Guide to Vietnamese Pronunciation

Vowels

a  like a in father       bàn – to sell
e  like e in ten          sen – lotus
ê  like a in game         tên – name
i  like ee in need        đi – go
o  like aw in flaw        to – big
ô  like o in no           cô – aunt
ơ  like o in worry        phở - noodle soup
u  like u in flu          thu – autumn
ư  similar to ur in fur   tức - from
ý  like “i”               Mỹ - America
ả  like “a”, but shorter  rắn – snake
à  like “o”, but shorter  lân – time, occurrence

Consonants

b  like b in beef         bò – cow
ç  like c in cow, but     cay - spicy
    unaspirated
đ  like y in you (south)  đờ - dirty
like Z in zoo (north)

d like d in do

g like g in go

h like h in hot

k same as “c”

l like l in little

m like m in mother

n like n in nothing

r like r in rake (south)

like Z in zoo (north)

s like sh in shoe

like ŋ in ŋo

dúng – correct

gần – near

hoa – flower

kiền – ant

ly – glass

muốn – to want

nón – hat

rắn - snake

sách – book

lý – glass

muốn – to want

nón – hat

rắn - snake

sách – book

Consonant Clusters

ch like ch in cheese when

in an initial position

cháo – rice porridge

like t in fat when in a final

cách – to be separated

tím - purple

vàng – yellow

xe – vehicle
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)
**gi** - 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

ng**h** same as “**ng**”, but only
nghe – to hear
found in an initial position

**nh** like **ni** in **onion** in an
nhà – house

initial position

like **n** in **can** in a final
bánh mì – bread

position (south)

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     Ơ ơ     P p
Q q      R r     S s     T t    U u
Ư ư     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  ngang  The tone “ngang” begins at mid-pitch tone, and remains flat while the tone is held.

á  sắc  The tone “sắc” begins at a higher pitch and rises sharply.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Á</th>
<th>huyền</th>
<th>The tone “huyền” begins at a low pitch and falls slightly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Â</td>
<td>nằng</td>
<td>The tone “nằng” begins at a very low tone, and then drops sharply at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Â</td>
<td>hỏi</td>
<td>The tone “hỏi” begins at a mid pitch, drops to a lower pitch, and the rises to a higher pitch, similar to yes/no questions in English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ñ</td>
<td>ngã*</td>
<td>The tone “ngã” begins at about the same pitch as hỏi, and then also drops, but has a glottal stop, or “break” in the sound, and then rises to a much higher pitch.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* In southern Vietnam, ngã is pronounced the same as hội. The southern Vietnamese dialect, therefore, only has 5 tones. This does not, however, change spelling. Words that are written using đầu ngã in the north, are spelled the same way in the south. It does, however, lead to some common spelling mistakes.