ + ม a + m	am (short sound)	Tam	ทำ : Tam = to do/make
ไ- / ใ-	ะ + ย a + y	ai (short sound)	Bi, Micro	ไป : Bpai = to go, to depart ใจ : Jai = heart, mind
เ-า	ะ + ว a + w	ao (short sound)	Chao, Cow	เขา : Kǎo = he/she/him/her

พยัญชนะท้าย : Pá-yun-chá-ná Táay : Final consonant letters and sounds

- There are 34 consonant letters used as final consonant letters.
- There are 8 positions / movements in our mouth used to represent the 8 final sounds in Thai syllables. (1 position / movement = 1 final sound)
- A final sound in Thai words are partly pronounced (not fully pronounce like in English). For example, 'hot' with ending sound 't', 'hod' with ending sound 'd'. Thai people who don't know English very well pronounce these two words the same without emphasising the last sound 't' or 'd' as this is what they are used to in Thai language. Another example the word 'stop' in English, if Thais pronounce this word, they would pronounce the 'p' but stop the sound before the friction 'p' sound comes out.
- In the Thai spelling system, there are **4 important elements in Thai syllables, which are the main consonants, vowels, final consonants and tones.**

- In Thai language, there is only one final sound in each syllable. There are no final consonant cluster sounds in Thai words like in English words, for example the word 'fast' in English, f is a main consonant sound, a is a vowel sound and s + t are the two final sounds which are clustered together. More examples; pits, prawns, down, belt, mixed, selves, etc.

Practice:

1. Practise how to pronounce final sounds in Thai syllables and words.
2. Memorise the English letter used as a phonetic letter / symbol for each sound / movement / position if you have not learnt Thai scripts.

 **Audio: Pronunciation 3 Final Consonants**

 **Video: Thai Pronunciation : Final Consonant Sounds**

Note:

- 1.) You can see in the table that for one final sound/movement/position there are one or more letters that can be used to represent the sound when writing. For example, กาน and กาล, as you can see they have different final consonants but we pronounce them in the same way, which is 'Gaan'.
- 2.) You do not need to memorise the Thai final consonant letters to learn to speak Thai. Only learn to pronounce correctly by learning and practising to move your tongue, lips and pushing the air out to make the sound until it becomes natural.

Final consonant group name	final tongue position/ movement/ sound in Thai words	Letter used to represent each sound	Transliteration	Example words
แม่ ก กา Mâe Gor Gaa	None	None	None	ดี : Dee good
แม่ ก ก Mâe Go' k	ก	ก ข ค ฅ	g / k	จาก : Jàak from
แม่ ก ด Mâe Go'd	ด	จ ด ต ถ ท ฑ ฎ ฏ ฑ ฒ ช ฌ ฌ ฌ ฌ	d	พูด : Pûud to speak
แม่ ก บ Mâe Go'b	บ	บ ป พ ภ ฟ	b	เจ็บ : Jè'b be hurt, be in pain
แม่ ก น Mâe Go'n	น	น ณ ญ ร ล ฬ	n	ฉัน : Chǎn I/me/my/mine (used by female)
แม่ ก ม Mâe Go'm	ม	ม	m	ผม : Pǒ'm I/me/my/mine (used by male)
แม่ ก ง Mâe Go'ng	ง	ง	ng	ช้าง : Cháng elephant
แม่ ก ย Mâe Gery	ย	ย	y	จ่าย : Jàay / Jàai to pay (similar to final sound i in english)
แม่ ก ว Mâe Gwerw	ว	ว	w	แก้ว : Gâew glass, cup

ระบบมาตรฐานการออกเสียงและการสะกด : Standard Thai Pronunciation and Spelling System

Every language is different. When you learn Thai, you need to understand how we pronounce syllables and words. You cannot just think you can read/pronounce Thai scripts or transliterations like when you are reading English.

A Thai syllable is constructed by combining 2, 3 or 4 nucleus sounds with a tone. Every Thai syllable has its own tone and the sound of each syllable is not influenced or changed by adjacent syllables. Learn about tones on page 44

Practice:

1. Understand and practise how to pronounce Thai syllables and words.
2. Memorise the system using English transliteration if you have not learnt Thai scripts.



Audio: Pronunciation 4 Thai syllable sound system

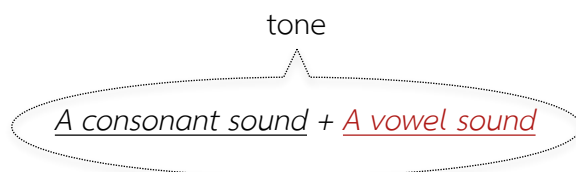


Video: Coming soon

Pronouncing Thai syllables and words

A word with one syllable:

- A syllable with 2 nucleus sounds



Examples;

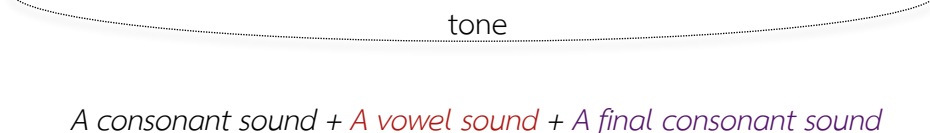
ด + ี = ดี : D + ee = Dee mid tone (be good/nice)

ม + า = มา : M + aa = Maa mid tone (to come)

ล + ะ = เละ : L + e' = Lé' high tone (be soggy/mushy)

Note : Original Thai words have only one syllable. However, there are words that have more than one syllable as we adapt some words from other languages. Also, time, region and society can change the way we pronounce some Thai words.

- A syllable with 3 nucleus sounds



Examples;

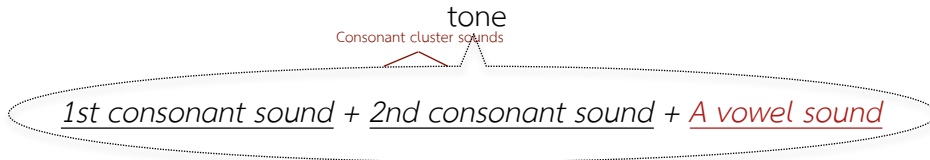
ด + ี + ด = ดีด : D + ee + d = Dèed low tone (to flick)

ม + า + ก = มาก : M + aa + k = Mâak falling tone (very/much/very much)

ล + ะ + ก = เล็ก : L + e' + k = Lé'k high tone (be small)

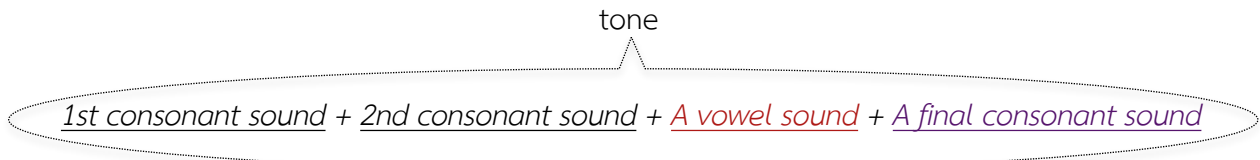
- A syllable with an extra nucleus sound or consonant cluster sound (เสียงควบกล้ำ)

Consonant ร : r, ล : l and ว : w are used after a main consonant as a cluster sound.



Examples;

ข + ว + ะ = ขวา : K + w + aa = Kwăa rising tone (right)
 ผ + ล + ะ = เผลอ : P + l + er = Plěr rising tone (be careless, be negligent)
 ต + ร + ะ = ตรา : Dt + r + aa = Dtraa mid tone (brand, seal, imprint)



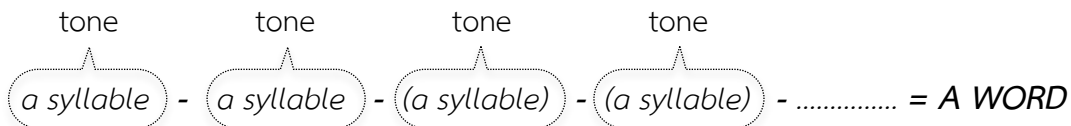
Examples;

ข + ว + ะ + ง = ขวาง : K + w + aa + ng = Kwăang rising tone (to obstruct)
 พ + ล + ะ + น = เพลิน : P + l + er + n = Plern mid tone (to enjoy, be enjoyable)
 ต + ร + ะ + ด = ตราด : Dt + r + aa + d = Dtràad low tone (name of a province)

Note:

1. In informal pronunciation or speaking (lazy way of speaking), Thais like to omit the ร : r and ล : l consonant cluster sounds from a word, for example ครีบ : Krúb changed to คีบ : Kúb (ร : r is omitted), ปลา : Bplaa changed to ป่า : Bpaa (ล : l is omitted)
2. There are no final consonant cluster sounds in Thai words like in English words, for example; **fast, pits, prawns, down, belt, mixed, selves**, etc.

A word with more than one syllable:



Every Thai syllable has its own tone and the sound of each syllable is not influenced or changed by adjacent syllables.

- 2 syllable words

ส + ะ - บ + ะ + ย = สบาย (be comfortable, be relax, be in a good condition)
 S + a - b + aa + y = Sà-baay
 low tone - mid tone

ย + -ะ + ง - ง + -ะ + ย = ยั้งเง (how?, what way?, which way)

Y + a/u + ng - ng + a + y/i = Yung-ngai?
mid tone - mid tone

• 3 syllable words

ส + -ะ - ว + -ะ + ด - ด + ี = สวัสดี (hello)

S + a - w + a/u + d - d + ee = Sà-wùd-dee
low tone - low tone - mid tone

• 4 syllable words

พ + ร + ี + ด - ส + -ะ - พ + -า - ค + โะ + ม = พฤษภาคม (May)

P + r + ue' + d - s + a - p + aa - k + o' + m = Prúe'd-sà-paa-ko'm
high tone - low tone - mid tone - mid tone

• 5 syllable words

พ + ร + ี + ด - ส + -ะ - จ + ี - ก + -า - ย + โะ + น = พฤศจิกายน (November)

P + r + ue' + d - s + a - j + i - g + aa - y + o' + n = Prúe'd-sà-jì-gaa-yo'n
high tone - low - low - mid - mid

A compound word: (See page 18)

A WORD ~ A WORD ~ = A COMPOUND WORD

Examples;

ขอบ ~ คุณ = ขอบคุณ (thank/thank for the kindness)

Kòrb ~ Koon = Kòrb~Koon (low tone ~ mid tone)

thank ~ kindness/virtue

แม่ ~ น้ำ = แม่น้ำ (river)

Mâe ~ Núm = Mâe~Núm (falling tone ~ high tone)

mother/mum ~ liquid/fluid/water/juice

น้ำ ~ ค้าง ~ แข็ง = น้ำค้างแข็ง (frost)

Núm ~ Káang ~ Kǎeng = Núm~Káang~Kǎeng (high~high~rising)

liquid/fluid/ ~ to remain/ ~ be solid/
water/juice to stay over night be hard

Note: Elisions and contractions only occur in some compound words which will be noted in this book. Therefore, when you pronounce syllables or words **you can't merge the final consonant sound of a syllable/word with the main consonant sound of the following syllable/word.**

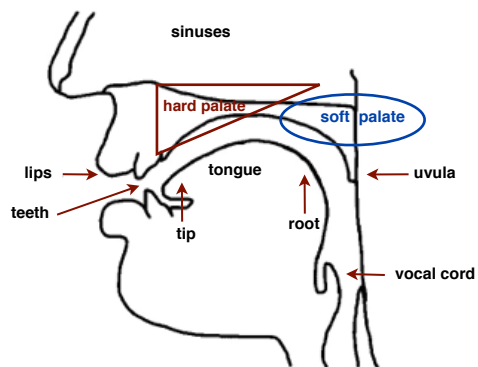
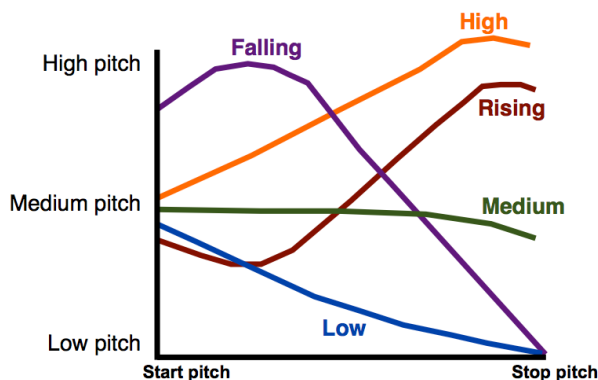
Example; สวัสดี (hello) = Sà-wùd-dee can't be merged to Sà-wàdee (wùd-dee) or Sà-wà-ee
 ขอบคุณ (thank) = Kòrb~Koon can't be merged to Kòrboon (Kòrb~Koon) as in thank you to
 thankou

เสียงวรรณยุกต์ห้าเสียง : The five tones in Thai language

Thai is a tonal language. There are five tones; mid, low, falling, high and rising, which are used to determine the meaning of words. Tones are just like a music tone that have a pitch and can move up or down depending on the specified movement of each tone in that particular language.

The five tone pitch graph

The pitch of a tone in Thai words moves like a music tone. See the graph below.



How to move the tongue to make each tone

Tones are made by changing the level of the root of your tongue when making sounds. The higher position of the root of your tongue, the higher the tone you are able to make. The lower position of the root of your tongue, the lower the tone you are able to make. The pictures below show you how to move your tongue root to make the five tones in Thai language.

Medium tone :

Mid level pitch and stable sound.



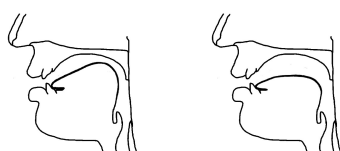
Tip : The tongue stays flat in a comfortable position (mid level) and does not make any movement. Make a long sound R..... Like when your dentist asks you to open your mouth.

Low tone :

Low level pitch and stable sound.



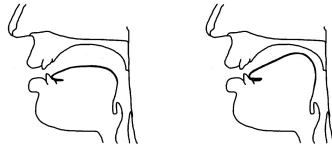
Tip : The root of the tongue stays still in low position. Drop your chin and make a long low pitch sound R.... Like you feel a little disappointed.



Tip : The root of the tongue falls from the highest position to the lowest, dropping your chin while making a long falling sound R... Like when you just realise something or when you are satisfied.

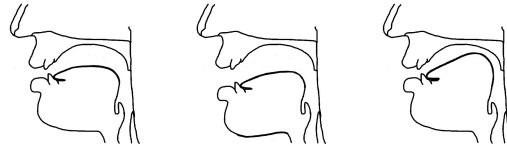
Falling tone :

High level pitch then fall to low level pitch.



Tip : The root of the tongue moves from a mid to high position. Open your mouth wide and make a long sound **Ouch...** Like when you try to indicate that it hurts. Or try a very short pitch sound **A...** when you try to stop someone from doing something.

High tone : High level pitch and stable.



Tip : The root of the tongue moves from a mid position to a low position, then rises up to it's highest position. This tone is similar to when you ask a question in English and raise your tone at the end of the sentence.

Rising tone :

Start from a mid level pitch which falls to a low pitch then rise back to high pitch.

Practice:

1. Understand and practise how to make different tones for the same sound.
2. Memorise the latin phonetic tone marks used as a symbol for each tone if you have not learnt Thai scripts

 **Audio:** [Pronunciation 5 The five tones \(1\)](#)

 **Video:** *Coming soon*

Latin phonetic tone mark above the English transliteration letters

Medium tone	Low tone	Falling tone	High tone	Rising tone
no mark	˘	˙	˚	˛

Every sound/syllable has a tone. It depends what sound/syllable with what tone is designated as a word (have meaning). One word can have one or more syllables.

Example words

Tone:	Mid	Low	Falling	High	Rising
-------	-----	-----	---------	------	--------

Word:	ไมค์	ใหม่	ไหม้	ไม่	ไม้	ไหม
Transliteration:	Mai	Mài	Mâi	Mâi	Mái	Măi
Meaning:	micro-phone	be new	burn/be burnt	no, not	wood, plant	yes/no question word, silk
Word:	มา	หมา	หมา	มา	ม้า	หมา
Transliteration:	Maa	Màa	Mâa	Mâa	Máa	Măa
Meaning:	to come	-	-	-	horse	dog/canine
Word:	ไก	ไก่	ไก้	ไก้	ไก้	ไก้
Transliteration:	Gai	Gài	Gâi	Gâi	Gái	Găi
Meaning:	-	chicken	-	-	-	feign ignorance
Word:	ไกล	ไกล่	ใกล้	ใกล้	ใกล้	ใกล้
Transliteration:	Glai	Glài	Glâi	Glâi	Glái	Glăi
Meaning:	be far	-	be near	-	-	-
Word:	พี	พี่	พี่	พี่	พี่	ผี
Transliteration:	Pee	Pèe	Pêe	Pêe	Pée	Pĕe
Meaning:	English letter 'P'	-	-	elder sibling, elder person, a title in front of an elder person's name	to take drug	ghost, spirits
Word:	ฮา	ห้า	ห้า	ฮา	ห้า	หา
Transliteration:	Haa	Hàa	Hâa	Hâa	Háa	Hăa
Meaning:	laugh	cholera	five	ha (laughing sound)	-	to look/search for

Example clause and sentence

ไม่	ใกล้	ไม่	ไกล		
Mâi	Glâi	Mâi	Glai		
no/not	be near	no/not	be far	= moderate distance	
ไม้	ใหม่	ไม่	ไหม้	ไหม	
Mái	Mài	Mâi	Mâi	Măi	
wood	be new	no/not	burn	?/Does?	= Does the new wood not burn?
หมา	มา,	ม้า	ไม่	มา	
Măa	Maa,	Máa	Mâi	Maa	
dog	to come	horse	no/not	to come	= The dog comes, the horse doesn't come.

Note:

The five words in the sentence above have different tone marks which indicate the meaning of each word. For this reason you must not think there is only one word in the sentence. In Thai, the tone, written pattern, usage and context is used to determine the meaning of a word.

Practice:

Practise how to make different tones with different sounds



Audio: Pronunciation 6 The five tones (2)



Video: Coming soon

Example words

Mid tone	มา Maa to come	ไป Bpai to go	ดี Dee be good	เรา Rao we/us/ours	มัน Mun it	คุณ Koon you
Low tone	สวัสดี Sà-wùd auspiciousness, happiness	ใส่ Sài to wear, to put on, to put in	แต่ Dtàe but	อีก Èek more, again, another	สี่ Sèe four	เจ็ด Jè'd seven
Falling tone	ค่ะ Kâ a polite particle used by females	ไม่ Mâi no, not, don't, doesn't	ใช่ Châi correct, right	วิ่ง Wing to run	ห้า Hâa five	เก้า Gâo nine
High tone	ครับ Krúb a polite particle used by males	ร้อน Rón be hot	แล้ว Láew already, then/and then	ล้าน Láan million	ซ้าย Sáay left	น้อง Nórng younger person, younger brother or sister
Rising tone	ไหม Măi? a yes / no question word (? , Is...?, Are...?, Am...?, Do...?, Does...?, etc.)	เขา Kăo he/she	ผม Pǒ'm I/me/my/mine (used by males)	ฉัน / Chăn / Chǎn I/me/my/mine (used by females)	หนาว Năaw feel cold	สอง Sǒrng two

'If you pronounce Thai correctly with the right tones, Thai people will understand you immediately. If you do not want to practise the pronunciation and tones you will never be able to speak Thai.'

‘At first, you might feel strange when you move your tongue, lips and push the air out to make Thai sounds. Do not feel embarrassed, it will take time and effort to practise with your teacher and you will speak naturally in time.’

Jiab, Supapan Lane
Head teacher