

Guide to Vietnamese Pronunciation

Vowels

a	like <u>a</u> in <u>fa</u> ther	bàn – <i>to sell</i>
e	like <u>e</u> in t <u>e</u> n	sen – <i>lotus</i>
ê	like <u>a</u> in <u>ga</u> me	tên – <i>name</i>
i	like <u>ee</u> in <u>nee</u> d	đi – <i>go</i>
o	like <u>aw</u> in <u>flaw</u>	to – <i>big</i>
ô	like <u>o</u> in n <u>o</u>	cô – <i>aunt</i>
ơ	like <u>o</u> in w <u>or</u> ry	phở - <i>noodle soup</i>
u	like u in <u>flu</u>	thu – <i>autumn</i>
ư	similar to <u>ur</u> in <u>fu</u> r	từ - <i>from</i>
y	like “i”	Mỹ - <i>America</i>
ă	like “a”, but shorter	rắn – <i>snake</i>
â	like “o”, but shorter	lần – <i>time, occurrence</i>

Consonants

b	like <u>b</u> in <u>be</u> ef	bò – <i>cow</i>
c	like <u>c</u> in <u>co</u> w, but unaspirated	cay - <i>spicy</i>
d	like <u>y</u> in <u>yo</u> u (south)	dờ - <i>dirty</i>

like z in zoo (north)

đ	like <u>d</u> in <u>d</u> o	đúng – <i>correct</i>
g	like <u>g</u> in <u>g</u> o	gần – <i>near</i>
h	like <u>h</u> in <u>h</u> ot	hoa – <i>flower</i>
k	same as “c”	kiến – <i>ant</i>
l	like <u>l</u> in <u>l</u> ittle	ly – <i>glass</i>
m	like <u>m</u> in <u>m</u> other	muốn – <i>to want</i>
n	like <u>n</u> in <u>n</u> othing	nón – <i>hat</i>
r	like <u>r</u> in <u>r</u> ake (south)	rắn - <i>snake</i>
	like <u>z</u> in <u>z</u> oo (north)	
s	like <u>sh</u> in <u>sh</u> oe	sách – <i>book</i>
t	like <u>t</u> in <u>t</u> ime, but unaspirated	tím - <i>purple</i>
v	like <u>v</u> in <u>v</u> iolet	vàng – <i>yellow</i>
x	like <u>s</u> in <u>s</u> outh	xe – <i>vehicle</i>

Consonant Clusters

ch	like <u>ch</u> in <u>ch</u> ease when in an initial position	cháo – <i>rice porridge</i>
	like <u>t</u> in <u>t</u> ake when in a final	cách – <i>to be separated</i>

position (south)

like ck in tack when in a final

position (north)

gh like g in go

ghét – to hate

gi like y in you (south)

gì - what

like z in zoo (north)

kh like k in king

không – no

ng like ng in king, but can

trắng – white

also appear in an initial
position

ngủ - sleep

ngh same as “ng”, but only
found in an initial position

nghe – to hear

nh like ni in onion in an
initial position

nhà – house

like n in can in a final
position (south)

bánh mì – bread

like ng in sing in a final
position (north)

ph like f in fire

phòng – room

th like t in take

tháng – month

tr similar to tr in train

trứng – egg

Bảng chữ cái Tiếng Việt
The Vietnamese Alphabet

A a Ă ă Â â B b C c

D d Đ đ E e Ê ê G g

H h I i K k L l M m

N n O o Ô ô Ở ở P p

Q q R r S s T t U u

U' u' V v X x Y y

Initial Consonant Clusters

ch- gh- gi- kh- ng-

ngh- nh- ph- th- tr-

Final Consonants

-c -m -n -p -t

Final Consonant Clusters

-ch -ng -nh

Thanh điệu - Tones

There are either 5 or 6 tones in Vietnamese, depending on whether it is the southern or northern dialect which is being spoken. The letter “A” will be used to show where the placement of the tone marker is. Notice there is no tone marker for the first tone, “*ngang*”. Next will follow the name of the tone, which also shows an example of the tone marker being used, and then a written description of it’s tonal qualities. The best method for learning the tones, though, is to listen to the audio voices on the app, or to have a Vietnamese teacher coach you on them. Try to mimic the sound and pitch you hear as exactly as possible.

a	<i>ngang</i>	The tone “ <i>ngang</i> ” begins at mid-pitch tone, and remains flat while the tone is held.
á	<i>sắc</i>	The tone “ <i>sắc</i> ” begins at a higher pitch and rises sharply.

à	<i>huyền</i>	The tone “ <i>huyền</i> ” begins at a low pitch and falls slightly.
ạ	<i>nặng</i>	The tone “ <i>nặng</i> ” begins at a very low tone, and then drops sharply at the end.
ả	<i>hỏi</i>	The tone “ <i>hỏi</i> ” begins at a mid pitch, drops to a lower pitch, and then rises to a higher pitch, similar to yes/no questions in English.
ã	<i>ngã*</i>	The tone “ <i>ngã</i> ” begins at about the same pitch as <i>hỏi</i> , and then also drops, but has a glottal stop, or “break” in the sound, and then rises to a much higher pitch.

* In southern Vietnam, *ngã* is pronounced the same as *hỏi*. The southern Vietnamese dialect, therefore, only has 5 tones. This does not, however, change spelling. Words that are written using *dâu* *ngã* in the north, are spelled the same way in the south. It does, however, lead to some common spelling mistakes.