

संस्कृतम्

SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION

अ	A	short /a/ like but ¹
आ	Ā	long /a/ like father ¹
ए	E	long /e/ like bed ¹
इ	I	short /i/ like happy ²
ई	Ī	long /i/ like feel , machine
ओ	O	long /o/ like law ³
उ	U	short /u/ like put , look
ऊ	Ū	long /u/ like mood ¹
ऐ	AI	short /a/ + short /i/ like eye
औ	AU	short /a/ + short /u/ like proud

ल	L	love
र	R	Indian roti ⁴
व	V	between wine and vine
य	Y	yes
ऋ	Ṛ	/r/ + short /i/ like pretty ⁴
ॠ	Ṝ	bottle + short /i/

ं	Ṃ	hum ⁵
ः	Ḥ	h + last vowel repeated ⁶

ह	H	high
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The consonant letters actually show an inherent vowel /a/: क translates to /ka/, ल to /la/, etc. Vowels are only written in their independent form at the beginning of a word. I'm not going to discuss the Devanāgarī writing system in depth because this guide focuses on pronunciation and IAST.

¹ UK pronunciation (Received Pronunciation)

² US pronunciation

³ Australian pronunciation

⁴ Use the Indian, Scottish or Spanish /r/, but not the usual English /r/. Also, /r/ is not retroflex

⁵ /ṁ/ is called Anusvāra and marks a nasal sound. This can be m, ñ, n, or ṇ

⁶ /h/ is called Visarga. It repeats the last vowel. Example: "ih" is pronounced "ihī"

⁷ Your tongue is positioned further forward, against your teeth, same position as English /th/

⁸ The tip of your tongue is pointed more backwards than in English

⁹ Not like /h/ in English!

ब	B	bin
भ	BH	abhor
प	P	spin
फ	PH	scoop honey

म	M	much
न	N	nice
ञ	Ñ	canyon
ङ	Ṇ	sing
ण	ṇ	retroflex ⁸ n

द	D	~ day ⁷
ध	DH	~ good ⁷ honey
ड	Ḍ	retroflex ⁸ d
ढ	ḌH	retroflex ⁸ d + h
त	T	~ table ⁷
थ	TH	~ eat ⁷ honey ⁹
ट	Ṭ	retroflex ⁸ t
ठ	ṬH	retroflex ⁸ t + h

ग	G	dog
घ	GH	doghouse
क	K	kiss
ख	KH	ask her

च	C	chair
छ	CH	chew
ज	J	juice
झ	JH	hedgehog

स	S	soup
श	Ś	~ sheep ⁷
ष	Ṣ	retroflex ⁸ sh

WHAT IS SANSKRIT?

Sanskrit is an ancient language that belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. It's one of the earliest documented languages.

Sanskrit is the language of yoga. Learning how to read and pronounce Sanskrit can be a great part of your yoga practice. It is not as hard to learn as it may seem and it will help you deepen your practice.

DEVANĀGARĪ SCRIPT

Sanskrit is traditionally written in a script called **Devanāgarī**, a writing system that's different from the Latin alphabet. Devanāgarī is used for many other languages like Hindi, Marāṭhī and Nepālī. It has a one-to-one correspondence between sound and script, which means you can read and pronounce it if you know the system. Like English, it's written from left to right.

Yoga Paper uses the **International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST)** to write Sanskrit. As the Sanskrit alphabet has more sounds than the Latin alphabet, IAST uses additional symbols like dots and lines. You can pronounce every Sanskrit word if it's written in IAST. If you see a Sanskrit word without these tiny symbols, there is a big chance that it is not spelled correctly.

→ Devanāgarī: प्राणायाम
→ Latin script: Pranayama
→ IAST: prāṇāyāma

LONG & SHORT VOWELS

It's important to distinguish long and short vowels because it can make a difference to the meaning of a word. Long vowels have a line above the letter, except for /e/ and /o/, which are always long vowels.

RETROFLEX AND ASPIRATED SOUNDS

Retroflex sounds are made with your tongue tip pointing more back than in English. They have a tiny dot underneath: ḍ ṭ ṇ ṣ

Aspiration means that there is a puff of breath afterwards. **Aspirated sounds** are followed by an h: dh ḡh ṭh ṭh ḡh kh ch jh

SOURCES

Killingley, Dermot: Beginning Sanskrit
Stiehl, Ulrich: The Original Pronunciation of Sanskrit
Bachmann, Nicolai: The Language of Yoga